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Marrying into Modernity: A Social and Cultural History  
of Weddings in Scotland, c.1930-2018

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the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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## Abstract

This thesis examines the history of weddings in Scotland from the 1930s to the present day. The early part of this period saw significant growth in Scotland's marriage rate, alongside the development of a highly visible wedding culture that has survived the decline of marriage in subsequent decades. Weddings have therefore been a dominant feature of Scottish society, both in terms of the number that have taken place and in their prominence in popular culture. Moreover, they exist at the intersection of categories that are often treated separately by historians, with the law, religion, economics, identity, popular culture, and community all having a role to play in the formation and celebration of a marriage. The thesis therefore treats weddings as nodes in complex networks composed of these different forces. From this perspective, their development becomes an index of wider historical change in Scotland and beyond.

Data provided by the National Records of Scotland, alongside published statistics, is used to trace the shifting demographic and denominational profile of weddings over the period, with local newspapers providing visual and written evidence of ritual features such as dress and venue. The local press is also used to explore the function of weddings within the wider communities in which they took place. These sources are supplemented by responses to a survey designed by the author to elicit further quantitative and qualitative insight into the experience of getting married in Scotland.

What emerges is the history of a culture profoundly shaped by modernity and its legacies. In section one, concerning the period from the 1930s to the 1970s, modernity is shown to have operated from below, in the spontaneous standardisation of popular practice, as well as from above, in the legal and ecclesiastical reforms that provided the parameters within which this occurred. Wedding culture is moreover shown to have been a constitutive element of community life. Section two traces the development of wedding culture 'after modernity', as its prior social basis unravelled from the 1970s onwards. No longer shaped by community or by a standardised lifecycle, weddings increasingly existed for their own sake, with both the law and popular culture placing increased emphasis on the right to individualised ritual. The 'modern' culture of weddings is thus shown to cast a long shadow, obscuring the underlying structural changes that have eroded its wider function in Scottish society.

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Particular recognition and gratitude is due to the people who volunteered to be interviewed for this project. Most of this material was not used in the end because, frankly, I was not able to do it justice within the parameters I had set for myself. Nonetheless each of those interviews was immensely valuable in shaping my understanding of my subject matter. This thanks extends also to the hundreds of people who filled out my survey. The response to this was unexpected and genuinely heartwarming, and fundamentally altered the shape of the thesis.

I also want to thank my family, especially John and Ann McLean, model parents and public servants, and still fundamentally who I want to be when I grow up. And, finally, to Holly: diolch am bopeth.

**Author's Declaration**

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

Murray McLean



## Introduction: Modern Scotland through Its Weddings

### Prologue: Pieces of Paper

In the summer before this project was completed, I was at my grandmother's house when she produced a box of documents relating to her own and my mother's weddings. There were official extracts from the Register of Marriages, and no less official-looking certificates of proclamation relating to the banns read for my grandparents in Fauldhouse Parish Church. There was also – according to a filing system as emotional as it was practical – my grandfather's death certificate and a poem he had written before my mother's wedding, in which he light-heartedly despaired of having to pay for it, having recently gone 'on the dole'. I had already seen other documentary evidence of my parents' wedding in the form of a photograph in the *West Lothian Courier*, first as a clipping kept in a similar personal archive in their own house, and later in the National Library of Scotland. These documents represent just some of the traces left by weddings. When two people exchange matrimonial consent, not only is a marriage created, but so are so many pieces of paper.

The piece of paper is a common metonym used in popular culture to deride marriage as a soulless institution, meaningless in comparison to true romantic love. In the early 1970s, Joni Mitchell sang of herself and her 'Old Man' that 'We don't need no piece of paper/ From the city hall/ Keeping us tied and true'.<sup>1</sup> Two decades later, the Proclaimers subverted this image, offering as a rebuttal: 'Yeah, it's just a piece of paper but it says "I love you."<sup>2</sup> Looking as a historian at the documents, official and otherwise, produced by the weddings in my own family, I know that they are not 'just' pieces of paper. But nor, it must be said, do they say 'I love you' in any explicit sense. Their primary concern is not the affections of my parents and grandparents, but the legal, administrative, and religious structures within which those individual attachments were given some broader, public significance. Including the photograph in the *Courier*, we may add to those the social structures of a local community expected to be interested in such a thing, as well as the commercial ones encompassing a newspaper editor judging it worthy of publication and the photographer who

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<sup>1</sup> Joni Mitchell, 'My Old Man', <<https://jonimitchell.com/music/song.cfm?id=159>> [accessed 25 January 2020].

<sup>2</sup> The Proclaimers, 'Let's Get Married', <<https://genius.com/The-proclaimers-lets-get-married-lyrics>> [accessed 25 January 2020].

submitted it in the first place. Even my grandfather's poem, the most explicitly affective of these documents, has an economic as much as an emotional context.

Weddings, then, are of a historical significance that far surpasses the question of romantic love, complex and worthy of investigation as that is. Placed within their wider contexts, they represent an opportunity to illuminate a history of Scotland that cuts across traditional categories of analysis, offering a perspective on historical change embedded in an experience shared by the majority of Scots who have lived in the past century. Such is the task undertaken in this thesis: to weave together the traces of these moments in the lives of ordinary people into a history that combines the intimate and the public like that box of papers in my grandmother's house. This introduction outlines the rationale of the investigation, arguing for the utility of weddings as a lens on Scottish social history, as well as the wider relevance of the Scottish case, and detailing the sources and methodology employed.

## Rationale

The documents surrounding my parents' and grandparents' weddings show these private rituals as points of confluence for disparate strands of historical change. It is for this reason that I have chosen to explore the history of weddings in Scotland as a way into a broader social and cultural history of the nation: a history *through* weddings as well as a history *of* weddings. The primary aim of this investigation is not simply to ask how weddings have evolved over the past 80 years or so, but to use that evolution as a lens on major areas of change in Scottish society at one point of their intersection. Weddings are treated here as nodes in a complex network of forces, encompassing the religious, the social, the legal and the economic.

Recently, a team of anthropologists has taken this polyvalency of marriage and its rituals as the basis for a project entitled 'A Global Anthropology of Transforming Marriage'. The investigators note that their approach to marriage

seeks the sort of comparison made possible by drawing together themes, or 'domains', that modernist projects in the social sciences are accustomed to separating [...] and attending to the ways in which they blur together, and are actively merged or separated in lived experience and practice.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Eirini Papadaki, Hsiao-Chiao Chiu, Janet Carsten, Koreen M. Reece and Siobhan Magee, 'Talking about Kinship', *Anthropology of this Century*, 25 (2019) <<http://aotcpress.com/articles/talking-kinship/>> [accessed

While my project is not comparative, it shares this rejection of ‘modernist’ thematic compartmentalisation as particularly inappropriate for understanding the place of weddings within wider society. Where I differ from the anthropologists, however, is in my avoidance of participant observation as a methodology. My vantage point is ultimately that of the social historian. As far as possible, every phenomenon and evolution outlined in the following chapters is placed in a quantitative as well as qualitative framework, with emphasis on the former for reasons discussed below. There is, accordingly, little in the way of thick description here. This methodological choice restricts the scope for discussion of the more subjective and affective aspects of weddings, but it does so in order to explore the full breadth of contexts in which they have taken place over the past century, contexts which may appear less salient from the anthropologist’s more intimate and immersed perspective.

In his study of weddings in 1980s Glasgow, Simon R. Charsley expressed his scepticism in the face of the ‘ingenious’ explanations of other anthropologists who tried to read meaning directly from ritual without this wider structural context.<sup>4</sup> Instead, he emphasised the role of popular interpretation in the creation of meaning, as well as the necessity of recognising a *lack* of meaning. These themes were later developed into an ‘anti-theory’ of cultural change in his work on one specific aspect of the wedding: the cake. Here, he produced a useful model of cultural change: ‘Change occurs as people bring their sense of what should be done, grounded in past experience, to the test of action in the present.’<sup>5</sup> I too am sceptical of the notion that individual rituals in themselves hold the key to understanding Scottish society. I treat them instead as part of a whole, possessed of quantifiable characteristics embedded in a multiplicity of wider illuminating contexts. Only in this way do weddings yield a history of Scotland as well as a history of ritual. With this in mind, the aim here is to recreate not the particularities of ritual – though these are certainly part of the story – but the social structures within which they played out. This is not because I believe weddings are ‘really about’<sup>6</sup> something else, but because individual ritual acts are only a small part of what they *are*, let alone what they are about. For this reason, the term ‘marriage formation’ is at times used instead of ‘weddings’ to emphasise the broader social, legal and religious processes of which the wedding is the cultural core.

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23 September 2019] (para. 5 of 58). See also <<https://anthropology-of-weddings.org.uk/>> [accessed 23 September 2019].

<sup>4</sup> Simon R. Charsley, *Rites of Marrying: The Wedding Industry in Scotland* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991), p. 197.

<sup>5</sup> Simon R. Charsley, *Wedding Cakes and Cultural History* (Abingdon: Routledge, 1992), p. 128.

<sup>6</sup> Papadaki et al, ‘Talking about Kinship’ (para. 5 of 58).

To emphasise the breadth of scope that weddings offer as a perspective on the history of Scotland does, of course, raise vital questions of representativeness. However broad and numerous the contexts into which weddings are placed, they can never be claimed as universally relevant for the simple fact that not everyone in the period considered had one. For different reasons in different periods, weddings were exclusive of significant sectors of the population, and even as they have been made more inclusive – by the recognition of a wider range of belief systems and of same-sex couples, for example – they have had their discontents. In any case, like any human experience, they have always contained multitudes that cannot be reproduced in a single study. The following chapters account for diversity and nuance as far as possible, but it must be stressed that the overwhelming focus on the ‘mainstream’ is not entirely a matter of practicality. My aim here is to examine what was and remains a pervasive cultural phenomenon. In doing so, I take up Paula Fass on her plea to cultural historians to examine the centre in its own right rather than taking for granted that it can be adequately illuminated by the periphery.<sup>7</sup> This approach goes to the heart of the utility for the social historian of studying weddings at all. In the mid-twentieth century, marriage reached a position of such prominence, both as an ideal and as a reality, that even the minority who remained single lived, as Katherine Holden puts it, in its ‘shadow’.<sup>8</sup> Understanding wedding culture in mid-twentieth century Scotland thus means understanding something of the very nature of that society.

The usefulness of weddings as a perspective on history is not, however, confined to the period of their near universality. Even as marriage rates have declined since the 1970s, weddings have retained their mainstream status. Writing of southern Africa, Julie Pauli and Rijk van Dijk have written of the ‘normative continuity’ of marriage in a society that values high degrees of conspicuous consumption in weddings but produces relatively few marriages.<sup>9</sup> The same dynamic pertains to Scotland, and it is in this ‘normative’ sense that weddings can be seen as a point of continuity in the period studied. As we shall see in chapter one, before the introduction of civil marriage in Scotland in 1940 there was considerable potential for ambiguity as to the precise number of marriages formed in the country in any given year. The years leading up to that reform are therefore taken as the starting point for the study, providing the cultural and legislative context for the beginning of the period of

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<sup>7</sup> Paula S. Fass, ‘Cultural History/Social History: Some Reflections on a Continuing Dialogue’, *Journal of Social History*, 37:1 (2003), 39-46.

<sup>8</sup> Katherine Holden, *The Shadow of Marriage: Singleness in England, 1914-1960* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Julia Pauli and Rijk van Dijk, ‘Marriage as an End or the End of Marriage? Change and Continuity in Southern African Marriages’, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 39:4 (2016), 257-266 (pp. 259-60).

marriage's quantifiable centrality to the average Scottish lifecycle. The main thrust of the investigation then consists of a social and cultural history of weddings in that period of lived universality and in the more ambiguous context that followed, ending with a consideration of the contemporary situation, characterised by the immediate impact of the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014. The introduction of belief marriage by the latter and of civil marriage 74 years earlier thus serve as rough bookends to a period rendered cohesive by a powerful wedding culture underwritten by the state. It is this broad periodisation which provides the chronological scope for this study. This is, then, the history of a norm, and will by necessity exclude vast swathes of actively subversive or quietly atypical experience. It is my hope that others will build on and respond to this work, giving full attention to the connected histories made in relation to and defiance of – but never, I would argue, in isolation from – the conditions I chart in the chapters that follow.

### Why Scotland?

Scotland recommends itself as the setting for this study for a number of reasons, based on both the characteristics it shares with other countries and those that make it distinctive. The most basic of these is its size. Scotland's population of just five million, as well as its increasingly enormous and unitary administrative subdivisions, means that it lends itself to reasonably comprehensive and comprehensible quantification. Relatedly, it presents an unusually complete and granular set of historical civil registration statistics. Underpinning these statistics is another helpful peculiarity, namely the Scottish legal system. As we shall see in chapters one and four, the distinctive trajectory of Scots law – from its late introduction and liberalisation of civil marriage to its innovative recognition of Humanist weddings – means that certain cultural phenomena are thrown into relief as popular behaviour shifts in response to legislation. Another distinctive feature of Scotland that interacts with a wider common culture is its status as a wedding destination. The rise of wedding tourism can be isolated as a discrete phenomenon within the data and compared to the behaviours of the resident population. The 'romantic' appeal of Scotland as a wedding destination can likewise be placed in dialogue with 'native' formulations of national identity, which, as we see in chapter six, have become increasingly visible in tandem with wedding tourism. Focussing a study of the history of weddings on the Scottish case therefore presents an opportunity to place expressions of national identity in a lived context, decentring the rise of political nationalism and foregrounding wider processes of social change.

Beyond these particular characteristics of Scotland, I must confess a broader ideological orientation towards the centrality of place in social history. I see genuine analytical value in concerning oneself as a scholar with those places and subjects with which one has some intimate connection and some concrete personal investment. Such familiarity can, of course, be a disadvantage if allowed to become myopic, but it also serves to illuminate. I write about Scotland as someone with a particular, lived relationship to the places of that country. It is quite possible, for example, that Bathgate Community Church, which features prominently in chapter six, would have escaped my attention were it not named after the town where I was raised. In a broader sense, my small-town upbringing is reflected in the admittedly obsessive attention paid at times to the intricacies of administrative geography in the chapters that follow. Following the example of K.D.M. Snell in his history of the parish in England and Wales, I am ‘trying to infuse cultural meaning into administrative history’.<sup>10</sup> From this perspective, the amalgamation of registration districts or the decline of a local newspaper cannot be a simple matter of rationalisation. Instead, they represent the obfuscation of a history of place, removing – to misappropriate the words of Gertrude Stein – some of the ‘there’ that was once there. If I allow a pedantic and materialist localism to guide my analysis at times, it is in the hope that it reinforces and lends nuance to the critical force of the investigation.

### Wedding Studies

Exploring weddings as nodes connecting various ‘domains’ means that this investigation necessarily overflows disciplinary boundaries, as well as those of the sub-disciplines of history. There is, however, a substantial body of literature that has been dedicated explicitly to the study of weddings. These works generally owe a common debt to the 1960 English translation of Arnold van Gennep’s 1909 work *Les Rites de Passage*.<sup>11</sup> The latter’s broad conception of rites of passage as sharing a basic tripartite structure and effecting the transition of members of a society from one social group to another passed into the received wisdom of anthropology via the work of Victor Turner.<sup>12</sup> It has, however, rarely been rigorously implemented or tested with regard to modern western marriage rites and most

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<sup>10</sup> K.D.M. Snell, *Parish and Belonging: Community, Identity and Welfare in England and Wales, 1700–1950* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 14.

<sup>11</sup> Arnold Van Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. by Monika B. Vizedom and Gabrielle L. Caffee (London: Routledge and Paul, 1960).

<sup>12</sup> See Joseph R. Gusfield and Jerzy Michalowicz, ‘Secular Symbolism: Studies of Ritual, Ceremony, and the Symbolic Order in Modern Life’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, 10 (1984), 417-35 (p. 428).

commonly simply serves to justify assumptions about the transformative power of ritual.<sup>13</sup> There have however been various attempts to explore national cultures through weddings. This is most explicitly the focus in Walter Edwards's *Modern Japan through its Weddings*, whose title is echoed in the sub-heading of this introduction, but similar endeavours have also been undertaken by Vassos Argyrou and Laurel Kendall, working on Cyprus and South Korea respectively. The wider contexts of ritual were present to some degree in all of these studies, but none featured detailed analysis of marriage law or demographics. Rather, each premised their investigations of contemporary marriage rituals on the assumption that these presented sites of interaction between 'traditional' ways of life and novel forces brought about through contact with and increasing integration into the West.<sup>14</sup> The dichotomies on which such investigations hinged could be limiting. Little attempt was made to disaggregate the 'natural' processes of cultural change from those brought about by identifiably alien influences, or to account for a modernity that is part of a global experience, and not merely an imposition of globalisation. As Natasha Erlank notes, anthropological preoccupation with 'traditional' rites 'make[s] it difficult to write about African weddings as modern and global cultural phenomena.'<sup>15</sup> More recently, however, there has been a renewed focus on marriage within anthropology, and while the traditional anthropological methodology of intensely local participant observation remains to the fore, there is a greater openness to the potential commonality of local experience underpinned by structural forces beyond the paradigm of westernisation.<sup>16</sup>

In contrast to this more traditional anthropological perspective, Diana Leonard and Simon R. Charsley both studied weddings in UK communities as British scholars themselves. Leonard's study of courtship and weddings in Swansea in the late 1960s, *Sex and Generation*, was pioneering in rejecting the dichotomy of 'modern' versus 'primitive' that precluded the serious study of 'our' rituals, as well as the nascent mythology of youth

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<sup>13</sup> Exceptional in this regard is Suzanne Friese, 'The Wedding Dress: From Use Value to Sacred Object', in *Through the Wardrobe: Women's Relationship with their Clothes*, ed. by Ali Guy, Eileen Green and Maura Banim (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Walter Edwards, *Modern Japan through its Weddings: Gender, Person, and Society in Ritual Portrayal* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989); Vassos Argyrou, *Tradition and Modernity in the Mediterranean: The Wedding as Symbolic Struggle* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Laurel Kendall, *Getting Married in Korea: Of Gender, Morality, and Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996). See also Rochona Majumdar, *Marriage and Modernity: Family Values in Colonial Bengal* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), a historical work but sharing many of the same concerns.

<sup>15</sup> Natasha Erlank, 'The White Wedding: Affect and Economy in South Africa in the Early Twentieth Century', *African Studies Review*, 57:2 (2014), 29-50, (p. 31).

<sup>16</sup> See Pauli and van Dijk, 'Marriage as an End or the End of Marriage?'; Papadaki et al., 'Talking Kinship'.

rebellion ‘based on middle-class norms and experience.’<sup>17</sup> This was born not of an ideological conservatism on Leonard’s part, but rather the opposite. Influenced by French Marxist feminist Christine Delphy, whose works she translated into English, Leonard sought to demonstrate women’s economic subordination *within* the family in contrast to the then standard Marxist analysis of the family as a single economic unit in itself.<sup>18</sup> Starting from the assumption that the continued prominence of wedding rituals meant that they ‘make important statements about, among other things, the nature of marriage and family relations,’ she concluded that the wedding ritual expressed and even enforced elements of this subordination.<sup>19</sup> Unlike the earlier sociologists whose work has recently been revisited with a critical eye by Jon Lawrence, Leonard did not abandon contradictory details to her field notes, but used them to populate an exhaustive and richly detailed text.<sup>20</sup> Among the details fitting less comfortably into a traditional materialist analysis were those deriving from Leonard’s attention to the salience of place and community. She addressed, for example, the reporting and announcement of weddings and engagements in the local press and the local class dynamics of kinship and social mobility.<sup>21</sup> In adopting this local focus, Leonard was aware of neglecting the ‘spiralist middle class’: that is, those socially and geographically mobile professionals who are more apt to lose their local family and community ties.<sup>22</sup> As we shall see, this means that her work provides a useful counterbalance to later methodologies.

Two decades after Leonard conducted her fieldwork, Charsley provided a Scottish example of this kind of wedding anthropology, applying Leonard’s methodology – if not her theoretical position – to Glasgow. Charsley’s interpretation of ritual is somewhat more open-ended than Leonard’s, leaving room for an analysis of rituals as ‘events which are essentially ends in themselves, self-justifying in their own intrinsic importance.’<sup>23</sup> Significantly, despite conducting his research at a time identified with the triumph of individualism and rampant consumerism in weddings,<sup>24</sup> Charsley identified a definite function of the wedding – intrinsic

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<sup>17</sup> Diana Leonard, *Sex and Generation: A Study of Courtship and Weddings* (London: Tavistock Publications, 1980), pp. 3; 61.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 2; 265-6.

<sup>20</sup> Jon Lawrence, ‘Inventing the ‘Traditional Working Class’: A Re-Analysis of Interview Notes from Young and Willmott’s Family and Kinship in East London’, *The Historical Journal*, 59:2 (2016), 567-593.

<sup>21</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, pp. 26; 125-6, 204.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 30.

<sup>23</sup> Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, p. 180.

<sup>24</sup> Rebecca Probert, ‘From This Day Forward? Pre-Marital Cohabitation and the Rite of Marriage from the 1960s to the Present Day’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Joanna Miles, Perveez Mody and Rebecca Probert (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2015), p. 73.



or incidental – in strengthening family ties and in educating the newlyweds about the joint family into which they would have to initiate their own children.<sup>25</sup> An even more fundamental contribution was Charsley's assessment of the 'bride' as a role adopted by women at the expense of their individual identities, an insight often overlooked in accounts of the 'individualistic' wedding.<sup>26</sup> Charsley's work also followed Leonard's in taking seriously the question of place. He emphasised the (south-eastern) Englishness of wedding etiquette literature in contrast to the sustained Scottishness of popular practice north of the border, as well as addressing the question of Glasgow's sectarian divisions.<sup>27</sup> Remarkably, however, he gave little attention to national identity as a category of analysis. Though addressing elsewhere the psychologically loaded identification of local practice as Scottish – but never Glaswegian – he skipped over the emerging phenomenon of working- and middle-class kilt-wearing.<sup>28</sup> Indeed, it is curious that the two major synchronic studies of wedding rites in the UK were based on case studies in the 'Celtic fringe', but made little of nationality. If Scottishness ranked low among Charsley's concerns, the question of Welshness was all but absent from Leonard's Swansea. This must be viewed as an oversight indicative of the political climate and critical preoccupations of a particular moment in post-war British history. As such, Leonard and Charsley offer an invaluable resource to the historian of modern ritual, but one which must be approached critically and contextually.

More recently, there has been a resurgence in attention paid to weddings by the social sciences, inaugurated in large part by Chrys Ingraham's ambitious 1999 analysis of the US 'white wedding' industry. Like Leonard before her, Ingraham's approach was avowedly materialist feminist. Rather than a detailed ethnography, however, this was an attempt to account for the USA-wide phenomenon of the white wedding and expose its murky hinterland of globalised streams of capital and labour. Ingraham, a sociologist, was dismissive of anthropology's preoccupation with ritual. For her, the power of the white wedding lay in its role in reproducing the 'heterosexual imaginary' and as an ideological tool of patriarchal capitalism.<sup>29</sup> By Ingraham's own reckoning, her initial effort finally created a more cohesive field of wedding studies.<sup>30</sup> The past two decades have indeed seen

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<sup>25</sup> Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, pp. 184-85.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 66-73.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 17-19.

<sup>28</sup> Simon R. Charsley, "'Glasgow's Miles Better': The Symbolism of Community and Identity in the City", in *Symbolising Boundaries: Identity and Diversity in British Cultures*, ed. by Anthony P. Cohen, (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), pp. 178-81.

<sup>29</sup> Chrys Ingraham, *White Weddings: Romancing Heterosexuality in Popular Culture*, 2nd edn (Abingdon: Routledge, 2008), pp. 26-29.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 228-9.

a proliferation of such work, and Ingraham's model has proved more influential than the ethnographic precedents of earlier decades.<sup>31</sup> Significantly, two major histories of weddings in the USA have focused on the commercialisation of weddings culture. This is most explicit in Vicki Howard's *Brides, Inc.*, a history of the US wedding industry, but is evident too in *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the White Wedding*, a collaboration between Elizabeth Pleck and Cele Otnes, scholars in the fields of history and business studies respectively.<sup>32</sup> These take their cue from Ingraham, foregrounding the developments in advertising, media, and tourism that shaped the American wedding industry as it exists today. Nonetheless, they also signal a significant departure from Ingraham's approach, indicative of the tenor of much subsequent investigation. While Ingraham ascribes almost no agency to consumers in the wedding industry, Pleck and Otnes in particular are at pains to appear non-judgemental in their analysis. As a result, a key narrative strand of these historical accounts is the emancipation of the desire for personal fulfilment from social and especially familial restraints.<sup>33</sup> The critical edge of Ingraham's analysis is thus largely missing, but an emphasis on individual motivation provides a corrective to its rather blunt conception of culture, which tends further towards the elitist despair of Adorno and Horkheimer than the more nuanced efforts of later studies.<sup>34</sup> This has had the advantage of demonstrating how rituals derive their significance from the culture into which they are incorporated and from the individuals who embrace them, rather than simply through the brutal logic of capital.<sup>35</sup> Ingraham's structural critique of hegemonic heterosexual culture, however influential in positioning weddings as a vital object of study, remains isolated amid a pronounced trend towards experience-centred studies foregrounding agency and individualism.

The renewed interest in contemporary marriage rites has been, as the above suggests, a predominantly US phenomenon. There has also, however, been a recent growth in such work in the UK, with a major contribution in the form of the collection *Marriage Rites and Rights*,

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<sup>31</sup> For a recent overview of the post-Ingraham US literature, see Patricia Arend, 'Consumption as Common Sense: Heteronormative Hegemony and White Wedding Desire', *Journal of Consumer Culture*, 16:1 (2016), 144–163.

<sup>32</sup> Cele C. Otnes and Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams: The Allure of the Lavish Wedding* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Vicki Howard, *Brides, Inc.: American Weddings and the Business of Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>33</sup> In this they expand on Pleck's concept of 'post-sentimental' family celebrations. See Elizabeth H. Pleck, *Celebrating the Family: Ethnicity, Consumer Culture, and Family Rituals* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

<sup>34</sup> For a historian's perspective on these issues of interpretation surrounding popular culture, see Lawrence W. Levine, 'The Folklore of Industrial Society: Popular Culture and Its Audiences', *The American Historical Review*, 97:5 (1992), 1369–1399.

<sup>35</sup> See Vicki Howard, 'A "Real Man's Ring": Gender and the Invention of Tradition', *Journal of Social History*, 36:4 (2003), 837–56; Friese, 'The Wedding Dress', in *Through the Wardrobe*, ed. by Guy et al.

which straddles the line between the historiography of marriage and the legal and social-scientific study of the concept and practice. Common themes nonetheless emerge and, perhaps unsurprisingly, a linear narrative culminating in the modern ‘individualistic’ wedding unites disparate investigations. The foundation for such conclusions is in part methodological. Elizabeth Peel’s ‘opportunistic’ sampling method produces an investigation of civil partnership rituals that is overwhelmingly middle-class in focus,<sup>36</sup> while Louise Purbrick’s Mass Observation respondents arguably represent a self-selecting sample particularly apt to reproduce conventional life narratives of twentieth-century cultural change.<sup>37</sup> This is not to discount Peel and Purbrick’s findings. Peel’s case study represents vital insight into the hegemony of heteronormative ritual, while Purbrick’s sophisticated use of anthropology in analysing wedding gift-giving successfully reconciles a functionalist understanding of ritual with questions of agency and symbolism. There is a danger, however, that centring the individual leads to an overestimation of individual agency. Purbrick’s conclusion that contemporary weddings are ‘less a family matter and more of an individual affair’,<sup>38</sup> is correct in essence, but does not consider what influences or constraints may have replaced those of the family. More troublingly, Peel argues that ‘selective’ traditionalism in civil partnership ceremonies necessarily destabilises heteronormativity, implying that oppressive social structures can meaningfully be challenged purely at the expressive level.<sup>39</sup> Such analyses stray uncomfortably far from the editors’ caveat that ‘“choice’ has to be seen in context.’<sup>40</sup>

Though it shares with them this narrative of individualism, the significant involvement of legal scholars in this work presents a key difference to the US studies. Perhaps due to the diversity of jurisdictions within the USA, national accounts have tended to avoid discussing the specificities of different legal regimes of marriage formation and how these interact with wedding culture.<sup>41</sup> In contrast, *Rites and Rights* and other work on the UK have paid greater attention to this factor. A special issue of the journal *Child and Family Law Quarterly* took the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1868 *Report of the Royal Commission on the Laws of Marriage* as an opportunity to assess the state of marriage formation in the jurisdictions of the UK and

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<sup>36</sup> Elizabeth Peel, ‘Civil Partnership Ceremonies: (Hetero)normativity, Ritual and Gender’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al, pp. 101-2.

<sup>37</sup> Louise Purbrick, ‘No Frills: Wedding Presents and the Meaning of Marriage, 1945-2003’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed by Miles et al, pp. 78-80.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

<sup>39</sup> Peel, ‘Civil Partnership Ceremonies’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al, pp. 112-13.

<sup>40</sup> Joanna Miles, Perveez Mody and Rebecca Probert, ‘Introduction’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed by Miles et al, p. 6.

<sup>41</sup> Discussions of Las Vegas and similar destinations in historical studies are the exception here. See for example Howard, *Brides, Inc.*, pp. 213-219.

Ireland.<sup>42</sup> Similarly, the growing visibility of legally recognised Humanist ceremonies has begun to inspire scholarship focussed on the ability of the law to meet popular demand for ritual in the UK and beyond. Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson's work on Humanist provision in Canada shows a promising sensitivity to jurisdictional peculiarities, and Isabella Kasselstrand's work on Humanism in Scotland helpfully situates itself as a point of departure for further study on state (de)regulation of ritual.<sup>43</sup> The most significant advance made by these studies is not perhaps so much the specific focus on law as the broader indication they give that the structural contexts of ritual in general may be starting to be taken more seriously. Kasselstrand's inclusion of the legislative context and some brief treatment of civil registration statistics in particular points in a promising direction. Similarly, sociologists Julia Carter and Simon Duncan have emphasised the highly conventional nature of so-called 'individualistic' consumption in weddings, a phenomenon they term 'individualized conformity'.<sup>44</sup> There is thus a growing recognition that weddings are about more than individual self-expression, and must be placed within their regulatory and social as well as experiential contexts.

As noted at the outset, the present investigation adopts and expands this multi-contextual perspective on weddings, placing them within the legal, social and economic structures that shape them, and on which they in turn shed light and exert influence. There is a risk, however, that in recovering these multiple contexts through the node of marriage ritual I nonetheless fracture and compartmentalise them in the way rejected by the 'Transforming Marriage' team. A study that treated in turn the legal framework for weddings, their relationship with religion, and the ritual culture surrounding them would cover a lot of ground but would not necessarily amount to more than the sum of its parts. A broader theoretical framework is required to reconcile the different spheres of historical change at work, and to illuminate their interconnections and shared motors and dynamics. For this reason, I have chosen to approach the developments discussed in this investigation through the framework of 'modernity'. This is a thorny concept, but I believe it is the only one that

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<sup>42</sup> See Rebecca Probert, Maebh Harding and Brian Dempsey, 'A Uniform Law of Marriage? The 1868 Royal Commission Reconsidered', *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 30:3 (2018), 217-235.

<sup>43</sup> Lloyd Hawkeye Robertson, 'Secular Weddings in Canada: An Examination of a Humanist Response to the Evolution of Marriage', *Secularism and Nonreligion*, 6:9 (2017), 1-10; Isabella Kasselstrand, 'We Still Wanted That Sense of Occasion': Traditions and Meaning-Making in Scottish Humanist Marriage Ceremonies', *Scottish Affairs*, 27:3 (2018), 273-293.

<sup>44</sup> Julia Carter and Simon Duncan, 'Wedding Paradoxes: Individualized Conformity and the 'Perfect Day'', *The Sociological Review* 65:1 (2017), 3-20. In an earlier study Dawn Currie identified a similar dynamic in what she termed the 'modern traditional' wedding. See Dawn H. Currie, "'Here Comes the Bride": The Making of a "Modern Traditional" Wedding in Western Culture', *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 24:3 (1993), 403-421.

usefully encompasses the necessary breadth of structural contexts in which I am placing the history of weddings.

Modernity is a term that remains rather contested and ill-defined, though the frequency with which it appears as a keyword in historiography without any attempt at definition is perhaps an indication that it is not quite as controversial as it should be.<sup>45</sup> However, in part because of its very ambiguity, the concept retains a valuable descriptive and heuristic function insofar as it is able to encompass common elements of structural change undergone in various forms by societies across the globe in the past century or so. The idea is not to invoke some objective measure of modernity against which Scotland can be compared. Instead, the concept provides a framework within which to understand the major phases of the evolution of wedding culture in Scotland and how these were shaped by broader structural forces. In the following section, I will attempt to flesh out my necessarily idiosyncratic understanding and deployment of the term in reference to Scotland since the 1930s.

#### (After) Scottish Modernity

Above, I used the ‘pieces of paper’ associated with weddings to introduce their nodal quality. These also serve as a useful tool for exploring the concept of modernity. In many ways, pieces of paper are the quintessence of the modern, and these particular examples allude to major themes developed throughout this study and their interaction with modernity.

The modernity of paperwork is perhaps clearest in the legal or quasi-legal documents in my family’s archives: the certificates of registration and proclamation. These are the artefacts of the modern bureaucratic state that informed perhaps the earliest articulation of modernity in terms applicable to this investigation, namely in the work of Max Weber. For Weber, modernity was an ‘iron cage’ of totalising administrative certainties, draining every aspect of life of its magical ambiguities. This process of ‘disenchantment’ was pursued in the name of scientific enquiry and the state’s monopolisation of authority.<sup>46</sup> Law, in the words of legal scholar Sionaidh Douglas-Scott, ‘epitomises the modern’ in this Weberian sense, ‘by its techniques of rendering things calculable, its strategies of control, its measure, systematisation, and bureaucracy’, and these are precisely the forces underlying the various

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<sup>45</sup> An honourable exception is James Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity: Space, Power and Governance in Mid-Twentieth Century British Cities* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), pp. 13-17.

<sup>46</sup> Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 2010), pp. 27-28.

registration certificates in a family archive.<sup>47</sup> The epistemological implications of this administrative and knowledge-producing aspect of modernity are discussed in detail below with regard to the sources used in this study. For the moment, however, it must be stressed that the ‘rational’ state is central to modernity as understood for the purposes of this investigation. It is not, however, the mere existence of the state that constitutes modernity: crucial is the way the state interacts with society and individuals.

Marshall Berman sees this interaction primarily in terms of a constant churn of creation and destruction: Marx’s ‘constant revolutionizing of production’ under capitalism, whereby ‘all that is solid melts into air’.<sup>48</sup> He presents everything from Haussman’s reconfiguration of Paris to Stalin’s collectivisation drive and Robert Moses’s US highways simply as variations on this theme.<sup>49</sup> While change for its own sake is likely a modern phenomenon, in contrast with the static cosmic hierarchies of the medieval imaginary, it seems to me profoundly ahistorical to lump all of modernity together under one banner, undifferentiated by ethos or circumstance. In the case of Scotland in the mid-twentieth century, the registration of marriages was not the blind accumulation of knowledge by a state propelled by its own sheer momentum. It formed part of a historically specific configuration of the state’s relationship to the economy and to society. This may most conveniently be referred to as social democracy, but the specific dynamic manifested in marriage certificates in mid-twentieth century Scotland was what legal scholar John Eekelaar refers to as ‘welfarism’. This describes the ethos of legal reform which emphasised legal protection for all individuals within existing structures of family and community, in contrast to the unregulated patriarchy of earlier family law and the *laissez-faire* individualism of subsequent developments.<sup>50</sup> Not only did marrying in twentieth century Scotland create a legal relationship between two people, it also bound that relationship to the state. This is not to suggest that the state has been able totally to dominate individual lives, but simply that modern life is characterised by an intimate connection with the state. In mid-century Scotland, that connection was immediate and visible, and tended towards the standardisation and regulation of individual lives as well as some basic concern for their quality and preservation. When I discuss the modernity of the legal and administrative contexts of marrying in mid-twentieth century Scotland in the chapters that follow, it is to this dynamic that I refer.

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<sup>47</sup> Sionaidh Douglas-Scott, *Law after Modernity* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2013), p. 20.

<sup>48</sup> Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 95 and passim.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 294.

<sup>50</sup> John Eekelaar, *Family Law and Personal Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), p. 31.

This aspect of modernity was not confined to the secular state. It applies also to the place of religion within Scottish society. Much of my focus on religion in this respect concerns the policy and practice of the Church of Scotland, and such a focus demands some justification. There is a risk that by examining the Church of Scotland in depth we merely reinforce, rather than interrogate, its privileged claim to centrality within modern Scottish society. The ecclesiastical diversity of Scotland – as well as that at the level of individual world views – must be borne in mind throughout the following discussion. However, in simple numerical terms, the Church enjoyed genuinely national status with regard to marriage formation, as well as certain privileges within the Scots law of marriage and a prominent place in post-war society. The Church therefore had a huge impact on wedding culture. To treat it simply as one denomination among many in the earlier part of our period would be to obscure the hegemonic quality of its relationship to wider culture, as well as the processes by which it *has* eventually become just another denomination in recent decades. These dynamics are explored in depth in the chapters that follow, but it is crucial to highlight at this stage some broader aspects of the relationship between religion and modernity.

For many years, the major narrative concerning the place of religion in contemporary history was that of secularisation. Debates remained concerning the chronology and precise nature of secularisation, but outwith the somewhat segregated subdisciplines of church and religious history, there was little to challenge this overarching consensus. Indeed, for many proponents of the ‘secularisation thesis’, the terms ‘secular’ and ‘modern’ appeared almost interchangeable. The past decade or so has seen the emergence of a ‘post-secular’ challenge to this consensus, which has entailed a reappraisal of twentieth century secularisation and an emphasis on resurgent forms of religiosity in the twenty-first.<sup>51</sup> This is a welcome development insofar as it has added greater nuance to the established narrative of religious change in the past century, loosening the under-interrogated link between secularity and modernity. However, it has also tended to invoke a rather unhelpful caricature of the previously dominant school of thought. Whatever the faults of the established history of secularisation, post-secular historiography has done little to disprove the fundamental point that religion has, in the United Kingdom at least, receded from public life to an extent

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<sup>51</sup> See Alana Harris, ‘Introduction: The Summer of ’68 – Beyond the Secularization Thesis’, in *The Schism of ’68: Catholicism, Contraception and Humanae Vitae in Europe, 1945-1975*, ed. by Alana Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); Sam Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain, 1963-1967’, *The Historical Journal*, 60:2 (2017), 519–546. For a more agnostic (so to speak) overview of recent developments, see William Gibson, ‘Introduction: New Perspectives on Secularisation in Britain (and Beyond)’, *Journal of Religious History*, 41:4 (2017), 431-438.

unprecedented in modern history.<sup>52</sup> Some may take issue with Callum Brown's announcement of the 'Death of Christian Britain', but insofar as this concerns the 'discursive Christianity' that once permeated British society, even the most revisionist tendency in post-secular scholarship would be hard-pressed to find a credible challenge to its core argument.<sup>53</sup>

In his history of religion in twentieth century Scotland, sociologist Steve Bruce argues that the key change has been 'choice' rather than decline, and that supernatural beliefs have not disappeared but have become uncoupled from specific, institutionally-defined doctrines.<sup>54</sup> This reading reconciles Scottish religious history with the 'post-secular', but it also confirms the established view of secularisation at the societal level. It is this structural element of religious history that I believe is most pertinent to understanding Scottish modernity, and which informs my treatment of religion in the following chapters. It is not my intention here to make windows on the souls of the men and women whose marriages form the core of this study. Rather, it is to understand the place of religious institutions in the lifecycles and ritual practices of successive generations of Scots. If the state is key to modernity, then it is the capacity of religious institutions to behave like the state – more than the subjective beliefs of individual modern people – that determines their place within modern life. As the history of weddings makes clear, the Church of Scotland was undeniably part of the modernity that took shape in the middle decades of the twentieth century. My grandparents' certificate of proclamation is not, then, simply religious ephemera, but a physical manifestation of religion's interaction with modernity.

By stressing the importance of the Church of Scotland to Scottish modernity, I do not wish to imply that its tenets were wholly and unthinkingly accepted by the majority of modern Scots. Throughout the period under consideration here, there is ample evidence of tensions, frustrations and suspicions between the Church and the people it claimed to serve. The Church was no more able to exert total control over wedding culture than was the state, and for all the contact Scots had with both there was no guarantee that the wishes of either were fully internalised. In order to articulate this complexity, I draw a distinction between *orthodoxy* and *orthopraxy*. In anthropology, orthodoxy refers to belief systems emphasising

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<sup>52</sup> An exception here is the nuanced post-secular approach to the continued prominence of the Church of England found in Daniel S. Loss, 'The Institutional Afterlife of Christian England', *The Journal of Modern History*, 89 (2017), 282-313.

<sup>53</sup> Callum G. Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain: Understanding Secularisation, 1800-2000* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Bruce in fact argues that such forms of belief and affiliation are part of secularisation, not a refutation of it, because they allow belief without doctrine. Steve Bruce, *Scottish Gods: Religion in Modern Scotland, 1900-2012* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), pp. 7; 153.



‘correct belief in theological doctrines’, as opposed to orthopraxy, which emphasises ‘correct performance of behavioural responsibilities’.<sup>55</sup> For my purposes, I bend these usages slightly, contrasting the orthodoxy of ritual prescribed by specific religious institutions and underwritten by the authority they seek to wield in matters of theology and morality, with the orthopraxy of popular notions of what constitutes a wedding, regardless of official opinion. This is the notion of ‘doing it properly’, a concept that appears time and time again in qualitative research on weddings.<sup>56</sup> Though I argue that there has been a shift in the balance between these two sources of ritual authority in Scottish wedding culture during the period under study, orthopraxy plays a role in even the most orthodox religious ceremony. Indeed, orthodoxy may even be subsumed within orthopraxy if following religious instruction is perceived as simply part of ‘doing it properly’, rather than as a primarily religious or spiritual end in itself. Indicators of religiosity based on ritual – for example, rates of religious marriage, baptism, funerals, etc – cannot therefore be taken as signs of religiosity *per se*.<sup>57</sup> However, they provide vital insight into the interaction between official religion and wider society. What weddings offer, then, is a detailed case study in Scotland’s experience of religious modernity.

Another category of paper takes us beyond the realm of the state and the state-like and into a broader conceptualisation of modernity. In the newspapers that carried wedding photographs and announcements we find not only an artefact of modern communications, but also a trace of the very dynamics of modern culture. Benedict Anderson attributed to the expansion of print in the form of novels and newspapers the very possibility of popular identification with the nation state.<sup>58</sup> Besides legitimising state action on the national level, the telescoping of time and space allowed by the rapid circulation of news and culture via print media led to a gradual homogenisation of important elements of everyday life and popular culture, in parallel with the standardising influence of modern administration. C.A. Bayly saw these ‘uniformities’ as core to the modernity of the long nineteenth century,<sup>59</sup> and the expansion of truly ‘mass’ media in the period covered by this study has only spurred on

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<sup>55</sup> Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 191.

<sup>56</sup> See for example Probert, ‘From This Day Forward?’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed by Miles et al, p. 71, and *Sex and Generation*, pp. 115; 256-7.

<sup>57</sup> On the importance of socialisation, as opposed to belief, in the maintenance of religious rites of passage, see Pascal Siegers, ‘Religious Indifference and Religious Rites of Passage’, in *Religious Indifference: Perspectives Beyond Secularisation*, ed. by Johannes Quack and Cora Schuh (Cham: Springer, 2017).

<sup>58</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>59</sup> C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004), p. 1.

this process of standardisation.<sup>60</sup> As we shall see, such standardisation has been a key feature of modern wedding culture.

The standardisation of culture should not, however, be taken to indicate the forceful imposition of a standard. I have chosen the title ‘Marrying into Modernity’ precisely to convey the spontaneity of the process by which marrying couples ‘modernised’ wedding culture in their own practice, in parallel with – as much as guided by – the legal and ecclesiastical reforms that were moving in the same direction. This title echoes Andrew Denning’s *Skiing into Modernity*, and is likewise intended to convey the grassroots, embodied genesis of new cultural practices, against the top-down model long applied to mass or popular culture.<sup>61</sup> However, I do not go so far as Denning in this turn towards individual or popular agency as an explanation for modern culture. Modernity, in this formulation, has a class problem. If it is forged by the conscious practice of some liberated and leisured avant-garde, then it is socially specific, and the rest of the people are somehow pre-modern. This might describe a certain kind of *modernism*, but it is meaningless as a model for modernity. Reconciling modernity and modernism has been a recurring problem in historians’ and others’ treatment of both concepts. One influential attempt at this was Marshal Berman’s *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*. Curiously for a book subtitled ‘The Experience of Modernity’, Berman’s analysis rests on the works of a handful of intellectuals, occasionally dipping into history for the purposes of illustration. As such, he ultimately did little to undo the elite perspective of traditional studies of modernism. Moreover, he tended to attribute the understanding of and appetite for modernity as constant change, distilled from his selective intellectual history, to the average modern individual, making of all humanity an avant-garde rather than attempting to understand what it means to be modern but not a modernist.<sup>62</sup> In order to avoid reproducing this elision, my treatment of modern culture does not concern modernism, nor indeed high culture of any variety. Modernity, as I see it, only makes sense as a pervasive condition, a modality of social life that runs across and underpins – even constitutes – divisions of class, race, gender and so forth. The developments I examine were not the self-consciously modern innovations of a cultural vanguard such as those early

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<sup>60</sup> It is beyond the scope of this study to trace directly the impact of mass media on wedding culture. Otnes and Pleck broach this subject, noting that there was a marked US trend towards ‘wedding movies’ in the 1990s, a major period of change identified in this study. See Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, p. 165. My sources do not allow me to draw conclusions on the causal relationship here, but the correlation is suggestive and is touched on in Chapter 6.

<sup>61</sup> Andrew Denning, *Skiing into Modernity: A Cultural and Environmental History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>62</sup> This is epitomised when Berman treats *leaving* the Bronx as the defining Bronx experience of modernity, without considering what this means for the experience of modernity among those who remained. See *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, pp. 326-7.

Alpinists Denning studies. Rather, they were conventional behaviours shaped by novel circumstances, enacted by people who were neither dupes nor pioneers, but simply ‘doing it properly’ under conditions of modernity.

If newspapers indicate the physical circulation of modern cultural forms, the wedding photographs they carried hint at something more fundamental about the nature of that culture and its relation to the individual. Andrew Blaikie considers the proliferation of images under modernity as key to its shaping of individuals’ memory and imagination. If Anderson showed that the printed word allowed individuals to imagine a synchronic national community, Blaikie argued for a similarly mediated relationship to the national *past*, in which images were to the fore. In picture postcards, illustrated travelogues, documentaries and sentimental magazines, Scots of the early to mid-twentieth century were presented with a standardised and stereotyped set of depictions of the nation’s past and present, which eulogised the world lost to modernity and lionised – or demonised – what was replacing it.<sup>63</sup> The idea of modern Scotland and its historical roots was just that: an abstraction circulated beyond the objective conditions of any lived experience of community. Blaikie’s concern was with modernity, but his foregrounding of memory and imagination, in which the line between image and reality is blurred, if not obliterated, gestures towards the postmodern. This raises the question of whether it is worth speaking of a transition to *postmodernity* once this process of mediation and imagination reaches a certain degree of saturation. Certainly, as I argue in chapter six, contemporary Scottish wedding culture is shaped by a ‘postmodern’ relationship to the past to an extent that presents a considerable rupture with what came before. However, the images that underly contemporary wedding culture were not simply plucked out of the ether. The conditions of their proliferation are as much material as they are cultural, and they bear a real and specific relationship to what went before.

It is perhaps better, then, to speak of some continuation or development of modernity. Borrowing a term from Douglas-Scott, I conceive of this development in terms of modernity and an emergent period designated ‘after modernity’. Douglas-Scott applied this term to the law, using it to evoke its fortunes in an era of legal pluralism and declining certainty as to the nature and (fitness for) purpose of the law itself.<sup>64</sup> It is not, admittedly, a perfect term; it implies, misleadingly, that modernity is over. Its value, however, is that it allows us to

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<sup>63</sup> Andrew Blaikie, *The Scots Imagination and Modern Memory* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010).

<sup>64</sup> Douglas-Scott, *Law after Modernity*, pp. 14-18.

consider an initial ‘moment’ of modernity, and another that succeeds this and is distinctive from it but remains shaped on a foundational level by the former order. It relates to what happens when the certainties of modernity, enshrined in codified legal systems and a universalised state machinery, meet with radically altered conditions on the ground: what comes after the moment of modernity’s arrival and consolidation, when the iron cage remains but its contents have grown and changed.

As noted above, the welfare state was crucial to the shape taken by modernity in Scotland. In addressing Scotland after modernity, then, some reckoning must be made with the decline of welfarist social democracy. In naming the political-economic epoch that has replaced it, I use a term that will undoubtedly rankle with some readers, but with which I believe it would be dishonest to dispense: neoliberalism. This is a term that is constantly being defined in the face of equally constant claims that it is being used incorrectly or, indeed, has no meaning. The left is often accused of using it as a catch-all term for everything that we dislike about contemporary society.<sup>65</sup> There is some truth in this. The power of the term is that it describes the rightward shift of the very common sense of contemporary society. In a technical sense, neoliberalism refers to the ‘free-market’ ideology adopted most famously by the Thatcher and Reagan administrations, and encouraged (or enforced) at an international level by the International Monetary Fund, World Bank, and World Trade Organisation.<sup>66</sup> For Brett Christophers, the fundamental feature that justifies the ‘neo’ in neoliberalism is the privatisation of what was previously state-owned.<sup>67</sup> To this extent, we might think of neoliberalism as capitalism after modernity. What was created at the apex of state administration of daily life in the years around the Second World War is precisely what is stripped for parts in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Beyond the specifics of policy and ideology, then, neoliberalism can be understood as designating a historical period, still ongoing, characterised by the forces unleashed by the dismantling and reconfiguration of the state that modernity created.

In wedding culture, this plays out on several levels. The paring back of the welfare state has, of course, undone much of the material context that shaped marriage in the mid-twentieth century. More directly, the decline and marketisation of municipal public services has profoundly altered the infrastructure available for civil marriage. These phenomena are

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<sup>65</sup> Brett Christophers, *The New Enclosure: The Appropriation of Public Land in Neoliberal Britain* (London: Verso, 2018), p. 14.

<sup>66</sup> David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 1-3.

<sup>67</sup> Christophers, *The New Enclosure*, p. 17.

discussed in detail in section two. For the moment, however, it will be helpful to consider the broader implications of neoliberalism. Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval argue that a defining feature of neoliberalism is competition, both in the sphere of economics and in the daily life shaped by these conditions.<sup>68</sup> The cultural corollary of this can be summed up in one word: individualism. Individualism is, of course, much older than neoliberalism, but the latter has bolstered it in ways both ideological and structural.<sup>69</sup> The casualisation of labour, the erosion of trade union power, and – particularly relevant in Scotland – the rapid transformation of vast numbers of people from social tenants into private homeowners has, in important aspects of daily life, severed individuals from certain structural solidarities that prevailed under social democracy, regardless of individuals’ particular political allegiances.<sup>70</sup> In parallel, and with regard to marriage, the law has increasingly treated individuals as just that; with some exceptions, the tendency has been for married couples to be seen less as a single legal entity and more as two individuals engaged in a contract.

These changes have played out against the backdrop of an already highly individualised culture of romantic relationships. Historians and sociologists studying marriage throughout the twentieth century identified the growth of what Lawrence Stone terms ‘affective individualism’.<sup>71</sup> A key feature of this was the consolidation of ‘companionate marriage’ as an ideal and reality in the middle decades of the twentieth century. Over this period, a greater emphasis was placed both in popular culture and expert opinion on marriage as a matter of personal emotional fulfilment. This has typically been described in terms of a transformation of marriage from an ‘institution’, bound in tradition and social obligation to family and wider society, to a ‘relationship’ between two individuals.<sup>72</sup> These developments are often viewed

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<sup>68</sup> Pierre Dardot and Christian Laval, *The New Way of the World: On Neoliberal Society* (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 4-6. Christophers takes issue with this analysis, pointing to the vast monopolies that have in fact strangled competition in an increasingly deregulated global economy. See *The New Enclosure*, p. 16. At the level of culture and rhetoric, however, the point stands.

<sup>69</sup> The rise of ‘popular individualism’ has been suggested as ‘an organizing meta-narrative for post-war Britain’ cutting across the traditional chronology of social democracy-crisis-neoliberalism. See Emily Robinson, Camilla Schofield, Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite and Natalie Thomlinson, ‘Telling Stories about Post-war Britain: Popular Individualism and the ‘Crisis’ of the 1970s’, *Twentieth Century British History*, 28:2 (2017), 268-304, (p. 304).

<sup>70</sup> Neil Davidson stresses this loss of labour’s ‘class power’ as a key feature of neoliberalism. Neil Davidson, ‘What Was Neoliberalism?’, in *Neoliberal Scotland: Class and Society in a Stateless Nation*, ed. by Neil Davidson, Patricia McCafferty and David Miller (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publisher, 2010), pp. 84-5. On the dominance of social housing in Scotland, see Richard Rodger, ‘Urbanisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland’, in *Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996).

<sup>71</sup> For a discussion of this concept in relation to marriage, see Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage?: Individualism and Intimate Relations* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2001), p. 8.

<sup>72</sup> For a broad historical overview of this development, see Stephanie Coontz, *Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage* (London: Penguin, 2006). A close study of the case of twentieth century England is offered by Claire Langhamer, *The English in Love: The Intimate Story of an Emotional Revolution* (Oxford:

in isolation from the wider structural context in which they arose – though sometimes they are attributed to rising affluence. Teri Chettiar’s work on the Marriage Guidance Council is exceptional in explicitly linking this ‘new kind of emotional subject’ to the state in post-war Britain, suggesting that the quest for emotional fulfilment was framed as an addition to the (public) duties attached to marriage, rather than purely as a question of individualism.<sup>73</sup> This would suggest that the withdrawal of the state under neoliberalism presents a rather different context in which affective individualism can unfold.

More work is required to reconcile political economy with individual affect and cultural expression, especially under neoliberalism. One area in which we might begin to introduce this broader structural context through the lens of wedding culture is in its interaction with identity. As noted above, questions of individual identity and self-expression have become central to scholarly understandings of contemporary wedding culture. The title of Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz’s 2002 study, *Wedding as Text: Communicating Cultural Identities through Ritual* sums up not only her approach but a common assumption running through many assessments of weddings in the past two decades.<sup>74</sup> In such postmodernist ‘readings’ of ritual, there is little space for questioning the wider structural factors bolstering or constraining the agency of participants. While my findings confirm a shift towards the expression of individual identities in weddings, as well as the growth of their expressive function more generally, it also seeks to place this phenomenon in contexts both historical and contemporary, tracing its development over the period as well as emphasising the material and social conditions that continue to frame individual ‘choice’. We see in chapter three that the expression of specific identities was a prominent feature of mid-century wedding culture, so that it is less the fact of expression itself than the bases of identity that have changed in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Here too, the choice of Scotland as the study’s focus proves revealing, as couples marrying in the twenty-first century have embraced in huge numbers the symbols of an apparently atavistic ethnic

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Oxford University Press, 2013); the Scottish case is outlined in Lynn Jamieson, ‘Changing Intimacy: Seeking and Forming Couples Relationships’, in *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century Scotland*, ed. by Lynn Abrams and Callum G. Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010). On the institution/relationship dichotomy more specifically, see David Morgan, ‘Ideologies of Marriage and Family Life’, in *Marriage, Domestic Life and Social Change: Writings for Jacqueline Burgoyne (1944-88)*, ed. by David Clark (Abingdon: Routledge, 1991). For an overview covering recent historiographical developments, see Timothy Willem Jones and Alana Harris, ‘Introduction: Historicising ‘Modern’ Love and Romance’, in *Love and Romance in Britain, 1918-1970*, ed. by Timothy Jones and Alana Harris (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).

<sup>73</sup> Teri Chettiar, ‘“More than a Contract”: The Emergence of a State-Supported Marriage Welfare Service and the Politics of Emotional Life in Post-1945 Britain’, *Journal of British Studies* 55 (2016), 566–591 (p. 569).

<sup>74</sup> Wendy Leeds-Hurwitz, *Wedding as Text: Communicating Cultural Identities through Ritual* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2002).

identity, a phenomenon already well documented in the USA.<sup>75</sup> As we see in chapter six, examining Scottishness within wedding culture allows us to place side by side the forces of individualism and cultural nationalism and so see that, far from contradicting each other, both emanate from a common historical moment whose groundings are as material as they are cultural.

Drawing together these strands, we can begin to think of a loosely cohesive totality called ‘Scottish modernity’. In common with contemporary developments across almost the entire world, it was characterised by a state more present than ever before in daily life, and an emergent mass media that reinforced the sense that citizens of these states formed cohesive communities with shared interests and cultural forms. It also shared with many other cultures a sense that individual lives were meant to be fulfilled in some way, even if only through a more emotionally modern relationship to an established normative lifecycle. More distinctively Scottish, however, was the particular welfarist inflection of the social democratic state, particularly in the form of social housing, and the relative institutional strength of a ‘national’ – though disestablished – church. After this brand of modernity was consolidated in the years around the Second World War, it underwent a fragmentation and reorganisation that was similarly globally recognisable. The state withdrew from the regulation – but also the protection – of individuals and communities, and culture was uncoupled from its ‘objective’ bases in a society increasingly atomised and amenable to abstract and highly mediated forms of identity-formation. Again, there was a distinctively Scottish inflection to this, as identity was increasingly organised around the nation. This ‘Scottish modernity’ offers a framework for the more detailed discussions in the chapters that follow. Accordingly, the thesis is divided into two sections, broadly concerned with modernity and ‘after modernity’. These headings offer two broad moments in the history of weddings in Scotland, crystallising distinct phases in a historical evolution that encompassed all aspects of life in Scotland, from the realm of law to that of popular culture. By conceptualising the history of weddings under this totalising framework, it is hoped that light will be shed on much broader aspects of Scottish society and beyond in the past century.

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<sup>75</sup> See Pleck, *Celebrating the Family*; Mary C. Waters, *Ethnic Options: Choosing Identities in America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990); Matthew Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too: White Ethnic Revival in Post-Civil Rights America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008); Paul Basu, *Highland Homecomings: Genealogy and Heritage Tourism in the Scottish Diaspora* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2006).

## Sources

As suggested by the foregoing discussion, weddings lend themselves to examination through a particularly broad range of sources. This study attempts to cover as many of these as possible, but preference has been given to those that allow the combination of at least some degree of quantification with the methods of cultural analysis found in most existing studies. As noted above, this is intended as a corrective to the tendency in existing studies to privilege surface over structure, as well as to the disproportionate visibility of middle-class and elite cultural forms. Among the purely qualitative sources are newspaper articles that touch on the subject of weddings or marriage (as opposed to wedding reporting itself), as well as evidence from a variety of contemporary written and visual sources. These are drawn on to flesh out particular cultural practices and to provide insight into the affective and subjective elements of wedding culture that are harder to gauge in other sources, as well as placing the other material in the wider discursive context in which it was created. I initially decided to complement the more quantitative data with a series of oral history interviews, including with members of my own family. Several interviews were conducted but, in reviewing these it became clear that the parameters of my investigation did not allow for adequate space to be devoted to the full examination of the issues of memory, identity and intersubjectivity arising from the oral history interview.<sup>76</sup> I refer occasionally to interviews with family members, but the main thrust of the investigation is provided by sources that allow some insight into the representativeness or hegemony of particular practices.

At the more purely quantitative end of this spectrum are the civil registration statistics collected by the National Records of Scotland, formerly the General Register Office for Scotland.<sup>77</sup> In the early and mid-twentieth century these were published in extraordinarily detailed annual volumes, containing vast quantities of figures and written exegesis on the births, marriages and deaths of the preceding year. They included figures on all marriages registered in Scotland, broken down by denomination, place of registration, method of publication (that is: proclamation of banns or civil publication of notice), as well as the age and prior marital status of the parties involved. This data, though expansive, was not

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<sup>76</sup> See Lynn Abrams, *Oral History Theory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010).

<sup>77</sup> On the genesis and development of civil registration in Scotland, see Anne Cameron, 'The Establishment of Civil Registration in Scotland', *The Historical Journal*, 50:2 (2007), 377–395; Cecil Sinclair, *Jock Tamson's Bairns: A History of the Records of the General Register Office for Scotland* (Edinburgh: GROS, 2000); Gayle Davis and Rosemary Elliot, 'Public Information, Private Lives: Dr James Crauford Dunlop and the Collection of Vital Statistics in Scotland, 1904-30' in *Medicine, Law and Public Policy in Scotland, c. 1850-1990: Essays Presented to Anne Crowther*, ed. by Mark Freeman, Eleanor Gordon and Krista Maglen (Dundee: Dundee University Press, 2011); Anne Cameron, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly: Local Registrars of Births, Deaths and Marriages in Mid-Nineteenth Century Scotland', in *ibid.*



exhaustive, with only the major denominations included in the main tables and geographical distinctions reflecting the larger local authority structures rather than registration districts. By the 1980s, these publications were increasingly glossy but carried rather less information than previously. However, NRS holds digitised raw data for all marriages from 1974 onwards, so figures for this period are taken from this source directly rather than from published tables (with the exception of method of publication, on which there is no digitised data).<sup>78</sup> The digitised data is coded for denomination, district, age, marital status, as well as the country of birth and residence of each party, allowing more exhaustive demographic analysis for this period.

This data is explored in depth in the following chapters, but at this stage it must be highlighted that, although this is the most ‘objective’ of the sources deployed here, it should not be considered as presenting an entirely neutral picture of marriage history ‘as it actually was’. Civil registration data represents the crystallisation of potentially fraught moments of contact between people and state. The data discussed here derives from the marriage schedule that is signed by the couple and their witnesses and celebrant in an act that, while not technically constituting the marriage, in practice serves as the legal proof of its existence.<sup>79</sup> It requires the names, ages, addresses and occupations of the couple, the names and occupations of their parents, the name and denomination of the celebrant, the name and addresses of the witnesses, and the place of solemnisation.<sup>80</sup> Not all of this information, however, is transformed into the data that informs the state’s official knowledge of the marriages created under its auspices. One particular variable lost between schedule and statistics would have been vital to this study were it available: occupation. No indicator of class has ever been factored into official marriage statistics, and the digital data is not coded for this variable. Whatever the original reasons for this decision, the absence of class from marriage formation statistics presages the effectively classless image painted of contemporary ritual. Katie Barclay has recently shown for an earlier period how the physical artefact of ‘marriage lines’ (that is, the official extract of the register of marriages retained by the couple) could carry great emotional weight.<sup>81</sup> Its intersection with class compounded this significance. As Smout notes, the advent of the welfare state and its benefits for legally

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<sup>78</sup> All statistics, unless otherwise stated, derive from published or digitised GROS/NRS data.

<sup>79</sup> Eric Clive, *The Law of Husband and Wife in Scotland*, 4th edn (Edinburgh: W. Green, 1997), pp. 38-39.

<sup>80</sup> These details have changed slightly over time. A brief overview of these developments can be found on the NRS website: ‘Statutory Register of Marriages’ <<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/research/guides/statutory-registers/marriages>> [accessed 20 January 2020].

<sup>81</sup> Katie Barclay, ‘Doing the Paperwork: The Emotional World of Wedding Certificates’, *Cultural and Social History* (2019) <<https://doi-org.ezproxy.lib.gla.ac.uk/10.1080/14780038.2019.1589156>>

recognised spouses ‘made respectability pay’.<sup>82</sup> That is, it incentivised the formation of a legally valid and verifiable marriage. It is not surprising, then, to find testimony like that of Carolyn Steadman, whose parents’ fabricated marriage ended up recorded as official fact on her birth certificate.<sup>83</sup> Ultimately, there is little the researcher can do to allow for the emotional weight and potential inaccuracy behind the statistics. They must be taken more or less at face value if they are to be of any use, but we should not forget the distance that lies between us and the dramatic moment of their creation.

After official statistics, the most public and most representative index of popular practice surrounding marriage formation in Scotland is the local press, of which extensive use is made throughout this study. The scale and variety of publication means that the traces of wedding culture left in local newspapers lend themselves not only to a close reading of their forms and social function, but also to a quantitative analysis of the concrete variables detailed in their contents. Wedding attire and venues in particular can be counted, coded, and analysed over time with relative ease. The peculiarities of wedding announcements, reports and photographs and the insights they give into the evolution of Scottish wedding culture are explored in the body of the text (primarily in chapter three), but some space must be given here to the methodological challenges posed by working with twentieth century local newspapers. The first of these challenges is that there has to date been virtually no systematic study of the local press in the twentieth century, with the exception of Rachel Matthews’s English study.<sup>84</sup> Existing studies of weddings have made scant or unsystematic use of these sources.<sup>85</sup>

The next challenge is the sheer variety of newspapers available. Not only have too many titles existed over the course of the century for anything approaching a comprehensive survey to be attempted, the constant cycle of amalgamations and closures, as well as the frequent gaps in archival holdings, means that even a local case study is unlikely to produce

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<sup>82</sup> T.C. Smout, ‘Scottish Marriage, Regular and Irregular, 1500-1940’, in *Marriage and Society: Studies in the Social History of Marriage*, ed. by R.B. Outhwaite (London: Europa, 1981), p. 228.

<sup>83</sup> Carolyn Steadman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (London: Virago, 1986), p. 40.

<sup>84</sup> Rachel Matthews, *The History of the Provincial Press in England* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017).

<sup>85</sup> Exceptional in this respect are Karen M. Dunak, ‘Ceremony and Citizenship: African American Weddings, 1945-60’, *Gender & History*, 21:2 (2009), 402-424; and Katrina Kimport, ‘Remaking the White Wedding? Same-Sex Wedding Photographs’ Challenge to Symbolic Heteronormativity’, *Gender & Society*, 26:6 (2012), 874-899. There are brief discussions in Erlank and Leonard: Erlank, ‘White Wedding’, pp. 35-37; Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, pp. 125-6; p. 204. A fuller study, but one which is elite in focus, is found in Sherrill Horowitz Schuster, ‘Here Comes the Bride: Wedding Announcements and Bridal Norms’, *Sociological Focus*, 30:3 (1997), 279-294. Howard suggests that, in the USA in the early twentieth century, company newsletters and not newspapers were the site of working-class wedding reporting, *Brides Inc.*, p. 180.

consistently comparable data over the entire period of investigation. I undertook such a task for the town of Hawick as a pilot study, focussing solely on photographs. This was a largely serendipitous choice, as the town was the focus of my master's thesis and had proved to possess a particularly dynamic and community-oriented local press, featuring an unusually high number of wedding photographs from the 1940s onwards.<sup>86</sup> For this reason, the figures on Hawick are particularly complete (Appendix 2 presents an overview of these). Initially an exhaustive enumeration was attempted of details such as how many people appeared in the photograph, the attire of all the bridal party, the presence of horseshoes or other tokens, and so on, but it was found that a simple count taking in categories of venue and attire was the most efficient means of capturing meaningful change across time. Comparable local studies were attempted, and while no other locality provided the wealth of material available for Hawick, opportunistic samples were made of other newspapers in an attempt to devise a methodology that could provide a snapshot of regional diversity at various points across the period. While this undertaking provided a great deal of insight into the nature and diversity of the local press, archival research of this nature proved too unwieldy for a quantitative study of the required scale, so it was decided to turn to the growing digitised resource of the British Newspaper Archive. This allowed not only a greater scale of data collection, but also the use of keyword searches to investigate specific phenomena – for example, weddings ‘before the sheriff’ (see chapter one), war weddings (see chapter two), or guards of honour (see chapter three) – across a range of local newspapers. The result of this evolving engagement with the local press throughout the course of the research is not the neat comparability of a small number of coherent case studies, but reflects something of the diversity and extent of the local press itself.

The third major source drawn upon represents something of an experiment in combining quantitative and qualitative methods. It consists of the answers of 971 respondents to a short survey, created using SurveyMonkey, in which they were asked to provide both concrete details and subjective reflections on their weddings. The intention was to combine something of the qualitative insight of an oral history interview with the quantitative value of a sample size difficult to apply to oral history itself. The questions and multiple-choice answers were as follows:

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<sup>86</sup> On the press in Hawick, see Murray McLean, ‘Community Life and Political Culture in Hawick, c. 1945-1975’ (unpublished master's thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2016).

1. In what year did your wedding take place?
2. Please give your gender, as well as your age and occupation at the time of the wedding.
3. Where in Scotland did you get married?
4. Where were you living at the time of the wedding?
  - The same town/area as where the wedding took place
  - Elsewhere in Scotland
  - Outside of Scotland
5. What kind of ceremony did you have?
  - Civil marriage (registry office)<sup>87</sup>
  - Civil marriage (in another venue)
  - Christian (in a church/chapel/etc.)
  - Christian (in another venue)
  - Other religion (Muslim, Hindu, etc.)
  - Humanist
  - Civil partnership (in a registry office)
  - Civil partnership (in another venue)
  - My wedding ceremony was not legally binding (i.e. I did not sign the marriage register)
  - Other (please specify):
6. What were your reasons for choosing this kind of ceremony?
7. What did you wear for the wedding ceremony, and why?
8. Was your wedding photo featured in a local newspaper?
  - No
  - Yes, I/my spouse submitted the photo to the newspaper
  - Yes, a friend or relative submitted the photo to the newspaper
  - Yes, the photographer submitted the photo to the newspaper
  - Yes, the newspaper's own photographer took the photograph
  - Yes, I can't remember how it was submitted
  - I don't know.
9. Would you say there was anything particularly 'Scottish' about your wedding? If so, what?
10. Finally, please use the box below to comment on anything you feel was significant about your wedding that wasn't covered in the previous questions. (If you have had more than one ceremony, or have converted your civil partnership to a marriage, please give details of this here.)

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<sup>87</sup> The term 'registry office' is not used in civil registration itself ('registration office' being the standard term) but appears most common in everyday usage and so was used in the survey for the sake of clarity.

In formulating these questions, I attempted to strike a balance between detail and concision, so that the survey would be quick and easy to fill out. Multiple choice answers were offered where quantification was the goal, with the exception of the question on attire, as it was felt that offering a rigid selection of options may preclude the collection of valuable nuance. The options for type of ceremony, in contrast, were prescribed to ensure that the distinction between, for example, civil ceremonies in and outwith registration offices would be captured. This was not entirely successful. Comparing multiple choice answers on this question with the longer responses suggests respondents were accurately distinguishing between religious and civil ceremonies, but not always between venue types, and several even selected 'civil partnership' for years when these were not available, presumably referring to a civil marriage. Despite this issue, and besides several incomplete responses, the survey yielded a wealth of valuable detail, aspects of which are explored in depth in chapters two to six.

Some context must be borne in mind when considering the survey results. The sample is naturally determined by the means by which the survey was distributed. This was done via my personal Twitter and Facebook accounts. The nature of my networks on the former meant that it reached a largely middle-class, academic audience in this instance. However, the vast majority of responses came from Facebook. On this site, I distributed the survey by joining as many Scottish local history groups as possible and posting a link to the survey. The precise demographics are impossible to quantify, but my impression is that these groups represented a much wider range of age and class backgrounds than Twitter. I attempted to garner a greater diversity of respondents by posting the survey to a Facebook group for Polish people living in Scotland, as well as by sending the survey to Jewish, Muslim, Hindu and Sikh organisations, as well as a heritage project focussed on migrants to Scotland, but I received no responses via any of these channels. The survey results therefore overwhelmingly concern Christian, civil and Humanist weddings among white Scots. To this extent, they reflect the 'majority' focus fostered by the sources discussed above. One respect in which survey respondents do not offer an entirely majoritarian perspective, however, is gender: 815 out of 971 respondents (83.9 percent) were female. It is possible that this relates to the demographics reached by the particular method used to disseminate of the survey. Much more likely, however, is that it simply reflects the perception present throughout the period under study that weddings are primarily of interest to women. The sample is thus less than representative when it comes to the actual people involved in getting married, but it is perhaps appropriate to privilege the insights of women. As we shall see, it is they who have

disproportionately been burdened with and/or taken upon themselves the task of creating, consuming and navigating wedding culture.

On the question of class, it is much more difficult to gauge the representativeness of the survey results. Respondents were asked to state the occupation they had at the time of their wedding; however, as this was an open-ended response, the information provided was often too ambiguous to be coded decisively. Occupation alone is not, of course, sufficient basis on which to determine social class, and this is especially relevant here given the disproportionate number of women among the respondents. Particularly in the earlier part of the period, women were far more likely than men to work in part-time positions, with their work seen as supplementary to a household income primarily based on the husband's salary.<sup>88</sup> For these reasons, it was decided that adequately coding respondents for social class position was not possible, and any attempt at doing so presented too great a risk of error. Occupation has therefore been included in information about individual respondents by way of context, but not for systematic analysis. This is regrettable, particularly given the lack of class coding in registration data. A pressing issue in the contemporary era of conspicuous consumption and low nuptiality is the extent to which marriage itself is becoming the preserve of the middle classes, a possibility that has been raised in studies of societies from the USA to South Africa.<sup>89</sup> Without adequate data, I can only come at this vital issue indirectly, as I do at various points in section two. Nonetheless, the survey respondents likely present a greater diversity of class backgrounds than many qualitative studies based on snowballing or other 'opportunistic' methods of sampling. The survey may not be able to elucidate the precise relationship between class and wedding culture, but it provides a wealth of data complementary to that found in the local press and civil registration statistics. Taken together, these present a rich variety of sources on modern Scottish wedding culture that, while not perfectly representative, allow for the examination of a broad cross-section of popular experience.

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<sup>88</sup> Arthur McIvor, 'Gender Apartheid?: Women in Scottish Society', in *Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by T.M. Devine and R.J. Finlay (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1996). For a discussion of women's work as 'supplementary' in the context of marriage and homemaking, see Yvonne McFadden, 'Creating a Modern Home: Homeowners in Postwar Suburban Glasgow, 1945-1975' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2016), pp. 120-130.

<sup>89</sup> See Kathryn Edin and Maria Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep: Why Poor Women Put Motherhood Before Marriage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), pp. 2-6; 201-02; Pauli and van Dijk, 'Marriage as an end or the end of marriage?', p. 263.

## Section 1: Weddings and Modernity

### Chapter 1: The End of Irregularity: Official Regulation and Popular Practice, c.1929-1950

#### Introduction

This chapter sets out the context for the modern culture of marriage formation that is the focus of section one. It traces the changes that took place in both Church and state on the eve of the Second World War regarding the regulatory framework underpinning weddings. At the centre of these developments was the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939. Following from the recommendations of the Morison Report, published in 1937, the Act abolished marriage *per verba de praesenti* (more commonly ‘marriage by declaration’), until then a peculiarity of Scots law that allowed the formation of marriage by the simple declaration of present consent to marry.<sup>1</sup> This was the most common form of irregular marriage, a broader legal category of marriage formation denoting legally valid marriages formed simply by the exchange of consent.<sup>2</sup> These could be registered if the couple appeared in the sheriff court with witnesses to the exchange of consent within three months of its occurrence. The sheriff would, if satisfied that it was valid, issue a warrant for the marriage to be registered. If a longer time had elapsed since the formation of the marriage, the couple would have to seek a decree of declarator in the Court of Session, a much more expensive and complicated legal process.<sup>3</sup> After 1940, one form of irregular marriage remained: marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute. This was akin to the ‘common law marriage’ of popular myth and remained a valid means of forming marriage until it was abolished by the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006.<sup>4</sup> Only a very small number of such marriages were ever registered; the discussion of irregular marriage in this chapter therefore focusses largely on marriage by declaration.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed account of the law of irregular marriage and the process of its abolition, see Brian Dempsey, ‘Making the Gretna Blacksmith Redundant: Who Worried, Who Spoke, Who Was Heard on the Abolition of Irregular Marriage in Scotland?’, *The Journal of Legal History*, 30:1 (2009), 23-52.

<sup>2</sup> The 1939 Act also abolished the much less commonly proven marriage *per verba de futuro subsequente copula*, whereby marriage was formed upon sexual intercourse following a promise of marriage. See Eric M. Clive, *The Law of Husband and Wife in Scotland*, pp. 44-48.

<sup>3</sup> Dempsey, ‘Making the Gretna Blacksmith Redundant’, p. 26.

<sup>4</sup> Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006, s. 3. On the ‘common law marriage’ myth, see Anne Barlow, Simon Duncan, Grace James and Alison Park, *Cohabitation, Marriage and the Law: Social Change and Legal Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* (Oxford: Hart Publishing, 2005), chapter 3.

In place of marriage by declaration, the 1939 Act introduced civil weddings, to be conducted in the office of a district registrar.<sup>5</sup> While this legislation certainly has its place in the history of secularisation in Scotland, it was, as we shall see below, primarily a welfarist reform. As Callum Brown, Thomas Green and Jane Mair note in their audit of religion in Scots law, the key distinction at work in this reform was between regular and irregular marriage, rather than religious and civil.<sup>6</sup> Irregular marriages involved no compulsory element of ceremony or registration, and there was no prior notice or marriage schedule involved in their formation. They thus presented the potential for profound ambiguity as to their validity – or, indeed, existence – leaving the parties involved vulnerable upon separation or the death of a partner, as well as in matters of property and welfare more generally. Registered irregular marriages were on the rise in the 1930s, but so too was a widespread perception that unregistered marriages were rife at the traditional elopement destination of Gretna Green.<sup>7</sup> While the latter phenomenon is impossible to gauge precisely, the introduction of civil marriage as an alternative ensured that virtually all marriages subsequently formed in Scotland were regular. Regularity meant that there was no longer room for ambiguity as to the existence of a marriage, and that each one was formed under the gaze of the state, which had a detailed record of the particulars of each individual couple and ceremony by way of the marriage schedule that was now compulsory.<sup>8</sup>

The 1939 Act thus restated the relationship between marriage and the law in Scotland and, most significantly for the purposes of this study, centred that relationship on the practical necessity of some degree of ceremony. As we shall see, this reflected a popular perception that ritual was necessary to marriage formation, which was growing even before the law rendered it accurate. This chapter examines the evolving legal and ecclesiastical contexts as well as the popular experience of marriage formation in the years leading up to the Act, and how its implementation during the Second World War interacted with these ongoing developments. Civil registration statistics, local press reporting, and official Church of Scotland guidance on wedding provision are drawn on to present the history of a culture undergoing rapid transformation, originating from below as much as from above: a culture on the cusp of modernity.

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<sup>5</sup> Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939, s. 1.

<sup>6</sup> Callum Brown, Jane Mair, and Thomas Green, *Religion in Scots Law: The Report of an Audit at the University of Glasgow* (Edinburgh: Humanist Society Scotland, 2016), p. 114.

<sup>7</sup> Dempsey, 'Making the Gretna Blacksmith Redundant', p. 26.

<sup>8</sup> The validity of a registered marriage could still be challenged if a legal impediment to the marriage subsequently emerged, but the 1939 Act stipulated that no such challenge could be made on the basis of the lack of qualification of the celebrant or registrar. Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939, s. 4.



## The Reform Context

The year 1929 is taken as a starting point for the discussion here, principally because of the watershed it represents in the relationship of the Church of Scotland to the (sub)state with which it was so intimately connected. That year saw the union of the Church of Scotland with the United Free Church. This was the culmination of longstanding efforts at healing a major rift within Scottish Presbyterianism, and a major element of the compromise involved was the legal clarification of the Church of Scotland's relationship to the state, resulting in its effective disestablishment. While this had taken place in the form of targeted legislation in the 1920s,<sup>9</sup> a major reorganisation of local government in 1929 and subsequent developments within the Church constituted disestablishment in practical terms. As Callum Brown has shown, Church establishment really existed in the parish, and in the structures of secular local government that had grown within a framework of Church dominance from the early to mid-nineteenth century.<sup>10</sup> Crucially, the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1929 abolished the parish as a unit of local government, an act of administrative secularisation that was completed when, in 1933, the Church was granted the right to amalgamate parishes.<sup>11</sup> The integrated geographies of ecclesiastical and civil governance were thus uncoupled and set on a path of divergence.

This was the dissolution of what Brown refers to as the 'parish state'.<sup>12</sup> What it was not, however, was the end of the Church of Scotland as a significant feature of Scottish life, either national or local. Indeed, the years leading up to 1929 and those that followed were characterised by a conscious effort on the part of the Church to take on the character of a national institution. This meant a parallel and cooperative existence in relation to the 'civil magistrate',<sup>13</sup> rather than the exercise of state-like functions by the Church itself. This was related to wider attempts to standardise and rationalise procedure across the Church.<sup>14</sup> This process gained momentum after the union of 1929, and by the time of the Second World

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<sup>9</sup> Francis Lyall, *Church and State in Scotland: Developing Law* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), pp. 71-5; Callum Brown, 'The Myth of the Established Church of Scotland' in *The Scottish Churches and the Union Parliament, 1707-1999*, ed. by James Kirk (Edinburgh: Scottish Church History Society, 2001), pp. 70-2.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 63-70.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.

<sup>13</sup> This is the term used to refer to the secular state in Article VI of the Articles Declaratory of the Constitution of the Church of Scotland. See Lyall, *Church and State*, p. 75.

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth M. Boyd, *Scottish Church Attitudes to Marriage and the Family* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1980), pp. 156-8. However, lest 'modernisation' and enlightened rationality be taken as synonymous, it should be remembered that the virulent sectarianism and anti-Irish sentiment of the interwar period was also stimulated in part by the Church's quest for national status. See Stewart J. Brown, 'Outside the Covenant': The Scottish Presbyterian Churches and Irish Immigration, 1922-1938', *The Innes Review*, 42:1 (1991), 19-45.

War there was a remarkable commonality in the welfarist ethos of both Church and state with regard to the future development of Scotland and the wider UK. This was most clearly articulated in the reports of the Church's Commission for Interpreting God's Will in the Present Crisis, established in 1942. In their orientation towards active intervention in society for the common good, these constituted something like a Church equivalent to the Beveridge report of 1942.<sup>15</sup>

The Church's claim to national status did not, however, go entirely unchallenged, and marriage law was a prominent site of tension in this regard. Parallel to the internal modernisation drive and external national orientation of the Church was a long delayed<sup>16</sup> enquiry into and subsequent reform of the Scots law of marriage formation, prompted in no small part by lobbying by the Church of Scotland itself.<sup>17</sup> The business of the 'blacksmith' at Gretna Green dominated contemporary discussion of the Morison Committee and the reforms it recommended,<sup>18</sup> but there was a subtle element of Church privilege under the law that also came under scrutiny. This was one of the last remaining functions of civil law actually administered by the Church, namely the proclamation of banns. While a civil alternative had existed since the Marriage Notice (Scotland) Act 1878 in the form of publication of notice by a district registrar, Church of Scotland banns retained full legal standing and were regulated entirely by the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland.<sup>19</sup> The Morison Committee recommended that legal effect be extended to the preliminaries of eleven further denominations.<sup>20</sup> The Church of Scotland took exception to this on the basis that it was a 'territorial' Church, serving all the people of Scotland regardless of faith or affiliation. In a memorandum submitted as evidence to the Morison Committee by the General Administration Committee of the Church of Scotland, as reported in the *Scotsman*, the case was made thus:

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<sup>15</sup> Donald C. Smith, *Passive Obedience and Prophetic Protest: Social Criticism in the Scottish Church, 1830-1945* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 1987), pp. 373-6.

<sup>16</sup> On earlier attempts, see Brian Dempsey, 'Making the Gretna Blacksmith Redundant', pp. 27-9.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>18</sup> A quite remarkable portion of the Morison Report (three pages out of seventeen, not including appendices) is devoted to a potted history of the marriage trade at Gretna. See *Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed to Enquire into the Law of Scotland Relating to the Constitution of Marriage* (London: HMSO, 1937), pp. 8-11 (hereafter Morison Report).

<sup>19</sup> Eric M. Clive and John Gray Wilson, *The Law of Husband and Wife in Scotland*, (Edinburgh: Green, 1974), p. 96.

<sup>20</sup> As named in the Morison Report, these were: the Baptist Church; the Catholic Church; the Congregational Church; the Episcopal Church in Scotland; the Free Church of Scotland; the Free Presbyterian Church; the Jewish Church; the Methodist Church; the Reformed Presbyterian Church of Scotland; the United Free Church of Scotland; the United Original Secession Church. See Morison Report, pp. 15-16.

The reason for proclamation being in places of worship belonging to the Church of Scotland is that that Church is in its very nature a territorial Church, and that every part of the country has its own particular place of worship which is available for all who live within that area. They may not belong to that Church, but that Church belongs to them. It is the national church, not merely a denominational place of worship for a congregation.<sup>21</sup>

The Church further argued that proclaiming banns for a couple did not imply Church approval of the marriage.<sup>22</sup> The Church thus defended its exercise of this fundamentally civil function not in terms of the moral influence of the parish state, but rather by downplaying its denominational (and emphasising its national) status. Indeed, the foundation for this defence had been laid in the internal Church reforms of the 1930s. In response to local government reorganisation from 1930, the General Assembly had decreed that proclamation of banns would be carried out not on a parish basis, but in line with civil registration districts.<sup>23</sup> The parish state may have been dismantled in 1929, but the Church thus sought spatial reconciliation with the ‘civil magistrate’ in its exercise of its remaining civil functions.

The tenor of the Church’s argument for retaining its monopoly over legally effective banns was reflected in its broader engagement with marriage law reform. Indeed, the Church of Scotland’s criticisms of irregular marriage – though equally dominated by the sensationalism surrounding Gretna Green as the rest of the debate – were couched in terms of concern for people (archetypally women) who found themselves in unregistered, unprovable irregular marriages, resulting in difficulties obtaining access to property rights and state welfare.<sup>24</sup> Brian Dempsey, in his detailed analysis of the evidence submitted to the Morison Committee, is sceptical of the Church’s true motives, and argues persuasively that the reform in general may have been down to the deeply-felt sense of the ‘evils’ of Gretna Green weddings that the Committee brought to their task, rather than following from the evidence they were given. Indeed, Morison refers to ‘marriage before the sheriff’ – which, though a term in popular usage (see below), did not exist in a legal sense – and ‘marriage by declaration de presenti [sic]’ as separate categories of irregular marriage, with the latter

<sup>21</sup> ‘Re-marriage of Divorced Persons’, *Scotsman*, 9 May 1936.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* Later editions Arthur Pollok Sym’s manual, discussed below, contained an appendix entitled ‘Is Proclamation of Banns a Civil or an Ecclesiastical Matter?’, which repeated this claim. *Marriage in Scotland: A Manual for the Use of Ministers, Session Clerks and others, prepared by the Rev. Arthur Pollok Sym, D.D., and issued by authority of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland*, 3rd edn (Edinburgh and Glasgow: Committee on Publications, 1940), pp. 38-9.

<sup>23</sup> Act XIII. of General Assembly, 1931. ‘Registration district’ was not substituted for ‘parish’ on marriage schedules until the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965, sched. 1, s. 3.

<sup>24</sup> Dempsey, ‘The Gretna Blacksmith’, pp. 39-40.

heading introducing a lengthy diatribe against marriage at Gretna Green. The distinction was entirely spurious; in order to register a Gretna marriage one would have to appear before the sheriff of Dumfries, but the marriage itself would still have been formed by declaration, as would any other confirmed by a sheriff.<sup>25</sup> Nonetheless, the committee's description of the kind of system they were seeking as 'easy, clear and simple' connects them very clearly to an overarching project of modernisation.<sup>26</sup> Whatever the intentions or prejudices of those lobbying for change, the reforms ultimately enacted embodied the spirit of welfarist modernity.

Such was the context in which the 1939 Act was introduced. The Act was not, however, the only manifestation of the reformist ethos of the 1930s. It was felt too in the experience of getting married even before the Act came into force. The following section considers marriage formation in the 1930s through the lens of the Church of Scotland's provision. Besides the intimate relationship between Church and state outlined above, the Church was, after the Union of 1929, solemnising upwards of 60 percent of all marriages in Scotland each year. Assessing its practices around marriage therefore offers vital insight into the majority experience of wedding culture.

### Modernity and the 'Territorial' Church

In the case of Church of Scotland weddings, there is a single document that provides a wealth of context and indirect evidence of mainstream (and even some more marginal) experiences of getting married in the 1930s. This is *Marriage in Scotland*, a manual for Church of Scotland ministers and session clerks published between 1933 and 1949. The timing of its first edition, published in 1933, means it must be placed within the wider process of reform that followed the structural upheaval of 1929. However, it was not an entirely new creation in 1933. The manual consisted of two sections, the first concerning the procedure around proclamation and the marriage ceremony, and the second covering 'Problems Connected with Marriage.' The bulk of the former section had been featured in the *Church of Scotland Yearbook* 'for many years',<sup>27</sup> but continued to develop in response to the legislation of both parliament and the General Assembly. The latter was shaped by issues raised by ministers in correspondence with the author. It therefore offers a window on popular practice as viewed both by the General Assembly and by parish ministers on the frontline, albeit

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<sup>25</sup> Morison Report, pp. 7-8.

<sup>26</sup> Morison Report, p. 15.

<sup>27</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 1st edn, p. 5

mediated by the perspective of one man, the Reverend Dr Arthur Pollok Sym.<sup>28</sup> Reading between the lines of this document, and particularly by tracing its evolution across its five editions,<sup>29</sup> we can discern a process of feedback and reform in the Church's administration of weddings at the local level, as well as its engagement with legal reform at the national level. In the process, an outline of popular practice and the forces shaping it begins to emerge.

As noted above, the 1930s was a period of geographical restructuring for the Church of Scotland, and Sym's manual indicates something of the impact of this on the experience of marrying couples. As a result of the decision of the General Assembly to mirror the secular structures of civil registration in the proclamation of banns, the residence requirement was now based not on the parish, but on the much larger area of the registration district. The General Assembly left the implementation of this reform to the discretion of individual presbyteries, which were free either to appoint one church per district to proclaim banns or to empower every church in a district to do so.<sup>30</sup> At the presbytery level, this occasioned a degree of anxiety regarding the potential for parishioners to use the new structures to evade the scrutiny of their parish minister and local community when it came to seeking proclamation.<sup>31</sup> This anxiety regarding loss of oversight was proportional to the power then enjoyed as a legacy of the parish state. Part of the Church's privilege in its administration of legal preliminaries was that the parish minister was charged with ensuring there was no legal impediment to a marriage before he proclaimed it, and there is much to suggest that the new structures undermined his power in this regard. Application for proclamation of banns was not made directly to the minister, but to an appointed proclamation officer, often a session clerk. By the end of the decade, it would appear that in some registration districts all applications were being handled centrally by one proclamation officer.<sup>32</sup> In the third edition of Sym's manual, specific guidance was included for proclamation officers, who were advised that:

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<sup>28</sup> Sym was part of the delegation that gave oral evidence to the Morison Committee on behalf of the Church of Scotland. Morison Report, p. 24.

<sup>29</sup> The National Library of Scotland holds the first, third, fourth and fifth editions; I have not been able to locate a copy of the second edition (1936) nor any evidence of editions subsequent to the fifth. Sym died before the publication of the fifth edition and the updates contained therein were mainly in response to the repeal of emergency wartime legislation on the legal preliminaries to marriage, suggesting that this was in fact the final edition. See *Marriage in Scotland*, 5th edn.

<sup>30</sup> Implementation at the Presbytery level was in many cases covered in the national press. See for example 'Banns Proclamation', *Scotsman*, 11 November 1931.

<sup>31</sup> Such concerns surfaced in a dispute over the status of South Winchburgh church in the Presbytery of Linlithgow and Falkirk. 'Presbytery Meeting', *Linlithgowshire Gazette*, 29 July 1932.

<sup>32</sup> 'Lanark Presbytery', *Scotsman*, 25 January 1939.

It is of importance that the receiver of applications should know accurately the bounds of the registration district in which his own church is situated and the churches included therein, and so far as possible the streets or other places of habitation within the district, so that mistakes may be avoided which are apt to cause delay.<sup>33</sup>

This advice had not been included in 1933, suggesting that it had come to Sym's attention in the intervening years that proclamation officers had trouble keeping track of the large area from which applicants for proclamation might hail. Those in the presbyteries who feared the advent of anonymity after reorganisation may have been justified. It would appear that intuitive local knowledge had less of a role to play in proclamation than a more professionalised command of state-mandated geographical boundaries. Couples approaching the church for proclamation were thus increasingly faced not with the intimate structure of the parish state, but something more akin to a modern bureaucracy.

Curiously, the loss of the Church's own structures coincided with an increase in its share of legal preliminaries. The proportion of all religious marriages preceded by banns proclaimed for at least one of the parties had grown over the early decades of the twentieth century but had levelled off in the 1920s at around 71 percent.<sup>34</sup> The 1930s saw another period of growth, from 70.9 percent in 1931 to 78.1 percent in 1938. Even amongst couples marrying within the Church of Scotland, the proportion having banns proclaimed grew substantially. In 1930 and 1931, around 17 percent of Church of Scotland weddings were preceded by *civil* publication for both parties; that is to say, they made no use of the Church's own legal preliminaries. By 1938, only 8.2 percent of Church of Scotland weddings were preceded by civil preliminaries for both partners, the smallest proportion since figures on publication by denomination were first published in the GROS annual report for 1917. Several of the smaller Protestant denominations showed a similar trend towards proclamation in the 1930s; the rate of civil publication for the Congregational, Episcopal and Free Churches fell by around 10 percent between 1930 and 1938.<sup>35</sup> The Church's rationalisation of its geographical remit, and the attendant alignment with civil administrative divisions thus appear to have rendered it more like the national, almost civic institution it claimed to be in response to the

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<sup>33</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn p. 12.

<sup>34</sup> Where parties lived in different registration districts, proclamation or publication had to be made in both, meaning that it was possible for one party to have banns proclaimed in one district while the other opted for civil publication in another. This was uncommon before the Second World War, applying on average to around 2% of religious marriages each year, but this figure grew steadily thereafter, reaching 9% by the time the legal effect of banns was abolished in 1977 (see chapter 4).

<sup>35</sup> From 44.4, 40.9, and 52.1 to 30.6, 32.9, and 41.3 respectively.

Morison Committee's recommendations.<sup>36</sup> The modernisation process of the 1930s thus cemented the position of Church of Scotland banns as a common experience of regular marriage in interwar Scotland. Whether modernisation meant that the Church's services were more readily available to marrying couples, or simply more easily exploited by them as some presbyteries had feared, more and more couples were undergoing this premarital contact with the Church.

Parallel to this increase in the popularity of banns, however, was an apparent growing acceptance by the Church of civil publication. Ministers were entitled to refuse to perform marriages preceded by civil publication on that basis alone, but Sym offered the following observation on this practice:

It is believed that, whatever may have been the case formerly, very few ministers nowadays will be disposed to exercise the right of insisting on a certificate of proclamation of banns and refusing an equally valid registrar's certificate of publication. This could only delay the marriage and cause annoyance to all concerned.<sup>37</sup>

Once again, this was only included in later editions of the manual. In the context of rising proclamation rates, the direct impact of avoiding this particular 'annoyance' would have been limited. Nevertheless, it speaks to a relatively open attitude on the part of the Church towards marrying couples. It is important to recall as well that this was happening against the background of a wider shift in the social function of the Church at the local level. As Brown notes, this was a period of declining 'puritanism' and greater emphasis on socialising and recreation centred on the Church.<sup>38</sup> The 'folk-memories' of 'highly judgmental' pastoral care that Kenneth Boyd says outlived the decline of Church discipline in the early twentieth century may therefore have been on the wane.<sup>39</sup>

The same emphasis on easing couples' access to religious marriage was found in the guidance concerning the wedding ceremony itself. Significantly, by the 1940s, it was church weddings as much as religious marriages that Sym's guidance sought to facilitate. In ceremonial terms, a key distinguishing feature of Scots marriage law was (and continues to be) the lack of any stipulation of the venues in which a religious marriage could be

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<sup>36</sup> Crucially, these reforms had been accompanied by efforts to advertise to the public how to go about securing proclamation: see 'Proclaiming Banns', *Scotsman*, 28 February 1930. By 1940, Sym's manual also included the instruction to display the details of the proclamation officers' availability on church notice boards. *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Callum G. Brown, *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 153-4.

<sup>39</sup> Boyd, *Scottish Church Attitudes*, p.158.

solemnised. The Church of Scotland preferred couples to marry in church, but in practice many opted to be married at home, in commercial venues such as hotels or restaurants, or in the parish manse (see chapter two). In the first edition of Sym's manual, it was simply stated that a church was 'usually the most fitting place [for a wedding] when suitable arrangements can be made'.<sup>40</sup> By the 1940s, however, it would appear that the Church was having to engage more directly with the reluctance of couples to comply with this preference, possibly as a result of participation in the Morison Committee's enquiries.<sup>41</sup> In 1940, the foregoing remarks were followed by the recommendation that the 'Minister should see that any dues required for the use of the church are not so high as to prevent any persons from having their marriage celebrated in the House of God.'<sup>42</sup> It is likely that church weddings were associated with greater and more sincere religiosity on the part of the couple.<sup>43</sup> However, the Church of Scotland's concern seems to have been with facilitating access to church weddings rather than vetting couples for strength of religious commitment. Indeed, when we consider that the expense of proclamation had long been seen as contributing to the incidence of irregular marriage<sup>44</sup> – a concern echoed in Sym's remarks on the subject<sup>45</sup> – the emphasis on inexpensive church weddings begins to appear more like an enticement to religious marriage as a protection against the irregular alternative, regardless of the personal religiosity of the couple. In this context, not only were couples approaching the Church for marriage finding themselves treated more as entitled citizens than as subjects of ecclesiastical scrutiny, they were also being encouraged and assisted to conform to the ceremonial preferences of the institution.

Cost was not, however, the only factor at play in keeping weddings out of churches, nor the only channel through which the Church sought to remedy this. Another revision of Sym's guidance concerned the publicity of the church wedding:

Some people are deterred from a wedding in church because of the gathering of strangers. [...] The [minister] should take steps to secure that the House of God is not made the scene of idle curiosity or vulgar display to the annoyance of those who seek to have their marriage solemnized quietly or even, so far as possible, privately.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 1st edn, p. 11.

<sup>41</sup> The assistant registrar at Gretna claimed in evidence presented to the Committee that church weddings incurred expense by convention if not by necessity; it is possible that this remark reached the attention of Sym. Dempsey, 'The Gretna Blacksmith', pp. 31-2.

<sup>42</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 18.

<sup>43</sup> This concern emerged in the debate on venues for religious weddings in 1949-50. See chapter 2.

<sup>44</sup> Eleanor Gordon, 'Irregular Marriage and Cohabitation in Scotland, 1855-1939: Official Policy and Popular Practice', *The Historical Journal*, 58:4 (2015), 1059-1079 (p. 1062).

<sup>45</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 28.

<sup>46</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 18.



Given the anxiety of some within the Church regarding the potential for subversive anonymity in the reformed system of proclamation, this emphasis on offering privacy in the wedding itself seems incongruous. Once again, avoiding irregular marriage provides a rationale. Anonymity was widely assumed to be part of the appeal of irregular marriage,<sup>47</sup> and the Church's efforts to extend it in some way to church ceremonies suggests a welfarist desire to bring marriage under the auspices of the Church and the legal regularity it afforded. The balance of considerations at the moment of contact with the Church regarding marriage had shifted from scrutiny of the right to marriage to the encouragement of legal regularity under religious auspices. This was the logic that shaped the popular experience of Church of Scotland marriage on the eve of the Second World War.

Significantly, it was a logic that extended – at least in theory – even to those who opted for irregular marriage. In popular understandings of the law, the lack of ceremony in irregular marriage seemed to render it somewhat incomplete. Sym indicates that the Church of Scotland was sometimes called upon to finish the job,

because the parties themselves, perhaps more frequently their relatives, desire to have the irregularity amended. This procedure is not possible. [...] It is a sacrilegious mockery of the holy rite of matrimony to make a pretence of marrying those who are already husband and wife.<sup>48</sup>

It is impossible to ascertain how often such requests were made. However, one case reached the attention of the national press when the attempted registration of a religious marriage in Falkirk revealed the couple had already married irregularly, eloping to Glasgow for the purpose.<sup>49</sup> This indicates that, despite the Church's insistence on respect for the legal validity of irregular marriage, families sometimes successfully orchestrated a second wedding. It must be assumed that the minister in this case was not aware of the original marriage. While the Church would not countenance marrying an already legally married couple, it was ready to meet such requests with the offer of a ceremonial 'recognition' of an irregular marriage.<sup>50</sup> Sym's manual offered the following guidance on the matter:

It may be that the persons concerned have been misguided rather than wilfully regardless of religion. [...] In such cases it is not advisable, and in others it would be useless, for a Minister to insist on compearance before a Kirk Session for the exercise of discipline, or to impose suspension from the privileges of the Church. To treat those who are lawfully married as though they had been living in sin

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<sup>47</sup> Dempsey, 'The Gretna Blacksmith', p. 33; Eleanor Gordon, 'Irregular Marriage: Myth and Reality', *Journal of Social History*, 47:2 (2013), 1-19 (p. 13).

<sup>48</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 1st edn, pp. 19-20

<sup>49</sup> 'Witnesses at Marriage', *Scotsman*, 23 July 1935.

<sup>50</sup> Sym preferred the term 'recognition', claiming that 'blessing' was used 'vaguely', but only added this observation in later editions. *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 28.

may repel, instead of attracting to Christian influence members or adherents who have erred and strayed. [...] Private remonstrance by the Minister, with a kindly offer to arrange for a service of recognition by the Church of the marriage, may not only win the persons immediately concerned, but relieve the minds and comfort the hearts of their parents and friends.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly the Church's blessing would not be given without some recognition that the initial recourse to irregular marriage was a failing in its eyes. However, as with the Church's administration of the weddings it solemnised, the emphasis was on inclusion to the fullest extent possible. Irregular marriage did not, therefore, imply a break with the Church. Indeed, as early as 1905 it was noted within the Church that part of the incipient rise in irregular marriage was taking place 'even between parties professing themselves Christians'.<sup>52</sup> From the Church's perspective, this was an undesirable compromise between legality and religious observance; by the 1930s, however, it was one that could be corrected to some extent by ceremonial means.

What the Church offered irregularly married couples was nothing short of a marriage ceremony without the marriage. One rare example of such a ceremony reported in the press demonstrates this quite clearly. In November 1939, the *Sunday Post* reported that 'Edinburgh's most fashionable war wedding' was in fact 'not a wedding at all, but merely a blessing following a quiet marriage ceremony at the Sheriff Court.'<sup>53</sup> The religious ceremony, conducted at St Cuthbert's Parish Church, included a bridesmaid and best man, and the bride was given away. On the surface it was very much a 'proper' wedding. The *Post* included in its report an explanation from the minister that the marriage itself had not been solemnised in church because there was insufficient time for the Swedish bride to fulfil the residence requirement for the legal preliminaries in time to marry the groom, a Royal Navy Lieutenant, on his ten days' leave.<sup>54</sup> This wedding thus resembled those in jurisdictions where compulsory civil marriage is followed by a religious service, rather than the subsequent blessing or recognition of an existing irregular marriage, such as Sym had in mind.<sup>55</sup> Closer to Sym's concerns was a 1935 'wedding' in Perth, reportedly coming a month after the couple had been married at Gretna Green and had the marriage 'confirmed' by the

<sup>51</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 1st edn, p. 19.

<sup>52</sup> This remark was made by the Presbytery of Glasgow in a request to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland to make 'marriages *in facie ecclesiae* more easy to the people'. Quoted in Boyd, *Scottish Church Attitudes*, p. 159.

<sup>53</sup> 'Edinburgh Society Wedding Secret', *Sunday Post*, 12 November 1939. As noted above, there was, in legal terms, no such thing as a Sheriff Court 'ceremony'; the sheriff merely issued a warrant to register the marriage.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>55</sup> See Wendy Kennett, 'The Place of Worship in Solemnization of a Marriage', *Journal of Law and Religion*, 30:2 (2015), 260-294 (pp. 273-281).

Sherriff at Dumfries. The article suggested that a Church of Scotland minister was going to bless the marriage – remarkably, in a hotel rather than church ceremony.<sup>56</sup> Because the article was published before the fact, it is unclear whether this ceremony actually went ahead. Indeed, what little evidence there is suggests that the Edinburgh wedding was more typical of these blessing services. Besides a small number of wedding announcements on the model of ‘by special licence [sic] and then at x Church/manse’,<sup>57</sup> two further articles noted similar circumstances, with the irregular marriage registered on the same day as the church ceremony.<sup>58</sup> In one of these cases, underlining the Church’s apparent comfort with such arrangements, the groom was himself a Church of Scotland minister, married just before the abolition of irregular marriage and choosing this option as a way of ‘dispens[ing] with all formalities’ in light of wartime conditions.<sup>59</sup>

While these are clearly exceptional cases, they illustrate the extent to which the Church was willing to comply with the ritual demands of marriage even when it had not been entrusted with the legal procedure – provided, of course, that the reason for this was not so serious as to preclude Church approval. It is worth quoting Sym’s guidance on the ceremonial aspect at length, as it illustrates the rather legalistic manner in which the minister was expected to treat what was, from a legal standpoint, empty ritual:

[T]hey should come to the Minister at an arranged time and place, preferably but not necessarily the Church, and in his presence and that of two witnesses [...] acknowledge that they had been irregularly married, producing in evidence thereof a certified extract from the books of the Registrar.<sup>60</sup> The Minister should then, with such other religious exercises as may seem proper, offer prayer, asking in the name of Christ for a blessing on the union, and should solemnly charge them to cleave together as husband and wife. He should conclude his exhortation with such words as these: “As a Minister of the Church of Christ, I declare that you two persons, who have already taken each other as husband and wife, are recognised by the Church to be married persons. What God hath joined let not man put asunder.”<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> ‘Perth-Scone Romance’, *Perthshire Advertiser*, 6 July 1935.

<sup>57</sup> Three such announcements were found in a sample from the 14 September 1939 edition of the *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*. ‘Special licence’ appears to have indicated marriage by declaration in announcements, based on analogy with ecclesiastical dispensation from the notice period preceding marriage that was available in England. See *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 15; and David Pocklington and Frank Cranmer, ‘Banns of Marriage: Their Development and (Possible) Future’, *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 19:3 (2017), 342-56 (pp. 347-8).

<sup>58</sup> ‘St Giles “Service of Blessing”’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 22 July 1937.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Leven Minister’s Surprise Wedding’, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 27 May 1940.

<sup>60</sup> Later editions allowed for the possibility that no such certificate was available and, before the recognition ceremony was described, an account was given of the registration procedure, to be recommended to couples without ‘marriage lines’. *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, pp. 28-9

<sup>61</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 1st edn, pp. 19-20.

The Church of Scotland procedure for recognising an irregular marriage thus combined a scrupulous compliance with secular law with a religiosity that extended to referring to a marriage likely begun in a solicitor's office (see below) as 'what God hath joined.' This encapsulates the wider ethos within which the Church operated in the 1930s, what we might think of as a kind of spiritual welfarism. In much the same way as the administration of legal preliminaries had been reorganised to match the secular state structures, and guidance on wedding provision had been altered to acknowledge the demands of economy and the desire for privacy, the recognition ceremony was offered on an inclusive basis, bringing parishioners who had married outwith the Church under its auspices as far as practicable. This was a further manifestation of the Church of Scotland's desire to operate as a 'national' institution. As long as the law of the land allowed irregular marriage, the Church would not use it as grounds for turning its back on potential communicants.

The Church's civic ethos notwithstanding, not all forms of irregular marriage were equal in its eyes. The foregoing discussion relates to marriage by declaration. The other major form of irregular marriage, marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute, tested the limits of the Church's welfarism rather more severely. In the first edition of Sym's manual, there was no mention of conducting a recognition ceremony for couples in such unions. The section on this kind of marriage consisted mainly of a discussion of the circumstances in which the couples in question could be admitted to communion, a decision which would ultimately rest with the Kirk Session.<sup>62</sup> Though couples living together as husband and wife, and perceived as such in their communities, were legally married, the ambiguity regarding the early stages of such an arrangement meant that, in the eyes of the Church, they were also guilty of living in sin. By the 1940s – at which point cohabitation with habit and repute was the only remaining form of irregular marriage – even these unions were subject to a greater degree of welfarist intervention on the part of the Church. The issue of admission to communion remained a live one, but greater attention was paid to both the legal protection and spiritual status of the couples in question. Sym noted that raising an action of declarator in the Court of Session, the only means of registering these marriages, involved greater expense than the procedure once available in cases of marriage by declaration, 'so much indeed that in most instances likely to occur in a Minister's experience the persons concerned would not be able to meet it.'<sup>63</sup> In a remarkable intermingling of Church and state welfarism, he therefore recommended that a recognition ceremony was the best course of action:

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<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 25-7.

<sup>63</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 31.

[T]he Minister may be justified in putting matters straight in view of the Church, at least in ordinary cases. [...] All that he can do in this way is to cause them to go through a service of recognition by the Church that they are married persons, to exhort them to cleave together as husband and wife, and to attend to the Godly upbringing of their family, if such there be. He should then pronounce a blessing upon them in their united life [...] The question may be: “Do you acknowledge yourselves to be married persons?” and as, of course, there is no certificate of registration the Minister will write out ‘marriage lines’ in such form as the following: “I certify that on (date) A.B. and C.D. appeared before me, and in my presence and that of witnesses declared that they wish to be recognised as husband and wife, and on behalf of the Church I hereby recognise them to be married persons.” He will sign the certificate, along with the witnesses.<sup>64</sup>

The pseudo-legalism of the recognition ceremony was thus particularly pronounced in cases of marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute. The minister was instructed to issue ‘marriage lines’ which, although of no legal standing, nonetheless constituted a kind of symbolic registration of the marriage, underwritten by the Church. Sym likewise recommended that ministers recognising a registered irregular marriage should ‘endorse’ the official marriage lines produced by the couples to this effect, with the strict exception that ministers should never endorse

any document, whether printed or otherwise, purporting to be issued by the person in whose presence the parties were irregularly married. Such a document has no legal validity, and should not be in any way countenanced or acknowledged by the Church.<sup>65</sup>

This was undoubtedly a thinly veiled reference to the certificate issued by the Gretna ‘blacksmith’,<sup>66</sup> indicating an antipathy towards this practice that the Church shared with the Morison Committee.<sup>67</sup> The Church’s recognition of irregular marriages thus entailed an intricate play of symbolic bureaucracy, as scrupulously legalistic as it was devoid of any real legal significance. In the Church’s ‘marriage lines’ we see the intersection of religious and legal modernity, shaped by the welfarist ethos of mid-twentieth century Scotland.

### Irregular Weddings?

Viewing irregular marriage through the lens of the Morison Committee and *Marriage in Scotland* offers insight into what was at stake in the modernising discourse of reform.

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<sup>64</sup> In contrast to the ceremonies for marriages by declaration, for habit and repute cases Sym advised that ‘It is not desirable that any persons should be invited to attend other than near relatives who are aware of the circumstances.’ Ibid., p. 32. In this regard the Church was following the lead of the law, upholding the element of fiction that constituted the ‘repute’ element of marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>66</sup> The Department of Health for Scotland told the Morison Committee that it accepted these certificates as proof of marriage; this did not make it into the report. Dempsey, ‘The Gretna Blacksmith’, p. 42.

<sup>67</sup> Morison Report, p. 9.

However, it is only by addressing popular experience that we can appreciate the broader reality of what changed in the transition to modernity. As Dempsey notes, the Morison Report seems to have been written without the Committee ever actually ‘address[ing] themselves to the fact that over 4000 couples each year *chose* irregular marriage’.<sup>68</sup> The real experiences and motivations of irregularly married couples were of minimal importance within the paternalistic logic of reform. At a remove of almost 90 years, these elements of popular experience have only become harder to discern. Dempsey gives this question some consideration, but his focus on the evidence submitted to the Morison Committee precludes deeper engagement with reality ‘on the ground’. Eleanor Gordon’s work on the myth and reality of irregular marriage addresses popular experience more directly, but the breadth of her chronological focus renders her attention to the 1930s – which, as we see below, was a crucial period in its history – somewhat superficial. Crucially, both Dempsey and Gordon engage with the statistics on registered irregular marriages only insofar as these were presented to the Morison Committee. Beyond the limitations this imposes on a quantitative approach to the reality of irregular marriage in the 1930s, it also tends towards framing it solely as the problem it presented to reformers, rather than as an element of popular culture. Gordon does move beyond this bind, arguing that irregular marriage was a ‘functional equivalent’ to civil marriage as it already existed in England and Wales and many other jurisdictions.<sup>69</sup> This is a vital insight, demonstrating as it does that distinct legal categories may be straddled by more or less identical popular practice. Nonetheless, it is an insight that emerges from a treatment of irregular marriage rooted in a discussion of the longer history of unregistered, informal unions, and so does not fully engage with the possibility of a cultural element to such equivalence. Drawing on a wider range of sources, however, it is possible to detect traces of a culture of irregular marriage.

Reformers in the 1930s were primarily concerned with unregistered irregular marriages, the full extent of which is impossible to gauge. However, for much of the decade leading up to the 1939 Act, 11 to 12 percent of all marriages registered in Scotland were irregular. This figure rose rapidly in the last years before abolition, to 14.2 percent of all marriages in 1938, and again to 16.6 percent in 1939. Part of this increase may be explicable by the publicity surrounding the impending abolition of irregular marriage as the Morison Report and resulting legislation were discussed in parliament and in the press. Faced with the prospect of abolition, many couples living in unregistered irregular marriages may have decided to

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<sup>68</sup> Dempsey, ‘The Gretna Blacksmith’, p. 50. My emphasis.

<sup>69</sup> Gordon, ‘Myth and Reality’, p. 16.

seek legal recognition. However, the number of marriages registered by decree of declarator in the Court of Session – the only option in cases of marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute, and necessary also in cases where more than three months had elapsed since the formation of a marriage by declaration – remained negligible.<sup>70</sup> This does not necessarily mean that a large number of these new irregular marriages were not motivated by the desire to register an existing union. Raising an action of declarator was considerably more expensive than registering a marriage by declaration by means of a sheriff's warrant, and it is possible that couples living in irregular unions in fact formed new marriages to avoid this expense, or were simply unaware that marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute was legally valid. In a strict legal sense this meant that the same marriage was potentially being formed twice, but this does not appear to have been challenged in the courts. It would be expedient in such cases to seek the anonymity of the cities, as the relative publicity of appearing before the sheriff in a small town would have ruined any pretence to marriage under which the couples might have been living up to that point.<sup>71</sup> However, the boom years of irregular marriage in the late 1930s do not suggest such movement. In 1937, 15 percent of all irregular marriages took place outwith the four cities; in 1938 the figure was 17.6 percent, and in the peak year of 1939 it was 18.6 percent.<sup>72</sup> In other words, a significant portion of the late 1930s irregular marriage boom was not characterised by the same degree of traffic to the cities as had traditionally reigned in irregular marriage. This suggests a diminishing role for secrecy in marriage by declaration, at least as far as those that were registered are concerned, and its evolution into a socially acceptable alternative to religious marriage.

This subtle geographical redistribution of marriage by declaration raises the possibility that, for some couples at least, it was not merely an administrative mechanism for formalising an existing union, but a *ritual* alternative to religious marriage; one of a range of options around which a 'wedding' could be built, rather than a rejection of formal, ceremonial marriage altogether. Many couples marrying by declaration turned to 'marriage agents', solicitors who would charge a fee to oversee the exchange of consent and advise on the process for

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<sup>70</sup> 7 marriages were registered this way in 1938; 6 in 1939.

<sup>71</sup> My grandmother tells the following story about her parents, which offers some insight into the complex realities behind registration statistics. In 1936 they went to London, telling friends and relatives upon their return that they had been married there when they had not, the objective being to circumvent the marriage bar operative in my great grandmother's job. In April 1940, expecting their first child, they were married by declaration, taking witnesses off the street for what would have been described as a 'marriage before the sheriff', despite having an almost textbook case for marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute. They lived in Aberdeen but went to Dundee for the marriage, presumably for anonymity.

<sup>72</sup> Registered Gretna marriages may have had a part to play in this; however, the irregular rate in Dumfriesshire actually peaked in 1938, falling in 1939, so they cannot have been the only factor.

registering the marriage.<sup>73</sup> Gordon notes that the growth of this practice meant that, ‘whilst in theory an irregular marriage required no notice, no ceremony and no witnesses, by the early twentieth century often all three took place.’<sup>74</sup> Despite the popular – and, in the case of the Morison Committee, official – preoccupation with weddings ‘over the anvil’ at Gretna Green, irregular marriage was in fact developing something like a standard bureaucratic procedure, not unlike the civil weddings already available in many other jurisdictions. Indeed, registrars sometimes played the role of marriage agent – though apparently without charging a fee – presaging their role as civil celebrants under the 1939 Act.<sup>75</sup> There is some evidence that this practice was growing in the late 1930s. In 1936, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* answered a question about arranging an irregular marriage with the following: ‘Call upon the registrar of your district, and arrange for the ceremony in his office. Afterwards the marriage party attends before the Sheriff to have the wedding confirmed.’<sup>76</sup> A registration office ‘ceremony’ was thus presented as standard procedure, even though it had no basis in legislation. The ceremonial trappings accruing to irregular marriage by the time of its abolition were not, then, simply unnecessary formalities attached to the legal process by unscrupulous marriage agents. They seem to have arisen from a broader sense that some manner of wedding was necessary to the formation of a marriage.

These developments took place against the backdrop of a tendency in public discourse to refer to ‘civil weddings’ taking place in Scotland.<sup>77</sup> This terminological slippage suggests a singular failure of the specifics of marriage law to enter the public consciousness, even as its profile was raised by regular press exposure surrounding the Morison Committee. It is impossible to gauge the extent of popular understanding either of the existing law or of the proposed reforms, but it is significant that even such a formidable intellect – and one so attuned to Scotland’s place within the union – as Naomi Mitchison failed to grasp the reality of the reform, interpreting it as an imposition of English law to the effect of ending marriage outwith church buildings.<sup>78</sup> The marriage boom that accompanied the outbreak of war did not improve public awareness. The early months of the conflict saw a steady flow of

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<sup>73</sup> See Gordon, ‘Myth and Reality’, pp. 13-4; Dempsey, ‘The Gretna Blacksmith’, p. 26.

<sup>74</sup> Gordon, ‘Myth and Reality’, p. 15.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon, ‘Irregular Marriage and Cohabitation in Scotland’, p. 1069.

<sup>76</sup> ‘Our Inquiry Bureau’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 7 August 1936.

<sup>77</sup> This was the case even when discussing incidents related to the specifics of Scots marriage law, as when witnesses to a ‘civil marriage’ in the office of a marriage agent were charged with making false oaths in the sheriff court. This was the marriage mentioned above at n. 49. ‘Witnesses at Marriage’.

<sup>78</sup> *Among You Taking Notes: The Wartime Diary of Naomi Mitchison, 1939-1945*, ed. by Dorothy Sheridan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986), p. 80. The same was implied in an article accompanying a *Sunday Post* photograph of the ‘last’ Hogmanay marriages confirmed in the Sheriff Courts: ‘Last Hogmanay Weddings in Scots Courts. 70 Couples Married “Before the Sheriff”’, *Sunday Post*, 1 January 1939. See below.



reporting on the marriage boom in terms of overworked London registrars, invariably without any comment on the difference between marriage law on either side of the border.<sup>79</sup> In a particularly striking example of this Anglo-centrism, the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* printed the comments of the minister of a Church of Scotland church in London, who advised soldiers on leave to have a church wedding, complaining that ‘There is nothing spiritual about a register office ceremony.’<sup>80</sup> This article was published in December 1939, but made no reference to the different Scots law of marriage, let alone its impending reform. Indeed, the casual Scottish reader could be forgiven for thinking civil marriage was already available in Scotland. In a cultural, if not legal sense, with ‘ceremonies’ carried out before registrars, they would not be entirely wrong.

Direct evidence of ritual practice around marriage by declaration is scarce compared to that concerning regular marriage. However, photographs of marriages ‘before the sheriff’ did occasionally appear in the press when there was some element of local interest or notoriety attached to them. In 1939, photographs were published of the ‘wedding’ of two ‘variety artistes’ who appeared before the sheriff in Arbroath to register their marriage. They were photographed walking from the registrar’s office to the Court House in a procession headed by members of their band playing instruments.<sup>81</sup> This was a particularly festive example of a photographed irregular marriage, but earlier in the decade more sombre photographs of other minor local celebrities appeared, including a boxer, a water polo player, and a footballer, all of whose weddings were ‘confirmed’ at Dundee Sheriff Court.<sup>82</sup> None of these photographs suggested a particularly lavish wedding – none of the brides was pictured in a wedding dress – but nor were they presented as an aberration. In the case of one footballer, whose marriage by declaration was reported but not photographed, it was noted that he had recently suffered a ‘double bereavement’, and the wedding arrangements were intended to avoid ‘fuss’ under the circumstances.<sup>83</sup> Marriage by declaration, as suggested both in evidence submitted to the Morison Committee and in Sym’s pamphlet, was evidently sometimes simply seen as a ‘quiet’ option in comparison to a more conspicuous religious ceremony.

<sup>79</sup> For example ‘War Weddings’, *Scotsman*, 5 September 1939.

<sup>80</sup> ‘They’re Usually Happiest’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 26 December 1939.

<sup>81</sup> ‘Arbroath Artistes Greet Newly-Weds’, *Arbroath Herald*, 18 August 1939.

<sup>82</sup> ‘Well-Known Boxer Married’, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 20 October 1936; ‘Noted Midland Water Polo Player Weds’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 24 July 1936; ‘Footballer Weds’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14 May 1938.

<sup>83</sup> ‘Arbroath Player’s Secret Wedding’, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 17 February 1936.

Another way irregular marriage made it into the press was when it fitted into a local calendar of festivities. The annual surge of marriages at Hogmanay and during trades holidays presented a spectacle of mass marriage that rendered weddings ‘before the sheriff’ briefly visible in the local and national press. In 1937, the following scene was reported during the holiday week in Dundee, when 14 couples appeared before the Sheriff in one day to have their marriages registered: ‘The public benches in Dundee Sheriff Court presented a colourful spectacle today. There were serried ranks of ladies in summer dresses and men with gay button-holes.’<sup>84</sup> The *Edinburgh Evening News* gave a similar impression of holiday weddings two years later, reporting confetti-throwing and an air of ‘happy excitement’ at Edinburgh Sheriff Court.<sup>85</sup> These annual festivities were evidently enough of a fixture in the press for the prospect of the 1939 Act to be seen in terms of their disappearance. On the first of January 1939, the *Sunday Post* printed pictures of couples leaving Glasgow Sheriff Court in what it wrongly reported would be the last Hogmanay weddings ‘before the sheriff’, presenting this as the end of a well-established and ‘popular’ practice.<sup>86</sup> At the end of the year, the *Post* published pictures of what really were the last such couples. This time the picture featured a ‘veteran marriage agent’ waving on the courthouse steps to couples whose marriages she had presumably overseen (see figure 1.1).<sup>87</sup> This is the only direct evidence of the business of marriage agents I have found in the press in the 1930s, but it hints at a general familiarity with their presence. Beyond the occasional interest of the press, it seems that there was a more mundane, routine culture of irregular marriage that was not reflected in general wedding reporting.

There was one exception to this absence of routine reporting on marriages by declaration. Alongside the ‘colourful spectacle’ of the trades holidays, Dundee newspapers carried occasional reports on marriages ‘before the sheriff’ that followed the same format as reporting on religious weddings (see chapter three). In 1938 and 1939, the *Courier and Advertiser*, *Evening Telegraph*, and the *Broughty Ferry Guide* all carried reports on weddings ‘confirmed’ by the sheriff that included a description of the bride’s attire and even, in some cases, a reception that followed the confirmation.<sup>88</sup> Indeed, this appears to have applied even to weddings outwith Dundee. An article in the *Courier and Advertiser* in the

<sup>84</sup> ‘Sheriff’s “Marriage Market”. 14 Weddings Confirmed’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 24 July 1937.

<sup>85</sup> ‘Wedding March’, *Edinburgh Evening News*, 22 July 1939.

<sup>86</sup> ‘Last Hogmanay Weddings in Scots Courts.’, *Sunday Post*, 1 January 1939.

<sup>87</sup> ‘Hogmanay Rush to Wed’, *Sunday Post*, 31 December 1939.

<sup>88</sup> For example: ‘Fife Man’s Bride from Montrose’, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 21 July 1938; ‘Harriers Wed’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 16 April 1938; ‘Wedding Confirmed by Sheriff’, *Broughty Ferry Guide & Carnoustie Gazette*, 9 July 1938; ‘Wedding Confirmed before Sheriff’, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 6 November 1939.

summer of 1939 described a reception for 50 guests at York House in Perth, after confirmation of the marriage at Perth Sheriff Court.<sup>89</sup> The fact that a range of Dundee newspapers all covered local and regional irregular marriages suggests that this was not simply a reflection of the idiosyncrasies of a one particular local newspaper editor or reporter. What Dundee possessed was perhaps not so much a unique culture of marriage by declaration as a broader public culture of weddings that was inclusive of these marriages. This was only beginning to become visible on the eve of the abolition of marriage by declaration. However, placed in the context of the geographical distribution and occasional reporting outlined above, it suggests a more widespread culture surrounding such marriages that was going generally unreported.



*Figure 1.1: A 'marriage agent' outside the sheriff court. The caption read: 'Mrs Watson, veteran marriage agent, bids newly-weds and their witnesses "Good-bye and good luck" as they leave the Sheriff Court.' Source: 'Hogmanay Rush to Wed', Sunday Post, 31 December 1939. ©D.C. Thomson & Co., image created courtesy of the British Library Board.*

The outbreak of the Second World War and the introduction of civil marriage 10 months later preclude any longer-term assessment of the popular practice of irregular marriage under 'normal' circumstances. However, it is clear from what evidence is available for the 1930s that the decade saw a growth not only in the registration of irregular marriage, but in its association with some degree of ceremony, beyond the romantic spectacle of Gretna Green. Within, or alongside, the functional equivalence Gordon identifies between irregular and civil marriage, there was thus also a growing element of cultural equivalence: irregular weddings as well as irregular marriage. What the 1939 Act introduced, then, was not so

<sup>89</sup> 'Perth Families United', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 6 July 1939.

much the novelty of a non-religious wedding ceremony as the regularisation and generalisation of an existing practice. However, as we shall see below, this legal development was not without implications for popular culture. Close analysis of the implementation of the 1939 Act reveals that, in practice, irregular and civil marriage differed in subtle ways that would influence the shape of Scottish wedding culture under modernity.

### War and the Introduction of Civil Marriage

Had it come a few months earlier, the outbreak of the Second World War might have rendered the efforts of the Morison Committee simply another footnote in the history of abortive Scots law reform. In the end, implementation of the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939 was only delayed by six months.<sup>90</sup> From the first of July 1940, no new marriage by declaration could be formed in Scotland, though any formed prior to that date could still be registered. For couples who did not want a religious wedding, the registrar now dominated the process of getting married. Not only did the new civil weddings have to take place in a registration office, they had to be preceded by publication of notice by the registrar; though civil preliminaries were also valid for religious marriage, that transferability did not operate in reverse. While the wedding itself could take place in any registration office in the country, publication had to take place in the registration district(s) in which the bride and groom were resident. This was a major reversal with respect to irregular marriage; gone was the possibility of eloping to one of the cities at a moment's notice. Indeed, non-religious marriage implied potentially greater publicity than religious marriage. While civil publication involved a statutory waiting period of seven days before the wedding could go ahead, Church of Scotland ministers were at liberty to proclaim couples on only one Sunday – rather than three as was often assumed to be the standard – issuing the certificate of proclamation just 48 hours thereafter, if they were satisfied that there was no barrier to the marriage.<sup>91</sup> However, changes to popular experience cannot simply be read from legislation at the best of times, and the war provided a particularly complex context for the implementation of reform. In the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt to trace the reality of the implementation of civil marriage, its interaction with the war context, and its structural implications for wedding culture during the war and in the decades that followed.

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<sup>90</sup> Stephen Cretney notes that the outbreak of war stymied plans under consideration by the Registrar General for England and Wales regarding the 'rationalisation of the law' of marriage formation. Stephen Cretney, *Family Law in the Twentieth Century: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 23.

<sup>91</sup> Normal practice was proclamation on two Sundays, but proclamation on a single Sunday was common. This supposedly required the submission of a declaration by two 'householders' that the couple in question were eligible to marry, but this was not stipulated in the relevant Act of Assembly and it is not clear how often it was complied with. See *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, pp. 12-14.

One major consequence of the 1939 Act was a further geographical redistribution of non-religious marriage.<sup>92</sup> As we have seen, this was already underway in the last years of irregular marriage. However, the Act accelerated this process considerably. In 1939, 18.6 percent of irregular marriages were registered outwith the four cities; in 1940, the figure was 25 percent for irregular and civil marriages combined, and in the first full year of civil marriage it was 34.7 percent, and would remain at roughly the same level for the remainder of the war. Largely, this was a question of infrastructure. The empowerment of registrars to perform marriages, and the attendant abrupt end of the enterprise of the ‘marriage agents’ in the cities, meant that the facilities for civil marriage were more evenly distributed than those which, though not strictly necessary to the process, had been used in many cases of irregular marriage. Not all registrars were able to perform wedding ceremonies, but the 1939 Act stipulated that there should be ‘reasonable facilities in every part of Scotland’ for civil marriage. It is not clear what ‘every part of Scotland’ meant in practice, particularly when it came to landward areas, but the stipulations were clear for large and small burghs, each of which had to have one registrar authorised by the Registrar-General to perform marriages.<sup>93</sup> A map titled ‘Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939. Authorised Registrars for Civil Marriages.’ held in the NRS archive shows 305 localities, plus 5 unnamed within Glasgow, marked out for authorisation, suggesting that there may have been 310 registration offices providing civil weddings from 1940.<sup>94</sup> The 1939 Act thus redistributed non-religious marriage more evenly amongst Scotland’s localities. Between 1936 and 1946 the large burghs (other than the cities) almost doubled their share, with the counties (excluding large but not small burghs) tripling theirs.<sup>95</sup>

At the national level, civil marriage was initially markedly less popular than irregular marriage had recently become. The national boom in irregular marriage that had peaked in 1939, in which year 16.6 percent of marriages registered were irregular, was halted abruptly by abolition on the first of July 1940. For the six months preceding that date, irregular

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<sup>92</sup> I use the term ‘non-religious’ marriage to denote civil and irregular marriage when discussing this moment of transition.

<sup>93</sup> Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939, s.1(6). ‘Large burgh’ and ‘small burgh’ are local government terms that designated the cities and larger towns, and small towns respectively, all of which had council at this time. The terms were in operation from 1930 to 1975 and I use them when referring to this period. In 1940 there were 24 large and 171 small burghs.

<sup>94</sup> National Records of Scotland (henceforth NRS)/RHP94296, ‘Map of population density of Scotland and Northern England, marked to show authorised registrars for civil marriages relative to Marriage (Scotland) Act, 1939’. The title and markers were added by hand to a 1931 Ordnance Survey map.

<sup>95</sup> Large burghs, not including cities, accounted for 9.9% of irregular marriages registered in 1936, and 18.2% of civil marriages in 1946. The counties, not including large burghs, accounted for 5.2% of irregular marriages registered in 1936, and 15.6% of civil marriages in 1946.

marriages accounted for 15.3 percent of the national total; for the remainder of the year, the figure for civil marriage was just 8.9 percent. This means that, of the 11.8 percent of marriages listed in the published statistics for 1940 as ‘Civil and Irregular’, around 60 percent were irregular marriages contracted in the first half of the year.<sup>96</sup> In 1941, civil marriage accounted for 11.3 percent of marriages. While this was clearly an increase on the rate witnessed in the second half of 1940, it failed to match the popularity of irregular marriage in the last months of its availability, instead coming closer to the rate of irregular marriage seen in the early to mid-1930s. Counterintuitively, given the pressure it placed on time and material resources, the war in fact favoured religious marriage. Of the years that included no period of peace (i.e. 1940-1944), the rate of civil marriage was highest in 1943 and 1944, when the marriage rate temporarily fell to pre-war levels. The boom years of 1940 and 1941, on the other hand, produced the smallest proportion of civil weddings on record. In other words, the ‘surplus’ weddings created under war conditions were overwhelmingly religious ceremonies. This trend was markedly more significant at the local level, particularly in the cities (with the exception of Dundee). Between 1939 and 1941, the proportion of marriages in Glasgow solemnised by the Church of Scotland rose by almost 10 percent. In Edinburgh the rise was 7 percent, and 5 percent in Aberdeen. This is a striking development when we consider the similarities between irregular and civil marriage, as well as the emergent culture of irregular weddings in the later 1930s. If, as Gordon argues, irregular marriage was by the time of abolition a ‘functional equivalent’ to civil marriage, the events of 1940 suggest that this equivalence was not without nuance. This is highly suggestive of the relationship between irregular and religious marriage at the time of the abolition of the former. As demonstrated above with regard to Church of Scotland ‘recognition’ ceremonies, it would appear that the distinction was not one of mutual exclusivity. If the war had encouraged irregular marriage, the porosity of the boundaries between it and religious marriage allowed the churches in general, and the Church of Scotland in particular, to step in when it was removed less than a year into the conflict.

It was not only in weddings themselves that the Church of Scotland enjoyed a greater presence during the war. War weddings were also characterised by an unprecedented rate of religious preliminaries. In 1940, the percentage of religious weddings preceded by banns proclaimed for at least one of the parties reached its twentieth century peak of 81.9 percent, and remained at around 80 percent throughout the war. For Church of Scotland weddings

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<sup>96</sup> A relatively small number may have been registered by sheriff’s warrant within three months of abolition; only 11 were registered by decree of declarator.

(and Scottish weddings in general) this was a continuation and acceleration of existing trends, but the war also had the novel impact of extending the use of banns among Scottish Catholics. From the end of the First World War, around 80 percent of all Catholic weddings were preceded by civil publication of notice for both parties, but in 1940 this figure fell to 67.9 percent. It rose again for the remainder of the war, but it would be 1946 before it reached pre-war levels. This is all the more remarkable when we consider that the 1939 Act had also introduced the sheriff's licence as an alternative to banns or civil proclamation when the notice period could not be observed for any reason, including war service.<sup>97</sup> The popularity of banns among Catholics was not, then, simply due to a lack of other options.

The reasons for this increased uptake of banns were partly practical. In 1917, the Church of Scotland had passed an Act of Assembly relaxing the requirements around proclamation of banns for men on active service. Banns could be called on any day of the week – at the church door if there was no service before the intended time of the weddings<sup>98</sup> – and no waiting period was imposed before issuing the certificate of proclamation. Furthermore, these soldier grooms could be proclaimed on the basis of the bride's fulfilment of residence requirements.<sup>99</sup> When war was declared again in September 1939, this Act of Assembly, never having been repealed, immediately came into force once more.<sup>100</sup> This was not simply a legal anomaly caused by the failure to repeal anachronistic legislation. By June 1940, parliament was following the example of the Church and rushing through comparable exemptions to civil publication of notice.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, the Church's own legislation was soon updated and replaced by Act VI of General Assembly, 1940, which extended its provisions to women engaged in war work.<sup>102</sup> It would appear that, as far as legislators in both Church and state were concerned, the fact that these marriages would be registered, and therefore subject to greater clarity if problems should arise subsequently, made any concerns

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<sup>97</sup> 1939 Act, s. 2. The virulent and institutionally sanctioned sectarianism of the interwar years certainly laid no solid foundation for this interdenominational contact, but Aspinwall's work on intermarriage suggests that contact between Protestants and Catholics has always been greater than assumed. See Bernard Aspinwall, 'Baptisms, Marriages and Lithuanians; or, 'Ghetto? What Ghetto?' Some reflections on modern Catholic historical assumptions', *The Innes Review*, 51:1 (2000), 55-67.

<sup>98</sup> This practice seems to have been fairly common. One month into the war, the *Stirling Observer* noted that four couples had already been proclaimed at the church doors locally. 'Notelets', *Stirling Observer*, 3 October 1939.

<sup>99</sup> Act VII of General Assembly, 1917. See *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 16.

<sup>100</sup> Letter from Arthur Pollok Sym, *Scotsman*, 28 August 1939.

<sup>101</sup> Eventually passed as the Marriage (Scotland) Emergency Provisions Act 1940. Further reform from both Church and parliament came in mid-1942, when proclamation in Scotland was temporarily allowed on the basis of usual residence on 3 September 1939, with the aim of facilitating the return for marriage of Scots displaced by war work. 'Scottish Marriages', *Scotsman*, 20 June 1942.

<sup>102</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 16.

around the rights or wrongs of rushing into wedlock decidedly secondary.<sup>103</sup> The Church of Scotland, after a decade of modernisation along self-consciously national-civic lines, was well-positioned to take on the demand for quick and easy marriage.

Beyond the administrative context, there is also a cultural explanation for the failure of the war to produce a civil marriage boom. The crucial element is not so much the relationship between irregular and civil marriage as the respective relationship of each to religious marriage. Whatever their functional equivalence, in this respect their cultural equivalence was incomplete. In contrast to the porosity of the boundaries between irregular marriage and religious marriage in the eyes of the Church of Scotland, civil marriage was unequivocally a separate entity. When Sym's guidance was revised after the 1939 Act, there was apparently no question of blessing or 'recognition' services for couples who had had civil weddings.<sup>104</sup> The reason for this was hinted at in Sym's articulation of the Church view that ministers were legally barred from marrying couples whose adulterous relationship had ended a prior marriage: 'Those who desire to enter on such a union have their remedy in civil marriage [sic] [...] but it is not a union which the Church can bless.'<sup>105</sup> This phrase was present in the first edition of the manual,<sup>106</sup> but there it was followed by a section on 'The Admission of Divorced Persons to Communion', in which irregular marriage was offered as a means by which such couples could 'ceas[e] to live in sin' and thereby at least open the way to reconciliation with the Church.<sup>107</sup> By the time civil marriage was introduced, this section was removed. Non-religious marriage no longer figured in such schemes of negotiated morality. If irregular marriage had been a regrettable, but potentially forgivable compromise in relation to religious marriage, civil marriage was its outright rejection.

It is impossible to say to what extent marrying couples accepted this distinction, but the Church's attitude gave sanction to the idea that the two forms of ceremony were based on

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<sup>103</sup> Indeed, proclamation at the church door could not realistically have allowed time for any objections to the marriage to be lodged. This was the most perfunctory compliance with the requirement of preliminaries.

<sup>104</sup> Anne Ashley noted, however, that 'services for the blessing of a marriage already entered into by civil procedure' were included in the Book of Common Order and the Scottish Book of Common Prayer. Anne Ashley, *The Honourable Estate: A Study of Marriage and the Law in Scotland* (London: National Council of Social Service, 1950), pp. 49-50. I have found only one example of such a ceremony, taking place in 1959. In this case, it was discovered that the bride did not fulfil the residence requirement for marriage in Scotland when the arrangements for the church wedding had already been made; this may account for the ceremony going ahead as a blessing. 'The Wedding which Nearly Wasn't', *Montrose Standard and Angus and Mearns Register*, 12 November 1959.

<sup>105</sup> *Marriage in Scotland*, 1940, p. 37.

<sup>106</sup> Including the words 'civil marriage', a remarkable inaccuracy in an otherwise scrupulously legalistic document. *Marriage in Scotland*, 1933, p. 21.

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.



different personal behaviours or life histories. A significant indication of the salience of the Church's view was the connection between the civil marriage rate and the proportion of those marrying who were divorced. 1947 saw the highest rate of civil marriage in the first decade of its existence – not surpassed until 1952 – and it was also the year of the same period in which the highest proportion of marriages involved at least one divorcee.<sup>108</sup> Though the published statistics did not break down the figures on remarriage by denomination, this would suggest that many divorcees, at least by the end of the war, had internalised the perception that civil marriage was for them. This had most likely been true of irregular marriage as well. However, as the foregoing discussion has shown, that form of marriage was rather capacious in its connotations. It could imply the rejection of ceremony, of religion, or of publicity, and the motivations involved could be subversive or simply pragmatic. Civil marriage, in contrast, was more clearly defined. Although it did not demand an explicit rejection of marriage on religious premises within the ceremony, as was the case in England and Wales until the 1940s,<sup>109</sup> it did demand a more abstract reckoning with religion, if only because the registrar had the last say on solemnisation, and no minister – at least not of the 'national' Church – would subsequently endorse it. Civil marriage could not, therefore, inherit the whole reserve of potential for irregular marriage that had built along with its cultural significance in the 1930s. This had, instead, to be shared out across the different forms of regular marriage during the war and afterwards. To this extent, then, the equivalence between irregular and civil marriage was imperfect. What irregular marriage implied, civil marriage declared with bureaucratic certainty. This, more than the fate of the Gretna blacksmith, confirmed the modernity of Scotland's post-war wedding culture.

## Conclusion

In Nan Shepherd's novel *The Quarry Wood*, written in 1928, the main character's mother is scandalised at the mention of Sally, a relative who 'disna richt ken gin she's merriet or no.'<sup>110</sup> Sally's predicament was not, perhaps, typical, but in early twentieth century Scotland it was well within the realm of possibility. Irregular marriage, with its possible lack of ceremony, carried a fundamental ambiguity. Without the decisive moment of formation embodied in ritual, a marriage could feel less real to the couple involved and their community. Without the intervention of a court, moreover, it was entirely invisible to the state. Whatever the

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<sup>108</sup> The increasing divorce rate that followed the Divorce (Scotland) Act 1938 complicates comparison, but it is worth noting that this correlation does not appear to have operated in the irregular marriage boom.

<sup>109</sup> This requirement was eventually removed, not by targeted reform but by apparent oversight in the drafting of the Marriage Act 1949. Cretney, *Family Law*, p. 24.

<sup>110</sup> Nan Shepherd, *The Quarry Wood* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1987), p. 39.

actual incidence of unregistered unions of this kind, the potential for their proliferation undermined the very logic of marriage as a modern legal institution in the context of welfarist reform. The solution to this, as delivered by the 1939 Act, was to insist on preliminaries, ceremony, and registration. In practice, this meant that virtually all marriages now had to be formed by means of a wedding, whether religious or civil. Under this new regime of marriage formation, people knew perfectly well whether or not they were married. Moreover, they also tended to know whether or not their neighbours were married. Non-religious marriage – though still associated with a degree of discretion, as we shall see in chapter two – was now no longer so closely associated with flight to the metropolis. By 1950, 37.9 percent of civil weddings took place outwith the cities, compared to 34.7 percent in 1941, and just 15 percent of irregular marriages in 1936. Closely connected to this loss of mobility in marriage patterns was the newly universal requirement for legal preliminaries which, whether religious or civil, had to be posted publicly in the area(s) where the parties were resident, regardless of where they went for the wedding. Whether or not this was an effective way of publicising marriage, it did pose a practical obstacle to elopement. To this extent, the 1939 Act pushed marriage out into the open, exposing it fully to the gaze of the state, and potentially to that of community. Ritual was thus the means by which marriages in Scotland were rendered legitimate and countable to the modern state, as well as its citizens.

This transition from irregular to civil marriage was the clearest index of modernity in marriage formation in Scotland, but it was not the only one. Parallel evolutions had taken place within religious marriage. By the time war broke out in September 1939, the Church of Scotland was performing a greater share of all weddings and administering a greater share of preliminaries than ever before in the twentieth century. However, if the quantity of popular contact with the Church around marriage had increased, it had not been without some alteration in the *quality* of that contact. Proclamation was a more rationalised, bureaucratised procedure than before. A proclamation officer and his capacity for memorising addresses at least partially replaced the charismatic authority of the minister in deciding who did and did not qualify for proclamation. The wedding itself faced the potential for a similar kind of rationalisation. Although wedding provision was at the discretion of individual ministers,<sup>111</sup> the guidance contained in Sym's manual suggested an overriding ethos of inclusion. The claim (made in response to the Morison Report's recommendations)

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<sup>111</sup> With the exception of partners whose relationship had begun as an affair resulting in the dissolution of a previous marriage, who were unambiguously barred from marriage in Church of Scotland. *Marriage in Scotland*, 3rd edn, p. 37.

that banns did not equal Church approval of the marriage in question was never extended to cover the wedding ceremony itself, but the thrust of rhetoric and reform in the 1930s was in the direction of this kind of neutrality in provision. The Church, newly reconstituted with a true numerical dominance in matters of religion, was exercising its 'national' function along increasingly modern, rationalised lines.

This trend towards greater administrative certainty centred on ritual in both Church and state was reflected at the level of popular practice. In the last years of its widespread existence, marriage by declaration took on trappings of ceremony that were legally unnecessary, and even began to acquire a certain degree of visibility within the mainstream public culture of weddings. In a sense, many Scots marrying in the 1930s had civil weddings before they were an administrative reality, enacting legal reform at the level of popular culture. In this very lack of legal basis, however, these 'irregular weddings' enjoyed a more ambiguous relationship to religious marriage, allowing religious involvement to be dispensed with without being explicitly rejected. The 1939 Act removed this ambiguity. Where the distinction between religious and irregular marriage had, in theory, been the presence or absence of ritual, civil marriage was defined by the removal of religion from ritual. While weddings were spreading spontaneously in popular practice by the late 1930s, the legal codification and regularisation of this phenomenon fundamentally redirected the evolution of popular ritual culture. This culture of regularity is the focus of the next chapter.

## Chapter 2: The Rise of the White Church Wedding, c.1939-1960

### Introduction

In *The Birth of the Modern World*, C. A. Bayly writes of the advent of modernity in terms of the ‘rise of global *uniformities*’: the parallel and interconnected processes of standardisation and, to some extent, homogenisation that took place in societies the world over during the long nineteenth century. This phenomenon was witnessed not only in matters of state administration, but in everyday ‘bodily practices’, right down to how people dressed.<sup>1</sup> In mid-twentieth century Scotland, weddings constituted the site of one such uniformity, which crystallised rapidly in parallel with the regulatory modernisation explored in the previous chapter. This was the rise of what will be referred to as the ‘white church wedding’. That is, a wedding ceremony performed in a church building and featuring a bride in a dress that could not be worn for any other occasion without significant alteration. Dress historians would perhaps balk at my assessment of this ritual aesthetic as ‘homogenised’, as to the trained eye the variations possible within the category of ‘wedding dress’ are doubtless virtually infinite.<sup>2</sup> However, as we shall see, the fact that a *wedding* dress, however, loosely defined, became a more or less indispensable part of the process of getting married represented a significant departure from early twentieth century practice. The same dynamic applied to wedding venues. In an article in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* published in 1966, Reverend Robert Taylor reflected on his 43 years’ experience of performing weddings, noting that the biggest change he had witnessed in that time was the rise of the church wedding: ‘[I]n my first two charges,’ wrote Taylor, ‘I had not one single wedding in a church.’<sup>3</sup> In the space of a decade, a homogenised aesthetic with the wedding dress and the church venue at its core replaced the relative diversity of weddings in the 1930s. It also indicated the specialisation of ritual in the form of its further segregation from everyday life. Modernity, far from excising ritual from a new ‘rational’ form of living, reified and universalised specialised ritual forms that had once been the preserve of the relatively wealthy.

One curious feature of the modernity of Scottish wedding culture was the extent to which it was perceived as ‘traditional’. Reverend Taylor was rather unusual in articulating the

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<sup>1</sup> C.A. Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World*, p. 1. Original emphasis.

<sup>2</sup> Indeed, even at the height of conformity in wedding culture a ‘white’ dress may have been ivory or cream or some other muted shade made acceptable by prevailing fashions.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. Robert Taylor, ‘Church Weddings Were Banned on Penalty of a Heavy Fine’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 25 February 1966.

discontinuity represented by church weddings. Indeed, by the mid-1960s, the white church wedding was an unquestioned part of the status quo in wedding culture. It was, nonetheless, a recent development in Scotland, its rise to dominance – in numerical rather than cultural terms – a matter of living memory. And yet, it enjoyed the unquestioned hegemony of a tradition. Part of the reason for the acceptance of novelty as tradition is that no official figures were kept on wedding venues, rendering comparisons with recent practice infrequent.<sup>4</sup> The relative inaccessibility of wedding photography in the 1930s perhaps created a similar forgetfulness when it came to wedding attire. More significant than this lack of an immediate historical record, however, were the conditions in which white church weddings had come to dominate, and the ways in which these interacted with popular memory. The Second World War saw increased the popularity of church weddings virtually overnight in some places, but nonetheless produced a public discourse that framed the disruption of war as a challenge to the white church ideal. The homogenisation of ritual that took place at this time was not, then, the self-conscious modernism of a cultural vanguard, but rather the common dynamic identified by Charsley of enacting inherited ritual knowledge in present conditions. It just so happened the condition of the present were those of total war and increased regulation. This chapter charts the rise to dominance of this ritual aesthetic during and after the Second World War, the parallel culture surrounding the new civil weddings, and the moralised sumptuary codes that segregated the two. As we shall see, the legal regularity created by reform in the 1930s and 40s was reflected in – and to some extent created – ‘uniformities’ of ritual culture that subtly reordered the experience of getting married in Scotland.

### War and the White Church Wedding

Standing in her white silk dress in Edinburgh’s Charteris Memorial Church, Lance Corporal Betty Ford of the ATS was the very image of the traditional bride.<sup>5</sup> After almost five ‘pageant-starved’<sup>6</sup> years of war, this glimpse of ritual splendour attracted what the *Sunday Post* described as ‘Edinburgh’s biggest war-time wedding crowd’.<sup>7</sup> Ford and her admirers had none other than Eleanor Roosevelt to thank for this respite from wedding austerity. The dress had been given by Roosevelt personally, one of fifty donated by American women for

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<sup>4</sup> The registrar for Montrose kept a note of venue choice and reported on a shift towards church weddings in 1955, but he seems to have been alone in keeping such records. ‘More Twins Born in Montrose’, *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review*, 6 January 1955.

<sup>5</sup> ‘Bride in Roosevelt Gown’, *Sunday Post*, June 4, 1944.

<sup>6</sup> ‘Lady Jean Ogilvie’s Wedding’, *Sunday Post*, 25 January 1942.

<sup>7</sup> ‘Bride in Roosevelt Gown’.

the use of British brides in the services, and a ballot had resulted in Ford's being the first to wear it. But this was not the only respect in which she was fortunate to wear a white silk wedding dress. In civilian life, Betty Ford had been a 'shopgirl', an orphan who lived with her aunt in an Edinburgh tenement.<sup>8</sup> While the white wedding had certainly been the ideal before the war – visually dominant in local reporting as much as in royal weddings and Hollywood spectacle – it was far from the reality for many brides, much less those of Ford's background.<sup>9</sup> Roosevelt's fortuitous intervention in her wedding did not, therefore, simply mitigate the effects of the war; it bestowed upon the ritual a normative, middle-class aesthetic. For this bride at least, the war may in fact have granted access to a status that would otherwise have been out of reach. In other words, if Betty Ford was a 'traditional' bride, it may well have been because of the war, not despite it.

This wartime wedding underlines the discontinuity that arguably sits at the heart of all tradition, but which was particularly pronounced in Scotland's embrace of the white church wedding in the middle decades of the twentieth century. If rituals evolve while retaining an authoritative air of timelessness, war implies an equally ambiguous confluence of continuity and change. Indeed, this has been a central point of contention in historians' assessment of the impact of the Second World War. While popular history and collective memory are often tempted by the satisfying narrative of change and progress – the democratising 'People's War'; the emancipatory effects of women's war work – academic history has in recent decades tended to emphasise the continuities of pre- and post-war life, and even the reinforcement of the status quo during and subsequent to the conflict.<sup>10</sup> As Penny Summerfield demonstrated, these interpretations reflect not merely the abstractions of memory or scholarly analysis, but also discourses circulated among contemporaries. They were – and continue to be – used selectively to make sense of deeply personal life histories in the context of nationally shared experience.<sup>11</sup> Just like the perception of tradition, these impressions had agency, playing a vital role in shaping personal and collective behaviour in response to external events. In Betty Ford's wedding, it was the *belief* in the disruption

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Edwina Ehrman, *The Wedding Dress: 300 Years of Bridal Fashions* (London: V&A Publishing, 2014), pp. 101-125; Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 155. Howard identifies a similar chronology in the USA, *Brides, Inc.*, p. 157.

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of these conflicting interpretations, see Penny Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives: Discourse and Subjectivity in Oral Histories of the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), chapter 1. Most recently the emphasis has been on qualified continuity: see Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers, 'Introduction', in *Gender and the Second World War*, ed. by Corinna Peniston-Bird and Emma Vickers (London: Palgrave, 2016).

<sup>11</sup> Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, chapter 6.

wrought by war – the belief that brides would wear white if not for that disruption – that determined what she wore that day.

The Second World War thus presents a particularly well-defined moment of change in wedding culture, even if its reality is rather different to what was perceived by contemporaries. This section explores the quantifiable shift in ritual behaviours through evidence in wedding photographs, reports and announcements in the local press. The results of a keyword search of the digitised British Newspaper Archive for the terms ‘military wedding’ and ‘war wedding’<sup>12</sup> provide an additional, ‘national’ account. In these sources, we see how the practical, material implications of war interacted with the discursive construction of the war experience, and can thus trace the resultant interplay of continuity and change in ritual culture.

### *Venue*

It has been claimed that, in the nineteenth century, most Scottish weddings took place in the home of one of the parties or in the parish manse, but this has never been quantified.<sup>13</sup> Wedding announcements placed in local newspapers offer the best means of quantifying twentieth century venue choice; among the available evidence, they represent the largest cross-section of local weddings, with the exception of registration statistics, which do not indicate venue (see chapter three). Table 1.1 shows the pre-war figures on venue choice for three areas of Scotland, encompassing the small burgh of Hawick, the county of Fife (and the large burgh of Kirkcaldy within it), and the city of Aberdeen.<sup>14</sup> Despite considerable local variation, house weddings were clearly the least popular option in most cases, and church weddings the most popular, though it was only in Aberdeen that these constituted the majority. Commercial venues (most commonly hotels) competed with the manse for second place, but Hawick appears to have been something of an outlier in favouring the manse. Notably, irregular marriage barely registered in wedding announcements.

<sup>12</sup> Terms chosen after an initial survey of wartime wedding reporting.

<sup>13</sup> The source of this assumption may be an observation made in the *Report of the Royal Commission on the Laws of Marriage*, (London: HMSO, 1868), p. xviii. See also Smout, ‘Scottish Marriage, Regular and Irregular, 1500-1940’, in *Marriage and Society*, ed. by Outhwaite, p. 228. The Morison Report made passing reference to weddings venues that implied that churches and private homes were the most prominent options. Morison Report, p. 15.

<sup>14</sup> It should be borne in mind that each newspaper also reported on the surrounding areas, and weddings were often announced where relatives of the couple lived rather than where the ceremony took place.

**Table 1.1: Pre-war venue choice in wedding announcements from a sample of local newspapers**

Year	Newspaper	% Church	% Commercial	% House	% Manse
1933	<i>Aberdeen Press and Journal</i> *	54.1	32.9	8.2	4.7
	<i>Hawick News</i>	42.3	14.6	9.5	33.6
	<i>Fife Free Press</i>	19.7	39.5	20.4	20.4
1938	<i>Aberdeen Weekly Journal</i> *	51.3	28.8	8.8	11.3
	<i>Hawick News</i>	46.8	16.5	5.5	31.2
	<i>Kirkcaldy Mail</i> **	43.8	40.5	4.1	11.6

\*Figures for August 1933 and March 1939 respectively: the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* and *Aberdeen Weekly Journal*'s much larger circulation means that monthly figures are broadly comparable to annual figures for smaller newspapers. March 1939 figures are placed here with 1938 figures from other papers to approximate the situation on the eve of war in the absence of a suitable source for Aberdeen in 1938.

\*\* Figures exclude weddings outside of Scotland. Figures from the *Kirkcaldy Mail*, a pilot study, have not been corrected for this factor, and it is possible that commercial venues would outnumber church weddings slightly if such correction were made.

Underlying the varying prominence of different venues was a stratified culture of ritual display and consumption within which churches, commercial venues, manses and private homes occupied distinctive positions. This is indicated by their place in local wedding reporting. Church weddings were by far the most visible. Of the 30 weddings photographed with identifiable venues in the *Kirkcaldy Mail* in 1938, 18 took place in churches, and the same was true of 21 of the 25 featured in *Hawick News* in the same year, with the remainder mainly representing commercial venues. Church and commercial venues were thus disproportionately visible. In the latter case, this was likely a case of pure conspicuous consumption, whereas in the former the communal interest of a church wedding was also a contributing factor (we recalled Sym's 'gathering of strangers' from chapter one). Marrying in the manse or at home may have involved a similar communality, but this lacked the validation of attention from the local press. Both options were underrepresented even in written reports, which were generally somewhat closer to announcements than photographs in their breadth of coverage. Similarly, the potential for a complete lack of ceremony in irregular marriages was matched by their invisibility in local reporting (at least outside Dundee: see chapter one). There was thus a clear hierarchy in venue choice, determined by differing levels of conspicuous consumption. It was not, however, a simple economic sliding scale, but one inflected by the expectations of the wider community.

One might expect the war to have favoured the less conspicuous options for marrying. Registration statistics indicate that this was not the case. As noted in chapter one, civil marriage failed to match the popularity of irregular marriage, though both implied minimal display. Nor is there any indication that the house wedding underwent a popular resurgence.



Instead, among the quieter venues, it was the manse that seemed to profit most from wartime conditions, at least initially. In Kirkcaldy, the first two full years of war saw a substantial increase in manse weddings, accounting in 1940 and 1941 for twice the proportion announced in 1938 and 1939.<sup>15</sup> In Hawick, where manse weddings were already popular before the war, the proportion remained steady at around 30 percent. However, in both towns manse weddings were in fact less common by end of the war than in 1938,<sup>16</sup> a trajectory that was replicated in Aberdeen, where there had been no comparable initial increase.<sup>17</sup> The war's impact on venue choice was not, then, simply a matter of practicality; more important was how this practicality entered wider culture. In some local reports featuring manse weddings it was noted that the venue had been chosen when a planned church or commercial venue wedding had to be cancelled due to the outbreak of war.<sup>18</sup> The manse, after some initial popularity, was thus associated not only implicitly with simple weddings, but also explicitly with concessions made to wartime conditions. In other words, the outbreak of war made the manse not simply a quieter option, but a compromise, representing a wedding that fell short of the peacetime ideal.

If the war undermined the popularity of the manse, it did the opposite for church weddings. Almost immediately, the war reinforced their already prominent position. In Aberdeen, this was evident in an increase of nearly 20 percent in the proportion of church weddings in the very first weeks of the war. In the last week of August 1939, 52.6 percent of weddings announced in the *Journal* were church weddings, rising to 71.4 percent in the first week of September. This was followed by a further 10 percent rise over the remaining years of conflict, with 80 percent of announced weddings taking place in churches in September 1945. In Hawick and Kirkcaldy, the rise was slower and steadier, but equally marked.<sup>19</sup> It was a change that registered even in the forms of wedding reporting in which the church wedding's dominance was already cemented. Just over half of the written reports in the *Perthshire Advertiser* between January and August 1939 featured a church wedding, compared to almost 80 percent for the same period in 1945. Similarly, in the *Hawick Express*, the proportion of church weddings among those photographed rose from 65 percent

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<sup>15</sup> 11.6% in 1938 and 9.8% in 1939, compared to 21.9% in 1940 and 21% in 1941.

<sup>16</sup> In Kirkcaldy, 8.8% in 1945 and 4.9% in 1946; in Hawick, 10.5% in 1944 (the last available war year for *Hawick News*).

<sup>17</sup> 5.1% in September 1945.

<sup>18</sup> 'Military Wedding', *Fife Herald*, 30 August 1939; 'War Wedding at St. Mary's Manse', *Motherwell Times*, 5 January 1940.

<sup>19</sup> In Hawick, 83.3% in 1944; in Kirkcaldy, 77.1% in 1946.

in 1941 to 94 percent in 1945.<sup>20</sup> The rise of the church wedding was almost directly proportionate to the decline of the most popular alternative, the commercial venue, despite efforts to capitalise on the ‘war wedding’ phenomenon for advertising purposes. Even the promise that ‘[t]he management [would] attend to everything – and relieve you of any anxiety’ failed to stem decline.<sup>21</sup> This professionalised provision of ritual could not compete with the Church- and community-approved attractions of the church wedding.<sup>22</sup>

In contrast to the manse wedding, the popularity of church weddings bore some relation to trends visible in civil registration statistics. As noted in chapter one, the Church of Scotland’s emergency wartime provisions attracted more couples to have banns proclaimed rather than submitting their intention to marry to the local registrar. As the *Aberdeen People’s Journal* put it in the early days of the war, the measures meant that, locally at least, the ‘Kirk [was] beating the “Shirra”,’ as the convenience of proclaiming banns under the new regulations attracted couples away from the now lengthier process of registering an irregular marriage through the sheriff court. As a result, it was implied, more couples were marrying in the parish church where their banns were proclaimed.<sup>23</sup> It must be noted, however, that the reported rise in church weddings far outweighed the swing towards Church of Scotland ceremonies and preliminaries indicated in civil registration. The change was not, then, simply a matter of pragmatism, but part of a more fundamental development within the existing culture of religious marriage. This becomes clear when we consider the choice of wedding attire alongside venue.

### *Dress*

The most striking feature of wartime wedding attire was the phenomenon of the uniformed bride. While it may be tempting to attribute the decision to marry in uniform to material scarcity, recent scholarship has emphasised the extent to which women’s uniforms in the Second World War were both designed and perceived to convey an element of glamour. This was a phenomenon often based on patriarchal attitudes towards women’s role in wartime

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<sup>20</sup> The wartime run of the *Hawick Express* held by the National Library of Scotland starts with 1941; it has been included as it featured an unusually wide range of local weddings and, almost uniquely, continued to publish such photographs regularly throughout the war.

<sup>21</sup> Advertisement for hotel ‘The Angus’, *Daily Record*, 23 September 1943.

<sup>22</sup> This is particularly significant given the evidence that in the USA white weddings were pushed by industry providers as a sign of patriotism, *Brides Inc.*, p. 95.

<sup>23</sup> ‘War Wedding Boom in Aberdeen’, *Aberdeen People’s Journal*, 2 December 1939.

society, but it also made a genuine contribution to women's pride in their war work.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, many women in uniform would have had the option of wearing a donated dress if they could not procure their own. In addition to the 'Roosevelt gown', various other donations were made to the services, and by late 1943 every RAF Command headquarters held an American dress for the use of WAAF brides.<sup>25</sup> Indeed, there is little to suggest that uniformed weddings were the result of mere practicality. In the vast majority of reports, the wedding took place in a church, and in several cases a separate reception was held at a hired venue. For one bride, a going away outfit was even described, which could just as easily have served as her wedding outfit.<sup>26</sup> Far from a concession to necessity, a uniformed wedding could be an expression of the importance of a couple's war service to their shared identity. A striking example of this was the wedding of Company Assistant Etta Forbes and Pilot Officer Walter Blench, which took place in St Ninian's Cathedral, Perth, in December 1940 (see figure 2.1). Both bride and groom were married in uniform, and the accompanying article included the following uncommon detail:

The wedding cake was decorated with designs of bomber, Hurricane, and Spitfire, and also anti-aircraft and searchlight equipment to represent the units to which the bride and bridegroom are attached.<sup>27</sup>

In this wedding, wartime conditions and the demands of ritual display were not in conflict, but seemingly in perfect harmony.

Such weddings were, however, the exception rather than the rule. These brides were most likely 'heroes' rather than 'stoics', to use Penny Summerfield's typology.<sup>28</sup> They actively embraced their military identities, and this was evident in their weddings. For most women in the services, however, the role of bride trumped that of war worker. Of those found in the BNA sample whose dress was described or shown, equal numbers were married in uniform and in 'traditional' gowns, with the remainder married in suits or less formal dresses.<sup>29</sup> This trend was even more marked in *Hawick Express* wedding photographs. Of 16 brides photographed during the war who belonged to the women's forces, only 5 were married in

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<sup>24</sup> See for example Pat Kirkham, 'Fashioning the Feminine: Dress, Appearance and Femininity in Wartime Britain', in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and British Cinema in the Second World War*, ed. by Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Martin Francis, *The Flyer: British culture and the Royal Air Force, 1939-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 91.

<sup>26</sup> E.g.: 'Military Wedding at Cupar', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 8 April 1943.

<sup>27</sup> 'Military Wedding at Perth', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 24 December 1940.

<sup>28</sup> Summerfield, *Reconstructing Women's Wartime Lives*, chapter 3.

<sup>29</sup> 18, 18, and 8 brides respectively.



Figure 2.1: A 'hero' war bride. Source: Perthshire Advertiser, 24 December 1940. ©D.C. Thomson & Co., image created courtesy of the British Library Board.

uniform, and 8 in wedding dresses.<sup>30</sup> The explanation for this lies with the ritual function of dress. Indeed, we might even think of the wedding gown as a kind of uniform in its own right. Sociologists and anthropologists have stressed its transformative function for brides, its power to remove them from everyday life, creating a bridal identity that overpowers the individual and instils a sense of transition.<sup>31</sup> This unique significance of bridalwear becomes particularly clear when we consider that the number of servicemen who did *not* marry in uniform was negligible. While male dress choice may also be attributed in part to material conditions, the fact that no donations of male wedding attire appear to have been made on any significant scale indicates the gendered nature of

ritual dress.<sup>32</sup> As Corinna Peniston-Bird noted in her study of the male body in the Second World War, while the soldier became the hegemonic image of masculinity, 'the culturally dominant point of reference for the female body remained the civilian norm'.<sup>33</sup> The embodied role of 'bride' thus outweighed military identity in a way that had no equivalent for grooms.

For the civilian population at large, there is much to suggest that the wedding dress in fact cemented its hegemonic presence during the war, at least in local reporting. Published wedding photographs were relatively rare in the 1930s, and those that were published tended to represent a relatively elite subsection of local weddings, amongst whom the wedding dress was a near-universal choice. The *Perthshire Advertiser*, with its relatively high number of written wedding reports, offers a more representative sample. Between the start of 1939 and the outbreak of war, 56.3 percent of the reports that mentioned bridal attire referred to a

<sup>30</sup> Women's military affiliations were sometimes not given in picture captions, so it is likely that these figures in fact underrepresent those servicewomen marrying in civilian attire.

<sup>31</sup> Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, pp. 66-73. See also Susanne Friese, 'The Wedding Dress', in *Through the Wardrobe*, ed. by Guy et al.

<sup>32</sup> Kirkham notes that servicemen sometimes borrowed clothes for weddings, but this was to bolster the impact of their uniformed appearance, not to emulate civilian dress. Kirkham, 'Fashioning the Feminine', in *Nationalising Femininity*, ed. by Gledhill and Swanson, p. 174.

<sup>33</sup> Corinna Peniston-Bird, 'Classifying the Body in the Second World War: British Men in and out of Uniform', *Body & Society*, 9:4 (2003), 31-48 (p. 43).

formal wedding gown; in the same period in 1945, the figure was 57.8 percent. This finding is suggestive of a sustained ‘white wedding’ culture, but ultimately it is inconclusive. The overall number of reports had fallen by the end of the war,<sup>34</sup> and it is possible that those featuring wedding dresses were more likely to continue to be reported. However, *Hawick Express* supports a more definitive interpretation. Between 1941 and 1942, in which years the same number of photographs (65) were published, the proportion featuring wedding dresses almost doubled, reaching 55.1 percent. At the end of the war, this figure was 67 percent. This evidence is, it must be stressed, partial at best. Although the *Express* published photographs of an unusually wide range of couples, even the most optimistic estimate would put the figure at just under a fifth of locally registered weddings at its peak.<sup>35</sup> In the absence of evidence to the contrary, however, it would appear that the white wedding was far from undermined by wartime conditions, and may even have grown in popularity despite material scarcity.

This continued presence of white weddings becomes even more remarkable when we consider the discursive context of wartime wedding consumption. Whatever the reality, there was a common perception that the war had all but put an end to the white wedding. Commenting on the wedding boom in September 1939, the *Perthshire Advertiser* noted that ‘white satin and orange blossom ideas have departed and a simple suit plus a spray of flowers have taken their place’.<sup>36</sup> It was a perception that filtered down to individual wedding reports as well. When the daughter of Brechin’s Town Clerk married in December 1940, her outfit was introduced in the following terms: ‘Like many other war-time brides, Miss Ferguson put aside thoughts of bridal white and chose instead a slim-fitting blue ensemble’.<sup>37</sup> There were those who noted the opposite trend, albeit not within the context of day-to-day wedding reporting. As early as December 1939, the writer of the ‘Woman’s Outlook’ column in the *Scotsman* claimed to have noticed ‘a tendency recently for brides to revert to formal white wedding gowns for the great occasion,’ using this observation to frame praise of the recent innovation of the white flannel wedding dress, promoted as a compromise between tradition and practicality.<sup>38</sup> Regardless of the empirical basis for either interpretation, both framed the war as a threat to established patterns ritual consumption. Ultimately, war was a context in which to place even greater value on such consumption, whether by finding means of

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<sup>34</sup> From 96 in 1939 to 45 in 1945.

<sup>35</sup> In 1941, 65 weddings were photographed, compared to 365 registered in the district of Roxburgh.

<sup>36</sup> ‘The First War Weddings’, *Perthshire Advertiser*, 16 September 1939.

<sup>37</sup> ‘Military Wedding in West Church’, *Brechin Advertiser*, 31 December 1940.

<sup>38</sup> ‘Woman’s Outlook’, *Scotsman*, 15 December 1939.

achieving it within conditions of scarcity, or simply by remarking on its absence. This was the discursive backdrop to change on the ground. War, as much as it created material obstacles to celebrating rites of passage, fostered a culture of normative nostalgia that valorised an established ideal of wedding consumption, all the while obscuring the fact that this had only ever been partially realised in popular practice.

### White Church Weddings and the 'Golden Age' of Marriage

The Second World War may have served as a crucible for the newly hegemonic white church wedding, but its dominance was not total by the end of the conflict. As Anne Ashley noted

#### CHURCH WEDDINGS



Figure 2.2: A typical 1950s wedding photograph. The continued - or fossilized - use of 'Church Weddings' as a heading was the only indication that their dominance was a recent phenomenon. Source: St Andrews Citizen, 2 April 1955. ©Johnston Press, image created courtesy of the British Library Board.

in 1950, assessing the state of Scots marriage law for the Edinburgh Council of Social Service, 'marriages at home, in the manse, or in some other place such as an hotel are still common.'<sup>39</sup> The respective popularity of such venues varied significantly from place to place, as it had before the war. In 1948 and 1953, around 10 per cent of weddings photographed in *Hawick Express* were manse ceremonies, the rest taking place almost exclusively in churches. This was reflected in the wedding announcements of Hawick's other local newspaper, *Hawick News*, in 1950.<sup>40</sup> In August of that year, manse weddings accounted for only 2.2 per cent of the 137 announcements placed in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, but with 3.7 percent of announcements referring to house weddings and 19 per cent to commercial venues, fully a quarter of all weddings represented were not church ceremonies. However, the break with the past was striking. In the *Fife Free Press* in 1955, church weddings made up 71.7 percent of announcements, compared to just 19.7 percent in 1933. By the end of the 1950s, the transition was complete. In August 1959, 99.6 per cent of announcements in the *Aberdeen Evening Express* were for church weddings.<sup>41</sup> The fortunes of the wedding dress

<sup>39</sup> Ashley, *The Honourable Estate*, p. 48.

<sup>40</sup> 83.9% were church weddings, 11.6% manse weddings (excluding those taking place outwith Scotland).

<sup>41</sup> All of these figures exclude weddings outwith Scotland.

followed a similar trajectory. From the end of the war to the mid-1950s, around 65 per cent of photographed Hawick brides wore white wedding dresses, and this figure rose steadily into the 1960s before remaining stable between 80 and 85 per cent from 1962.<sup>42</sup> The uniformity of the white church wedding as seen in visual representations and in more elite wedding reporting was clearly not the full story. Nonetheless, Hawick suggests that popular practice gradually conformed to this representation as time went on (see Appendix 2).

[image removed for licensing reasons]

*Figure 2.3: A 1950s civil wedding. Still from Stanley L. Russell's Wedding, National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive.*

In contrast to the increasingly ubiquitous white church wedding, civil weddings were almost never photographed or reported in the local press (even in Hawick they did not appear until the mid-1950s) and were largely absent even from wedding announcements. One exceptional piece of evidence for civil marriage in this period highlights both the muted consumption of such ceremonies and their relative invisibility. Among the wedding videos held by the National Library of Scotland's Moving Image Archive for the 1940s to 1960s, only one features a civil wedding. In contrast to the other videos, there are no lingering shots of tables laden with wedding gifts (see figure 3.5). The couple, dressed in suits, arrive at the registration office in Lilybank Gardens in Glasgow with two witnesses, and pose briefly for

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<sup>42</sup> These figures are for all brides, at a time when civil weddings were exclusively 'informal' but occasionally photographed; the percentage of church weddings featuring brides in white dresses would therefore be slightly higher.

the camera after the ceremony (figure 2.3).<sup>43</sup> The groom was Stanley L. Russell, a 45-year-old filmmaker and head of Thames and Clyde Films at the time of his marriage in 1950.<sup>44</sup> It would appear that it was this personal and professional connection to filmmaking rather than any existing visual culture of civil marriage that resulted in the film's creation. What few traces of civil marriage we find in more widespread visual sources appear to confirm the representativeness of the Russells' wedding: not devoid of elements of custom, but decidedly muted in consumption and display.<sup>45</sup>

Wedding culture after the Second World War was thus characterised by a significant and growing degree of uniformity, both in visual representations and in popular practice, albeit with two parallel varieties of conformity available to marrying couples. When we place this within the legal framework established in the previous chapter, it would appear that the abolition of ambiguity that came with the end of marriage by declaration also applied to popular practice, with wedding culture segregated into two distinct strands: religious and civil. To an extent, the internal consistency of civil wedding culture was underwritten by the law. Though Scottish couples, in contrast to those marrying in England and Wales, were free to marry in any registration office in the country, other venue types were strictly off-limits. It has been suggested that in the USSR such venue restrictions resulted in self-imposed restrictions on wedding attire.<sup>46</sup> As we shall see, dress choice was part of a more complex web of moral and social meanings, but the spare municipal setting of civil weddings no doubt contributed to their generally muted aesthetic. In the case of religious weddings however, there was no parallel legislative framework for uniformity. Although the Church of Scotland did consider refusing to conduct ceremonies outwith its own premises (see below), it was behind the curve of a popular culture already tending towards universal church weddings. If the 1939 Act abolished 'pre-modern' ambiguities surrounding legal and social status, it was matched by a parallel delineation in popular culture, enacted by ordinary men and women going about the business of getting married. Modernity was thus embodied in ritual, as much as in legislation.

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<sup>43</sup> National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive, *Stanley L. Russell's Wedding*, dir. unknown, (1950), <<https://movingimage.nls.uk/film/0768>> [accessed 7 September 2018].

<sup>44</sup> Ross Ferguson, 'Biography of 'RUSSELL, Stanley Livingstone'', National Library of Scotland Moving Image Archive <<http://movingimage.nls.uk/search?personality=10030>> [accessed 7 September 2018].

<sup>45</sup> All of the civil weddings photographed in the Hawick newspapers in sample years before 1968 featured brides in suits or simple dresses.

<sup>46</sup> Janice Mee and Irina Safronova, 'An Historic Perspective of English and Soviet Bridalwear between 1917 and 1960', in *Wedding Dress across Cultures*, ed. by Helen Bradley Foster and Donald Clay Johnson (Oxford: Berg, 2003).



The war accelerated this process, but the post-war decades suggest that subtler forces were also at work. These concerned not only the legal regularity of marriage and the homogenisation of its ritual culture, but also its demographic contexts. This was, after all, the ‘golden age’ of marriage.<sup>47</sup> It was certainly becoming a more universal experience. The 1921 and 1931 censuses both found that just under half of women aged 25 to 29 had never been married, but by 1951 this figure was under a third, and by 1961, 81 percent of women in this age group were or had previously been married. The figures for men followed a similar, if somewhat less dramatic trajectory.<sup>48</sup> From 1948, moreover, the mean age at marriage for both men and women entered a downward trend that would not be reversed until the 1970s, falling from around 29 for men and 26 for women in the late 1930s and during the war to 27.2 and 24.6 in 1960. A greater decline in the mean age at first marriage is likely underplayed in published statistics, which include remarriages as well as first marriages. If these could be removed, as is possible from the period from 1974 onwards (see chapter four), we would likely see a significantly younger profile for marriages between partners both marrying for the first time, which in the late 1950s constituted around 90 percent of all marriages annually. What all of this indicates is that marriage was placed closer in the lifecycle to other markers of adulthood, such as entering the job market and leaving the parental home.

Indeed, marriage formation was, in popular perception, synonymous with the establishment of a new household. This was a dynamic reinforced by almost every aspect of society, from the ‘breadwinner’ logic of employment law and the emergent welfare state – which defined a married couple in shared accommodation as ‘homeless’ for the purposes of social housing allocation – to the customary dominance of household items among wedding gifts.<sup>49</sup> As with wedding culture generally, the war intensified and clarified this dynamic. Reporting on a planning conference in London, the *Daily Record* gave the figure of two million UK war weddings as an indicator of the anticipated scale of post-war reconstruction. From this perspective, every war bride was a post-war housewife in waiting.<sup>50</sup> It was a discursive

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<sup>47</sup> See Pat Thane, ‘Family Life and “Normality” in Postwar British Culture’, in *Life After Death: Approaches to a Cultural and Social History of Europe During the 1940s and 1950s*, ed. by Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>48</sup> Michael Anderson, *Scotland’s Populations from the 1850s to Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 207.

<sup>49</sup> See: Helen Glew, ‘Regulating Marriage: Gender, the Public Service, the Second World War, and Reconstruction in Britain and Canada’, in *Gender and the Second World War*, ed. by Peniston-Bird and Vickers; *Allocating Council Houses: Report of the Sub-Committee on Allocation of Council Tenancies* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1967), p. 18; Louise Purbrick, ‘No Frills’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Family Towns Wanted’, *Daily Record*, 5 July 1943.

connection that took on material form in the guise of ‘utility’ furniture. ‘Newly married’ was a category of eligibility for the scheme, and in March 1944 the Board of Trade announced that it would be expanded to include all those who had married on or after the first of September 1939.<sup>51</sup>

For the generation coming of age during and after the Second World War, then, marriage was an increasingly predictable – rather than simply normative or desirable – part of the lifecycle; almost a constitutive element of adulthood itself. Even more than the couples marrying amid the anxious traditionalism of wartime, it was these young Scots who married into modernity, entering an increasingly standardised model of adulthood via rituals streamlined according to administrative categories underwritten by Church and state.

### Negotiating the Religious/Civil Divide

As we have seen above, the polarisation of religious and civil marriage was to a significant extent a matter of consumption. Just as the introduction of civil marriage was a welfarist measure rather than a concession to secularisation, it is not entirely clear that the cultural divide between the different kinds of wedding was entirely a matter of religious belief. The categories of religious and civil marriage, though representing meaningful differences to contemporaries, cannot be contained solely within a narrative of secularisation. The cultural and social history they illuminate here captures something broader and harder to pin down than institutional religion. In this period the visual culture of marriage was dominated by the white church aesthetic, and civil marriage remained defined by its marginality to this culture. Nonetheless, as we shall see, the meanings of marriage ritual were never as rigorously divided as they appeared at first glance.

In the press, the difference between religious and civil marriage in the 1950s – insofar as it featured – was framed as one of consumption. Advertisers wrote of different outfit choices for ‘formal or informal’ weddings,<sup>52</sup> but the extent to which this distinction mapped onto different legal categories of ceremony varied over time. By the late 1950s, religious marriage was closely associated with formality: that is, greater consumption. The chronology and extent of this transformation in religious wedding culture owes much to the extension of wartime privations into the late 1940s and beyond. Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska has written

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<sup>51</sup> ‘Utility Furniture for All “War-Weds”’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 15 March 1944.

<sup>52</sup> E.g., advertisement for ‘Miss Peebles’, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 15 February 1954. See also Louise Purbrick, *The Wedding Present: Domestic Life Beyond Consumption* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), p. 24.

of the political significance, particularly for women, of restricted consumption in the first decade after the war.<sup>53</sup> In wedding culture, the same circumstances contributed to a discursively reinforced notion of doing things ‘properly’ and, in the late 1940s, the continuation of rationing framed an intensified desire for a lavish white wedding. As one local newspaper noted in 1948, ‘In spite of ever-present austerity, brides-to-be are more than ever determined to have white weddings.’<sup>54</sup> Compounding this desire was the wartime dynamic whereby present crisis created a rose-tinted view of pre-war reality, still in evidence when the future Elizabeth II married in 1947. The *Dundee Evening Telegraph* had the following to say on the occasion:

The material difficulties of the time will not trouble the Princely pair who to-day plight their troth to each other. Yet they, too, take their chances with the uncertain time. Their wedding is a testimony of their faith in the future of Britain. Besides, it helps to take our thoughts off our present austerities; to recall more gracious days and ampler times as we remember past Royal weddings and the long history which they illustrate.<sup>55</sup>

This vicarious enjoyment of a lavish wedding owed much to a culture of deference that had survived the so-called ‘People’s War’. However, the same morale-boosting role was attributed to weddings across social classes. As an *Arbroath Herald* columnist remarked in 1948, ‘Getting married is certainly one way of distracting attention from the reality of life in this brave post-war world in which we are living’.<sup>56</sup> Once again, there is the implication here that marriage symbolised connection to a happier pre-war time, despite the fact that people in Scotland were marrying in numbers and with levels of ceremonial elaboration that were uncommon before the 1940s.

The effect of this intense valorisation of lavish weddings was not, however, to denigrate simple ceremonies, but rather to provide a context in which minimal consumption could take place without implying any kind of ‘moral’ transgression. Civil weddings were included in this amnesty. In a 1949 feature in the *Fifeshire Advertiser*, the writer remarked that ‘It is a sad commentary on our present “hard times,” that because many brides cannot afford an elaborate “white” wedding, hats are being specially designed for Registry office weddings!’<sup>57</sup> Civil ceremonies were thus framed as an unfortunate compromise necessitated by economic circumstance, but nonetheless part of an acceptable wedding culture. Indeed,

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<sup>53</sup> Ina Zweiniger-Bargielowska, *Austerity in Britain: Rationing, Controls and Consumption, 1939-1955* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>54</sup> ‘June Weddings’, *Bo’ness Journal and Linlithgow Advertiser*, 28 May 1948.

<sup>55</sup> ‘Current Events’, *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 20 November 1947.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Someone Told Me’, *Arbroath Herald*, 2 April 1948.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Woman’s Review’, *Fifeshire Advertiser*, 2 July 1949.

the customary press silence with regard to registration office ceremonies was broken in the late 1940s to report the remarks of A. W. Brewer, president of the National Association of Registration Officers in England and Wales, regarding his desire to make the offices more attractive for their purpose.<sup>58</sup> However, a letter written to the *Northern Echo* and reprinted in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* argued that less emphasis should be put on the aesthetics of civil marriage and more on the solemnity of the ceremony, suggesting a didactic and moralising attitude towards such weddings among at least some sections of the public.<sup>59</sup> Any question of beautifying registration office facilities quickly receded and would not resurface until the 1970s (see chapter five). Austerity had afforded civil ceremonies a place in mainstream wedding culture that all but disappeared with the rise of consumer spending from the early 1950s.

While this relative visibility for civil weddings was short-lived, it indicated the importance of display in determining the meanings of different kinds of ceremony. The relative marginality of religion in this dynamic is suggested by a connection drawn by one Mrs Cowe, born in 1909, between pre- and post-war weddings:

I mean it was just like getting married in the church, it was the Minister that married us, but we got married in the manse. See long ago people got married in the manse. I don't think there were any registrar houses, like what we have now in Ferry Road [Leith].<sup>60</sup>

Interviewed at the end of the twentieth century, Mrs Cowe evidently saw a direct equivalence between religious marriage in the manse and civil marriage before the registrar, even though she recognised that the presence of a minister in the former connected it to church weddings. Just as advertisers spoke of the relative 'formality' of weddings, the religious/civil divide was less salient in Mrs Cowe's recollection, as influenced by the post-1939 legal framework, than the level of consumption and display connected to different ceremonies. It would seem, then, that the long-term impact on popular practice of the 1939 Act was not only to clarify the line between religious and non-religious marriage, but also to align these divisions to distinctive regimes of consumption. Some couples who in the 1930s might have married 'quietly' in the manse joined those who would have opted for irregular marriage in choosing civil ceremonies after the war. This division was still growing in the decade after the war ended, delayed by a consumer culture defined by rationing, but from around the mid-1950s it was solidly in place, and would remain so for some time.

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<sup>58</sup> 'Brightening Up Registrar Weddings', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 11 April 1949.

<sup>59</sup> 'More Meaning', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 14 April 1949.

<sup>60</sup> Helen Clark and Elizabeth Carnegie, *'She Was Aye Workin': Memories of Tenement Women in Edinburgh and Glasgow* (Oxford: White Cockade Publishing, 2003), p. 7.

This is not to say that consumption was not stratified within these parallel ritual cultures. Commenting on the dominance of the church wedding, Reverend Taylor noted that even couples seeking a quiet religious wedding married in church, though sometimes opting for the vestry as a more minimalist option.<sup>61</sup> The categories of formal/lavish and informal/quiet did not map directly onto the religious/civil divide, but rather interacted with it. The basis for that interaction was a complex regime of moralised conventions around consumption, with religion playing a role that had as much to do with respectability as with faith: a question of orthopraxy as well as orthodoxy. Diane Leonard encountered this in her study of weddings in Swansea in 1968. There the white church wedding was associated with norms of bridal virginity, parental approval, non-cohabitation, and first marriage. Couples who were perceived to transgress these norms were excluded from such ceremonies, if not by law or by church policy then by social convention.<sup>62</sup> In Scotland, there was evidently some flexibility in the enforcement of these criteria. For example, pregnancy did not always mean total exclusion from religious marriage. One survey respondent, married while pregnant at the age of 17 in 1959, had a church wedding and, in response to the question ‘What did you wear for the wedding ceremony, and why?’ wrote ‘a suit and hat [because] I was pregnant.’<sup>63</sup> In this case, pregnancy meant compromise with regard to the wedding aesthetic, but not the kind of ceremony undertaken.

The corollary of this flexibility was that a church wedding was not in itself sufficient to shield women from the connotations of reduced consumption. When her father died during the planning of what was to be a ‘big’ wedding in the summer of 1963, my grandmother decided instead to marry quietly and, as she told a colleague, ‘as soon as possible’. The colleague’s reaction to this new timescale was to assume that she was pregnant, an assumption that followed her through other stages of wedding planning. This was revealed when I asked her what she wore for the ceremony:

Oddly enough, I wore a wedding dress. Ehm, and again, my bridesmaid, who came with me to buy the dress, said, ‘I would have thought under the circumstances, Iris, you would have got married in a suit.’ And the lady who was serving me all of a sudden, you know, wanted to put the, wanted to put the dress back on the wall. You know. And I felt so embarrassed.<sup>64</sup>

The norms of wedding consumption thus presented couples – and primarily women – with a complex set of imperatives to be navigated under the watchful eye of family, colleagues,

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<sup>61</sup> Taylor, ‘Church weddings’.

<sup>62</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, chapter 5.

<sup>63</sup> Survey response (female clerk aged 17 at time of wedding in 1959).

<sup>64</sup> Iris McLean, interview with author, residence, Westhill, 30 March 2018.

and the ‘ritual experts’ of the wedding industry.<sup>65</sup> It was not simply a question of aiming for a ‘proper’ white wedding, but of balancing that ideal with deeply engrained sumptuary codes.

Another criterion often attached to a white church wedding was that it should be the first marriage for both parties.<sup>66</sup> As noted in chapter one, rates of civil marriage in the immediate post-war years correlated to the number of widow(er)s or divorcees marrying in a given year. It is important, nonetheless, not to equate civil marriage with remarriage. When we compare the rate of bachelor/spinster marriage to that for religious marriage, we see that it is numerically impossible for all such marriages to have been religiously solemnised. While post-war austerity may explain a certain portion of bachelor/spinster civil weddings, harder to gauge are the motivations of those couples who opted for civil marriage in the 1950s, when numbers were still small and the material trappings of religious marriage more homogenised. In the absence of greater visual evidence, we may turn to published statistics.

By the late 1940s, around 17 to 18 percent of weddings in Scotland each year were civil ceremonies, and this figure would remain stable throughout the 1950s (see Appendix 1). From this perspective, the wartime rate, lower than the late-1930s irregular rate, was artificially suppressed by the incentives towards religious marriage discussed in chapter one. The period discussed here thus represents what appears to be a fairly stable and established peacetime culture of civil marriage. As we have seen, civil marriage did not entail the same flight to the cities as had been the case with irregular marriage. Though published statistics do not allow us to trace the relationship between couples’ place of residence and place of marriage, the geographical spread of civil marriage would suggest that many of those marrying in this way did so in their local registration office. Indeed, the distribution of civil marriage continued to move away from the cities in the post-war decades. In 1947, 63.4 percent of civil weddings took place in the four cities; in 1957 the figure was 61.1, falling to 53.8 in 1967.<sup>67</sup> Some of this trend is explained by an inflated share of civil weddings for the counties. This was caused by what appears to have been a surge in such weddings at Gretna, beginning around 1954 and ending with the lowering of the age of majority in England and

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<sup>65</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 34.

<sup>66</sup> Howard argues that the US wedding industry ‘established and upheld lifelong marriage as a cultural ideal’ into the 1970s because the ‘first marriage’ market was more profitable. *Brides, Inc.*, pp. 88-89.

<sup>67</sup> The category used in GROS publications changed from ‘Cities’ to ‘Counties of Cities’ from 1949, but the boundaries appear to have remained roughly the same.

Wales in 1969.<sup>68</sup> Nonetheless, the overall trend suggests that civil marriage was an accepted – if marginal – part of local wedding cultures. Survey responses give a similar impression. Of weddings referred to in the survey that took place before 1979, almost exactly the same proportion of civil and religious ceremonies were celebrated in the respondent’s place of residence (80.6 and 79.2 percent respectively).<sup>69</sup> However, of those who were able to say whether or not their wedding photograph was featured in a local newspaper, 80.6 percent (29) of respondents married in civil ceremonies answered ‘no’, compared to just 34.9 percent (52) of those married religiously. Civil weddings were thus an increasingly local phenomenon, but they occupied a different and much less visible space in local wedding culture than their religious equivalents.

This culture was not without its variations, and a brief examination of these further illuminates the place of civil marriage within it. Port Glasgow was consistently the large burgh with the lowest rate of civil marriage in the period discussed here, and there are three local factors likely to contribute to this situation. First, the proportion of local marriages that were first marriages for both parties was consistently extremely high. Second, and not entirely unrelated, the burgh had a relatively large Catholic population, Catholic weddings being only slightly less prevalent than Church of Scotland ones. Finally, with a population of around 20,000, Port Glasgow was a relatively small town surrounded by larger urban areas; neighbouring Greenock was almost twice the size, with Paisley and Glasgow only a short train journey away in the opposite direction. The presence of a large Catholic population proves a reliable indicator of low uptake of civil marriage in the 1950s. Indeed, Glasgow was consistently the city with the lowest civil rate at this time. The reasons for this lie partly in the status of marriage as a sacrament in Catholicism and the greater doctrinal importance therefore attributed to ceremony in Catholic marriage formation. Moreover, the

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<sup>68</sup> Published statistics do not allow Gretna Green weddings to be isolated for analysis. However, the civil marriage rate for Dumfriesshire rose dramatically between the early 1950s and late 1960s (from 10% in 1953 to 49.9% in 1969, having peaked at 62.7% in 1966) and both the number of marriages registered and the civil rate dropped off between 1969 and 1970 (from 802 to 489 marriages, with only 32.1% of the latter representing civil ceremonies). The average age at marriage in the county was also significantly lower than the national average, at 25.4 for men and 22.3 for women in 1960 (compared to 27.2 and 24.6 nationally). In that year, 51% of marriages registered in Dumfriesshire took place in landward areas of the county (the local government category which included Gretna Green) compared to 37.4% in 1950 and 34% in 1970. All of this suggests, albeit indirectly, that a significant number of ‘runaway marriages’ involving couples under the age of 21 from England and Wales were taking place at Gretna in the 1950s and 60s. It is likely that this phenomenon skews national statistics to a small degree, but the numbers involved are miniscule in comparison with the later scale of wedding tourism discussed in Section 2. It is worth noting, however, that ‘runaway marriage’ was still viewed as a live legal issue in the 1950s: see A.E. Anton and P. Francescakis, ‘Modern Scots “Runaway Marriages”’, *The Juridical Review* (1958), 253-85.

<sup>69</sup> Due to the relative lack of responses for the 1950s and 1960s, 1978 is taken as a cut-off for the early period of survey weddings, chosen to coincide with the implementation of the 1977 Act. This is not an ideal periodisation, but it is broadly indicative of mid-twentieth century practice.

character of Catholicism as an often embattled minority identity in Protestant Scotland may have promoted greater observance of religious rites of passage as a channel for community cohesion.<sup>70</sup>

Less straightforward to explain, however, are the areas where civil marriage was disproportionately popular. Uptake was extremely uneven on a local level, and several large burghs saw sharp peaks and troughs in their civil marriage rate. Of those that had consistently high civil marriage rates, some, such as Perth and Inverness, appear to have been the focus of a degree of flight from the surrounding counties. Others, such as Dunfermline, present a more ambiguous dynamic. In contrast to Port Glasgow, Catholic marriages never accounted for more than 10 percent of the local total, and there was a greater rate of remarriage. However, the civil rate was not entirely accounted for by remarriage. In the peak year of 1955, 40 percent of all weddings in Dunfermline were civil, but fewer than 20 percent were remarriages for either one or both parties. Clearly factors other than religious and social attitudes to remarriage were significant. Indeed, there may have been an element of local culture at work, as seems to have been the case in pre-war Dundee:<sup>71</sup> Kirkcaldy, the only other large burgh in Fife, also showed a consistently high rate of civil marriage, and the figure for the county was not low enough to suggest significant traffic to the towns from the surrounding areas for the purpose of getting married.<sup>72</sup> What these brief local insights suggest is that geography continued to play a significant role in wedding culture. Although the introduction of civil marriage had redistributed non-religious marriage away from the cities, the extent to which civil weddings could become part of the accepted wedding culture was dependent on local factors. The importance of Catholic populations as an indicator of low civil marriage rates suggests that a stricter local emphasis on religious marriage could polarise couples' choices, leading to greater retention by religious communities when it came to members' marriages, but also greater pressure to elope among those who were not so retained.

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<sup>70</sup> Indeed, religious affiliation among Scottish Catholics has historically been more stable than among Protestants. See Ben Clements, 'Religious Change and Secularisation in Scotland: An Analysis of Affiliation and Attendance', *Scottish Affairs* 26.2 (2017), 133-162 (pp. 137-141).

<sup>71</sup> See chapter 1. Interestingly, Dundee's rate of civil marriage was *not* unusually high for a city after the war.

<sup>72</sup> In 1955, 12.6% of weddings in Fife (excluding Dunfermline and Kirkcaldy) were civil, compared to an average for all counties (excluding large burghs) of 9.9%. In the same year, Dunfermline's civil rate was 40.5% and Kirkcaldy's 30.5%, compared to an average for all large burghs of 20.3%. Fife had the highest number of burghs of any county, with 23 small burghs alongside the large burghs of Kirkcaldy and Dunfermline. Under the terms of the 1939 Act, this may have resulted in an unusually high concentration of registrars authorised to perform civil weddings per head of population. By way of comparison, the next highest number was in Ayrshire, with 16 burghs in total.



Among Protestants, pressure from religious institutions was perhaps less intense, but it nonetheless shaped mainstream wedding culture. The most direct means by which the Church of Scotland sought to assert itself in matters of marriage ritual concerned the peculiar liberality of wedding venue regulation in Scots law. Writing in 1949, Ashley noted that ‘the development of thought and practice in the Church of Scotland at the present time is in the direction of the restoration of the old rule that marriage should be solemnized in Church, unless the circumstances are exceptional.’<sup>73</sup> This was a curious development. As we saw in the previous chapter, the Church of Scotland certainly *preferred* couples to marry in church, but there was no question in any edition of Sym’s manual that this was a matter of Church law. Nonetheless, the General Assembly proposed in 1949 that the ‘old rule’ be enforced. However, as was noted during Kirkcaldy Presbytery’s discussion of the proposal, ‘they did not know anything about this law and no one seemed to know where the law could be found.’<sup>74</sup> Ultimately, many presbyteries were satisfied that the popular tendency was towards marriage in church and that there was therefore no reason to enforce the practice, whatever its basis – or lack thereof – in law.<sup>75</sup>

This was a fairly minor episode in the history of the Church of Scotland, but it provides insight into a significant moment in the development of a wedding culture that was still overwhelmingly religious in character. The question of venue was clearly laden with significance for many within the Church. While some professed understanding for those who wished to avoid the expense of a church wedding,<sup>76</sup> there was also a preoccupation with morality in attempts to contain weddings within church buildings. In Lorn Presbytery it was argued that ‘ministers should get away from the bad practice of performing marriage ceremonies in hotel lounges and similar places in order to impress on the parties the sanctity of the marriage vows.’<sup>77</sup> In the Presbytery of Linlithgow and Falkirk it was similarly pointed out that the question of venue related to another discussion point arising from the General Assembly report, namely: ‘The means whereby the Church’s members might be better instructed in the nature and duties of Christian marriage.’<sup>78</sup> From this perspective, church

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<sup>73</sup> Ashley, *The Honourable Estate*, p. 33.

<sup>74</sup> ‘Re-Marriage of Divorced Persons’, *Fifeshire Advertiser*, 10 December 1949.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*; ‘Church News’, *Scotsman*, 10 November 1949; ‘Presbytery Discuss Attitude to Divorce’, *St. Andrew’s Citizen*, 17 December 1949.

<sup>76</sup> Such costs were not necessarily high, but: ‘In some instances, it was said, the bride was expected to contribute to church funds as well as to pay for the hire of the church hall for reception.’ See ‘Counting Costs’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 12 November 1949.

<sup>77</sup> ‘Church News’, *Scotsman*, 10 November 1949.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Re-Marriage of Divorced Persons’, *Fifeshire Advertiser*, 10 December 1949.

weddings were seen as an opportunity for the Church to play a greater role in guiding couples embarking on marriage.

While the Church's stance on venues was less prescriptive in practice than the General Assembly report might have anticipated, the debate on church weddings marked a new chapter in the relationship between the Church of Scotland and the Scottish people. Having proven itself as a 'territorial' church during the Second World War, the Church was in a strong position in the 1950s, characterised by an increased membership and active participation in post-war reconstruction in the form of the Church extension scheme.<sup>79</sup> This renewed 'national' status was evidently a source of confidence for the Church, but it also led to certain tensions. At the closing session of the General Assembly of 1952, the Moderator advanced the notion that the post-war Scottish parishioner was simply a 'good customer to his church'. Drawing on contemporary images of a bureaucratised and alienated mass culture,<sup>80</sup> he claimed that 'People are 'registered' at their church for baptisms, weddings and funerals just as the citizen is registered for tea and bacon.'<sup>81</sup> Later that year, another minister wrote in the *Aberdeen Evening Express* that 'Ministers have become tradesmen in white weddings rather than proclaimers and instructors of the distinctive Christian view of marriage.'<sup>82</sup> At the following year's General Assembly, a minister from Inverness claimed that 'Taking the figures for weddings, baptisms, and funerals together [...] 78 per cent of my pastoral duties in 1952 were done for parishioners, neither members nor adherents of the church.'<sup>83</sup> In the years that followed, occasional reports of low-level disagreements between couples and ministers hinted at the church wedding as a site of conflict in the religious lives of communities. Clergy complaints about alcohol consumption at weddings were perhaps not new,<sup>84</sup> but in the late 1950s and 1960s they were accompanied by grumbles over the punctuality of brides and the fact that parishioners marrying in church were often 'unknown' to the minister and his wife.<sup>85</sup> In 1958, one minister was forced to deny claims that he had banned the use of confetti at the weddings he conducted, clearly demonstrating the potential for the Church to appear inimical to the very popular rituals it was supposed to provide.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> E. W. McFarland, 'Building the Promised Land: The Church of Scotland's Church Extension Movement, 1944–61', *Twentieth Century British History*, 23:2 (2012), 192–220.

<sup>80</sup> On the cultural politics behind this kind of allusion, see Joe Moran, 'Queuing Up in Post-War Britain', *Twentieth Century British History*, 16:3 (2005), 283–305.

<sup>81</sup> 'Good Customer to His Church', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 29 May 1952.

<sup>82</sup> 'Marriage – As I See it', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 17 September 1952.

<sup>83</sup> 'Minister's Figures Startle Assembly', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 28 May 1953.

<sup>84</sup> "'Cut Drink from Wedding Receptions'", *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 7 May 1958.

<sup>85</sup> "'Get Me to the Church on Time', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 2 October 1968; 'It's the Minister Who is Marrying in Haste!', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 25 March 1965.

<sup>86</sup> 'Confetti Ban is Denied', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 9 October 1958.

These were not, however, the tensions of an institution facing a serious threat to its dominance. The Church of Scotland was entrusted with performing the majority of weddings, but wedding culture was determined by forces larger than any individual religious institution, even if it was one with some claim to national status. The allusion to rationing in the mention of ‘tea and bacon’, is particularly revealing, invoking as it does a particularly tangible form of state intervention to complain of an apparent sense of entitlement among parishioners. The Church had worked its way into the new era of welfarist modernity, and these complaints reveal the discomfort of civic function enacted through spiritual institution: orthodoxy bristling at its inclusion in orthopraxy. These tensions would be productive of cultural change in the later twentieth century, as we shall see in section two. In the immediate post-war decades, however, they were relatively superficial. For the time being, something like equilibrium reigned in the ‘golden age’ of marriage.

## Conclusion

In chapter one, it was argued that legal modernity in marriage formation was a matter of strict categorisation and the abolition of ambiguity, with the 1939 Act making clearer than ever before what did and what did not constitute marriage. What this chapter has shown is that the popular ritual culture of marriage tended towards a similar manifestation of modernity. With the rise of the white church wedding, the marriage ceremony was distinguished more than ever before – and for an increasingly wide range of Scots – from everyday life, the distinction manifested in the fact that it was increasingly rare to see a bride simply dressed in her best clothes. Civil marriage was the exception. However, here too weddings reflected the new certainties of the law, separated from everyday life not by consumption but by their confinement to the registrar’s office. Remarkably, religious weddings underwent a parallel process of spatial specialisation, restricting themselves – apparently by popular consent – to the church, even before ecclesiastical authorities considered making this trend compulsory. The law did not create this practice. However, its categories did provide a new set of poles around which popular practice could coalesce. The range of weddings – from ‘lavish’ to ‘quiet’, ‘formal’ to ‘informal’ – that had been contained within the multitude of venues and ceremonies available in the 1930s was redistributed accordingly. The same concerns that had motivated couples in earlier decades – familial approval; financial constraints; the desire for publicity or anonymity – were still relevant, but the categories of religious and civil overlaid them with new significance; a newly inflected set of social norms and cultural meanings to be navigated. Marrying couples and

their wider networks brought an established ritual ideal to bear on this new legal regime, in a context of increased affluence and renewed structural incentives to marry.

Such was the basis of wedding culture in the ‘golden age’ of marriage. It has been suggested that the surface conformity of culture in the 1950s concealed deep contradictions and discontents.<sup>87</sup> However, the above shows that there is also a case to be made for post-war culture as a reflection of, rather than compensation for, what was going on beneath the surface. During the Second World War and in the decades that followed, weddings were ubiquitous and divorce uncommon. Marriage was therefore a highly visible and largely unquestioned facet of the lifecycle. While for some this context would undoubtedly have been suffocating, for many it represented a stability unknown to previous generations, especially in the context of a social housing boom that took for granted the centrality of married couple to the archetypal family in need of accommodation.<sup>88</sup> In this context, the ubiquity and homogeneity of wedding culture during and after the Second World War seems less a question of some puritanical ‘return to normality’, than the confluence of mass culture and state intervention; in a word, modernity. There was undoubtedly a moralising component to this, not least because the Church of Scotland, with its ‘territorial’ remit, had secured a prominent place for itself in the post-war order. But if there were tensions at the heart of 1950s culture, they were to lie dormant until the structures holding them together began slowly to unravel in the 1960s. As we shall see in chapters five and six, that unravelling had profound implications for the evolution of wedding culture, but the genuinely hegemonic character of the culture that preceded it should be taken seriously. As the next chapter shows, it had implications for more people than the just marrying couples at its core.

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<sup>87</sup> Thane, ‘Family Life and “Normality” in Postwar British Culture’ in *Life After Death*, ed. by Bessel and Schumann; see also Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era* (New York: Basic Books, 2008).

<sup>88</sup> Michael Anderson suggests that the particularly strong social housing provision in Scotland helped to equalise nuptiality rates (which had previously been lower in Scotland) with those in England and Wales. Anderson, *Scotland’s Populations*, pp. 429-30.

## Chapter 3: We Are Gathered Here Today: Weddings and Community in 20<sup>th</sup> Century Scotland

### Introduction

Despite the inclement weather, a large congregation of the general public witnessed the wedding in Auchtergaven Parish Church on Saturday afternoon between Miss Etta P. Watson, eldest daughter of Mrs Frank Coghlan, Rose Cottage, Bankfoot, and Mr Robert Allan, Dunfermline, son of the late Mr Allan, Meadowbank, Bankfoot, and of Mrs Allan, Branscroft, Dunfermline. [...] Nine years a member of Auchtergaven Church choir, the bride was made the recipient of an inscribed timepiece from her fellow-members. From the bridegroom she received a handsome trinket set of silver and crystal decorated in petit point, while his gift to the bridesmaid was a gold wristlet watch suitably inscribed and to the child attendants, pearl necklaces. To the 'groom and the best man the bride gave gloves.<sup>1</sup>

*Perthshire Advertiser*, June 1938

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The spate of Balallan weddings continues and on Tuesday, 22nd August, Annie S. Macleod, elder daughter of Mr and Mrs Roderick Macleod, 50 Balallan, was married to Robert John Nicolson, only son of the late Mr Alexander and Mrs Nicolson, 18 Bonawe Street, Glasgow. [...] Rev. Murdo Macleod, who presided, proposed the toast of the "Bride and Groom" and the groom aptly replied. [...] Dr Macdonald spoke briefly of the many fine qualities of that fine old man, Mr John Macleod, the bride's grandfather, who is 95 years of age. Mr George Murray, Depute Postmaster, paid tribute to the bride's good work in the Post Office, work always done with charm and efficiency. Mrs Macdonald appropriately sang "Thug mi mo làmh do'n eileanach." ["I gave my hand to the islander"] Over 100 telegrams from a' the airts were read by Rev. Murdo Macleod, who, throughout, enlivened the proceedings with witticisms and anecdotes. [...] The young couple left that night for the south. The first part of their journey was in one of MacBrayne's trucks propelled by the many well-wishers who were seeing them off.<sup>2</sup>

*Stornoway Gazette*, September 1950

The above extracts are taken from wedding reports published in local newspapers in the middle decades of the twentieth century. In both cases, a wealth of detail is presented, not only concerning the couple themselves, but the many kinfolk and members of the wider community who had a stake in the wedding. This is not the thick description of the anthropologist, but rather a kind of indigenous equivalent; a near exhaustive and deeply socially embedded account of the rituals surrounding marriage. Such reports give a glimpse of the vast quantities of ink that was spilled meticulously reporting the weddings of

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<sup>1</sup> 'June Weddings in City and County', *Perthshire Advertiser*, 8 June 1938.

<sup>2</sup> 'Balallan', *Stornoway Gazette and West Coast Advertiser*, 1 September 1950.

‘ordinary’ people to an audience comprised of neighbours and strangers, readers who were expected to have at least a passing interest in these rituals – to which they likely had not been invited – merely through the accident of shared geography.

The publication of such reports points to an unstable binary that runs through the history of marriage formation presented in this study, namely that of the ‘public’ versus the ‘private’. In previous chapters we have seen how public concerns – law, civil registration, the welfare state – have shaped and responded to private lives, relationships, and rituals. If this treatment establishes a dichotomy it is to some extent a false one. Throughout the twentieth century, and arguably beyond, weddings have not, for the most part, been a strictly private matter concerning only the individual parties to a marriage. This chapter addresses the public *within* wedding culture itself, examining the social structures that framed this ‘publicity’ and which have given way to a gradual shift in favour of more exclusively private ritual over the past forty years or so. In doing this, it also explores a key source for the study as a whole: local newspapers. These are revealed to be not simply a rich source of information about wedding culture, but a constitutive element of it; a crucial component of social infrastructure that facilitated and perpetuated the public nature of weddings. As we shall see, the ‘privatisation’ of ritual has occurred in tandem with the decline of that infrastructure, pointing to a material basis for contemporary ritual culture that is easily overlooked in postmodern narratives of individualism and consumer identity. To be sure, weddings are still conspicuous and outward-facing, but the public that consumes these rituals is no longer defined by the same structures of community that were once the very stuff of wedding culture.

### Community Lived and Imagined

The concept of community is crucial to the discussion in this chapter. It is a hotly contested term. Indeed, summarising its fraught relationship with historiography and the social sciences would constitute a thesis in itself. It will be helpful nonetheless to highlight a key dichotomy in definitions of community, namely that between simple physical proximity and more elective affinities as the basis for solidarity and social life. These are often posited as mutually exclusive bases of community, the former belonging to a lost age, the latter defining contemporary life.<sup>3</sup> Jon Lawrence’s recent study, *Me Me Me?: The Search for Community in Post-war England*, offers a vital corrective to this simplistic account, showing that even in ‘traditional’ working-class communities a strong desire for privacy and for

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<sup>3</sup> For a discussion of these models in historical perspective, see Snell, *Parish and Belonging*, chapter 1.

limiting intimate contact to a select group underlay an apparently indiscriminate place-based system of conviviality and mutual aid. Most importantly, Lawrence points to the material basis for changes in community life, arguing that public investment is required to bolster social ties. The facilitation of elective communities by technological advances and the loosening of social conventions is not, from this perspective, an unambiguous gain, but part of a wider shift from social democracy to neoliberalism, which cannot in that context be trusted to strengthen community *per se*. Lawrence also highlights the importance of imagined community, and the impossibility of treating this in isolation from lived community, or vice versa. Nonetheless, Lawrence's explicit focus on face-to-face contact between neighbours and workmates means that the imagination of community in this formulation rests solely on individual experience and recollection.<sup>4</sup>

This is, I believe, a missed opportunity. In Benedict Anderson's use of the term, 'imagined communities' had a distinct material basis in print capitalism. The structural investment Lawrence recommends, though undoubtedly crucial, neglects these less tangible sites of community both lived and imagined. Anderson's focus was of course the emergence of imagined *national* communities as political agents and arenas, but the same paradigm may also be applied to sub-national units, especially when we consider the essentially regional structures of much of the press well into the twentieth century.<sup>5</sup> In her study of working class neighbourhoods, German social historian Adelheid von Saldern seems to offer an even smaller-scale application of this paradigm, with the concept of *Quartiersöffentlichkeit*, the neighbourhood public sphere.<sup>6</sup> However, here too it is face-to-face contact that is foregrounded, and placed implicitly in contrast to the print culture of the classic Habermasian bourgeois public sphere. What is presented is the embodied public sphere of everyday social contact. The exploration of space and the material conditions of sociability produced by such a study is undoubtedly vital, but it also risks establishing a dichotomy between textually imagined bourgeois community and 'real' lived working-class community. Both Lawrence and von Saldern nonetheless recognise that there is an element of imagination in community even at the most local level. It is my contention that this

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<sup>4</sup> Jon Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?: The Search for Community in Post-war England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> Adrian Bingham, *Family Newspapers?: Sex, Private Life, and the British Popular Press 1918-1978* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 16; Andrew Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town: The Provincial Press in England, 1855-1900* (Cambridge: Open Book Publishers, 2018), p. 4.

<sup>6</sup> Adelheid von Saldern, *Häuserleben: zur Geschichte städtischen Arbeiterwohnens vom Kaiserreich bis heute* (Bonn: Dietz, 1995), p. 27. 'Neighbourhood public sphere' is the translation given in Corey Ross, 'Mass Culture and Divided Audiences: Cinema and Social Change in Inter-War Germany', *Past & Present*, 193 (2006), 157-195 (p. 191).

imagination does not operate outwith the paradigm of print capitalism identified by Anderson; that wedding reports like those above played a role in populating local readers' minds with fellow members of a shared locality. This is where my definition of community is necessarily more expansive than Lawrence's and that of the scholars and commentators to whom he responds. If all communities are to some extent imagined, it follows that even at the level of neighbourhood there are aspects of community that have nothing to do with face-to-face contact. Indeed, Julia Guarneri and Andrew Hobbs have both applied similar models to Anderson's to argue for the role of the press in imagining community on a much smaller scale than the national.<sup>7</sup> This chapter casts weddings and their reporting as crucial and ubiquitous elements of the local public sphere, with the local press forming part of the infrastructure of community. As infrastructure, the press was perhaps less tangible than the 'amenities and public spaces' that Lawrence calls for,<sup>8</sup> or the other material conditions of work and housing that defined the period, but it was no less important than these.

The physical infrastructure of community life, that which facilitated face-to-face contact, should not, of course, be neglected. The relationship of weddings to physical public space was another crucial element in their construction of and relationship to community. This chapter explores the spatial practices that troubled the public/private binary, taking couples and their communities out into the streets and inviting audiences of (relative) strangers into specialised ritual spaces and private homes.<sup>9</sup> The role of close kin in wedding culture informs the discussion in chapter five. The concern of this chapter is at the margins of these relationships; the dynamics by which weddings perpetuated connections with people who might have only the most superficial contact – or indeed, none at all – with the marrying couple. Accordingly, this chapter also addresses the local cultures of civic and corporate identity that suffused mid-century weddings and incorporated individual marriages into an everyday project of placemaking. Phenomena such as guards of honour and ludic pre-wedding rituals emerge as practices through which community was more or less consciously enacted in occupations of public or otherwise specialised space and in articulations of local group identities. The aim here is to show that, whatever the surface continuities today of the wedding culture that took root after the Second World War, the local structures of

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<sup>7</sup> Julia Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern Americans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2017); Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town*, p. 14; 29.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 236.

<sup>9</sup> It should be noted that there has been a growing scholarly scepticism about the rigidity of the spatial division between public and private, particularly on the part of feminist scholars. See Beat Kümin and Cornelia Osborne, 'At Home and in the Workplace: A Historical Introduction to the "Spatial Turn"', *History and Theory*, 52 (2013), 305-318.



community and kinship into which it was woven have lost key parts of their material and social basis.

### The Local Press

The mid-twentieth century saw rapid and thoroughgoing change in the media landscape in Scotland and in the United Kingdom as a whole, with the rise of television in particular transforming the way in which people engaged with the ‘outside world’ as well as with their own communities. However, as Frank Mort reminds us, even in the 1950s, the decade of the televised coronation and the entrance of television sets into most households, ‘print media still dominated news communication’ and had a profound influence on popular attitudes.<sup>10</sup> At this time, the newspaper industry itself had only recently undergone a thorough structural transformation to become a primarily national rather than regional or local phenomenon.<sup>11</sup> In Scotland, it has been argued that the local press in the nineteenth century was the site of a vibrant and genuinely community-rooted vernacular literary culture that has been overlooked by a scholarship preoccupied with the perceived cultural crimes of the ‘kailyard’.<sup>12</sup> While the nineteenth century Scottish press has been studied from a literary perspective in this regard, its nature in the twentieth century – agreed to be a period of relative decline – has escaped systematic analysis. Nonetheless, in the middle decades of the twentieth century, local newspapers continued to form an important part of local community life. They were deeply embedded in hegemonic local cultures of economic and political power. To give just one particularly telling example, in the late 1950s, *Hawick News* featured a three- to four-page section titled *Lyle and Scott News*, in which the knitwear firm of that name published business and social news about the company, as if it were news for the town as a whole.<sup>13</sup> Local newspapers could thus be an important conduit for local identity-formation.<sup>14</sup> However, even when weddings were reported in apparent isolation, devoid of any community or work-based identity, they formed part of a local public sphere and their role within this demands attention.

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<sup>10</sup> Frank Mort, ‘Scandalous Events: Metropolitan Culture and Moral Change in Post-Second World War London’, *Representations*, 93:1 (2006), 106-137 (p. 188). See also Bingham, *Family Newspapers?*, pp. 15-18.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 16; See also Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town*.

<sup>12</sup> Blaikie, *The Scots Imagination*, p. 103.

<sup>13</sup> This feature sometimes overlapped with local wedding reporting. When the managing director’s son married a knitwear worker, their wedding photograph was published in *Lyle and Scott News*. See ‘Jock and Rita Wed’, *Lyle and Scott News*, in *Hawick News*, 7 March 1958.

<sup>14</sup> See Murray McLean, ‘Strikers and Townsfolk: Civic Culture and Industrial Relations in Post-War Hawick’, *International Journal of Regional and Local History* 11:2 (2016), 75-90 (p. 79).

This section attempts to provide an overview of local wedding reporting in the mid-twentieth century. Though certain features were common to most newspapers, the local press displayed an immense diversity in content and even business model. For example, *Hawick News* remained an independent publication well into the late twentieth century (by which point the many local papers had been subsumed within the Johnston or DC Thomson groups) with its editor providing a prominent local personality.<sup>15</sup> This diversity extends even to the very definition of ‘local’. There was a common culture of local wedding reporting that spanned the presses of Scotland, encompassing geographical communities ranging from small burghs and their landward hinterlands to entire city-regions. The populations and areas involved – as well as the particular histories and circulations of individual titles – mean that, for example, the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* is not a ‘local’ newspaper in the same way as *Hawick News*. However, the very existence of a newspaper in a particular area served to provide a certain geographical coherence. Guarneri has argued that in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century USA, local newspapers taught residents of rapidly expanding cities and their hinterlands how to be city-dwellers, giving them a medium through which to imagine themselves part of a community, on the same model Anderson ascribed to national communities.<sup>16</sup> As in Anderson’s original thesis, Guarneri takes for granted that the need for a print-based imagination of community comes from the *scale* of social life inherent to modernity; the growth of ‘community’ beyond the limits of face to face contact. No doubt this is a crucial structural factor in the development of modern societies, but places like Hawick demonstrate that even a small community, where there would be a higher degree of face-to-face contact or at least indirect social connection between residents, could still be constituted in part by a strong public sphere built on the press. Wedding reporting, situated somewhere between private life and public interest, was part of a dense knowledge network that allowed these areas of circulation to become imagined communities.

The presence of weddings in the local press in the twentieth century took three main forms: announcements, articles, and photographs, with the last two occasionally appearing in combination.<sup>17</sup> Wedding announcements were the most common, longest-lived, and

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<sup>15</sup> Jock Houston, ‘The Parish of Hawick’, in *The Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, 31 vols, XVIII: *The County of Roxburgh*, ed. by John Herdman (Edinburgh: Scottish Academic Press, 1992), p. 125.

<sup>16</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, esp. chapter 4.

<sup>17</sup> In the early 1950s, the *Fife Herald and Journal* also regularly published a list of couples for whom banns had been proclaimed at churches in the town of Cupar in the early 1950s, but this is the only example of this practice I have found. See for example: ‘Proclamations’, *Fife Journal and Herald*, 1 July 1953. The Kilbrandon Committee (see chapter 4) considered recommending the publication of intended marriages in local newspapers but decided that it would be too expensive. See *The Marriage Law of Scotland: Report* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1969) (henceforth Kilbrandon Report), pp. 20-21.

probably most representative of these forms. Already a regular feature of local newspapers in the nineteenth century, these were abundant in the early to mid-twentieth century. While engagement announcements such as those appearing in the national press were less common and fairly elite, wedding announcements were relatively democratic.<sup>18</sup> Assuming the number of weddings announced was at least broadly proportionate to the number registered in a given area, calculations based on Kirkcaldy and Hawick would suggest that on average between 35 and 50 percent of all weddings were announced in the local press.<sup>19</sup> Announcements were placed by the couple or their relatives in the weeks following the wedding, for a small fee.<sup>20</sup> They tended to be extremely formulaic, but could carry a wealth of detail, the essential core of which was the names and addresses of the spouses,<sup>21</sup> the wedding venue, and usually the name of the minister who had conducted the ceremony. The two weddings whose reports are cited above were announced – in both cases on the front page of the issue of the newspaper in which the report appeared – as follows:

ALLAN–WATSON.–At Auchtergaven Parish Church, on 4th June, by Rev. Colin F. Millar, B.D., Robert, elder son of the late David Allan, Bankfoot, and Mrs Allan, “Branscroft,” Dunfermline, to Janet (Etta), daughter of Mrs F. Coghlan, Rose Cottage, Bankfoot.<sup>22</sup>

NICOLSON–MACLEOD.–At the Church of Scotland, Kinloch, on 22nd August, 1950, by the Rev. M. Macleod, Tarbert, Harris, assisted by the Rev. A. A. Mackillop, Kinloch, Robert John, only son of Mrs Nicolson, and the late Mr Alexander Nicolson, 18 Bonawe Street Glasgow, to Annie S., eldest daughter of Mr and Mrs R. J. Macleod, 50 Balallan, Stornoway.<sup>23</sup>

Wedding reports were less numerous than wedding announcements, but nonetheless provided a relatively representative account of local weddings in the 1930s to 1950s, when wedding photographs were still uncommon in many newspapers. In general, they were scarcely less formulaic than announcements, and contained the same information, alongside

<sup>18</sup> Gillis says that only the ‘most affluent’ members of working class placed engagement announcement in the early twentieth century. John R. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse: British Marriages, 1600 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), p. 279. My impression is that this would be an overstatement in reference to practice in Scotland.

<sup>19</sup> In 1938, 131 weddings were announced in the *Kirkcaldy Mail*, compared to 358 registered in Kirkcaldy; *Hawick News* featured 132 compared to 261 registered in Roxburgh. In 1950, 121 weddings were announced in *Hawick News*, compared to 305 registered in Roxburgh.

<sup>20</sup> For example, in 1955 the *West Lothian Courier* charged 3/3 for an announcement of 20 words or fewer, 4/- for 20 to 26 words, and 9d per additional six words. See *West Lothian Courier*, 14 January 1955. In the same year, *Dundee Courier and Advertiser* offered a ‘prepaid rate’ of 3d per word with a minimum charge of 5/- . See *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 4 July 1955.

<sup>21</sup> Sometimes the address given was that of the parents of either bride or groom, particularly if this was what provided the local connection from the point of view of the newspaper in question, but this was not stated explicitly. This applied also to photographs, but it is impossible to know the extent of this without intimate knowledge of the couples in question (my parents’ wedding photograph caption in the local newspaper listed my father’s address as that of his parents, when he had in fact already left home at the time).

<sup>22</sup> ‘Marriages’, *Perthshire Advertiser*, 8 June 1938.

<sup>23</sup> ‘Marriages’, *Stornoway Gazette*, 1 September 1950.

remarkably detailed descriptions of what was worn by the bride (and often by her bridesmaids and mother), as well as such details as any gifts exchanged between bride and groom, or given to the bridesmaids by the groom. As with much local reporting at this time, these accounts were presented by a kind of omniscient observer whose actual presence at the wedding in question was rarely alluded to. It is unclear on what basis weddings were chosen for inclusion in the local paper, but it is a testament to the assumed public interest in weddings that local reporters included them in the circuit they made among local events and meetings.<sup>24</sup> Rare comments on newspapers' own practices give a glimpse of the realities of wedding reporting. For example, wartime reports of local journalists' overuse of petrol, or of their standing in for an absent best man, suggest that it was a job involving a high degree of independence and sociability.<sup>25</sup> This was a form of journalism that was firmly embedded in local life.<sup>26</sup>

Whatever the precise mechanics of wedding reporting, the ambiguity surrounding inclusion and exclusion was in itself significant. Reporting appeared as if undertaken as a matter of routine, unshaped by local hierarchies or commercial imperatives, though both were of course important factors. Photographic reporting followed a similar logic when it became more common in the 1950s and 1960s, but before then it was for the most part relatively elite in character. This is best illustrated by a newspaper like the *Annandale Herald and Record* which, in the 1930s, regularly included a photograph in some of its wedding reports. Alongside the usual details, these sometimes included an apparently exhaustive list of the gifts received by the couple, including the name of the giver, with the nature and number of the gifts indicating a high degree of affluence.<sup>27</sup> There were, however, places where published wedding photography was not exclusively an elite phenomenon in this period. An exhaustive survey of local newspapers is outwith the scope of this study, but significant variation is apparent in those sampled here. Both of Hawick's local papers covered an unusually wide range of local weddings from at least the 1940s. It was perhaps the size and

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<sup>24</sup> Leonard notes that couples in Swansea simply hoped to have their photographs published, rather than taking any steps to make this happen. *Sex and Generation*, p. 204.

<sup>25</sup> 'Obtaining Petrol', *Dumfries and Galloway Standard*, 7 May 1941; 'The Photographer at the Wedding', *Brechin Advertiser*, 25 March 1941.

<sup>26</sup> This is not to say that newspapers' relationship to local communities was entirely charismatic or intuitive. Some papers actively solicited information from readers about upcoming meetings and events. For example, in the early 1930s, the news column for Bo'ness in the *Linlithgowshire Gazette* began with a notice telling readers that 'Intimation of Meetings, etc., or any event of public interest, which is sent in due time to the Bo'ness Office, will be attended to by the special reporter of the "Gazette."' *Linlithgowshire Gazette*, 29 January 1932.

<sup>27</sup> E.g., 'Lieut. E.H. Bonnett – Miss B. Atkinson Clark', *Annandale Herald and Record*, 7 August 1941. Hobbs observes the same practice in nineteenth century wedding reporting in the English provincial press. *A Fleet Street in Every Town*, p. 357.

relatively strong civic identity of Hawick that underlay this level of coverage. Other papers pictured typically few weddings despite an apparent editorial desire to include them. Such was the case with the *Kirkcaldy Mail*, which solicited indications of local weddings and other events with an almost hectoring tone in the late 1930s.<sup>28</sup> Photographs taken by newspapers' own photographers appear to have dominated in this period. Photography credits were not always included, but when they were they referred to a newspaper or publishing group as often as to an individual photographer.

It would appear, then, that the inclusion of one's wedding photograph in the local newspaper largely depended up to the 1960s on the initiative of the paper and its editor. However, there was also a commercial context to wedding reporting. Guarneri has suggested that US local newspapers covered weddings in an attempt to appeal to female readers, a motivation Edward Owens has also identified in media coverage of the 1934 wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina.<sup>29</sup> At a more practical level, newspapers also marketed crucial elements of the event itself, with advertisements for wedding stationery produced by local newspaper offices abounding from the 1930s to 1970s, and the services of a newspaper's staff photographer were also increasingly advertised to couples in the later years of the period.<sup>30</sup> For a time in the 1960s, *Hawick News* even offered a present to couples who placed their wedding announcement in the paper, in the form of a 'handsomely packed carton of goods for your new home.'<sup>31</sup> Another channel for the publication of wedding photographs that was strongly shaped by commercial imperatives was submission by an independent photographer, who would pass the photograph onto the newspaper, often without any intervention from the couple in question.<sup>32</sup> Publication of wedding photographs, with the photographer credited in the photo caption, added free advertising for the photographer to the social function fulfilled by publication for the couple and their community.

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<sup>28</sup> 'We want pictures! We want to take them! Will you give us the opportunity? [...] Are you getting married? If so, we want a picture of your wedding. If you have arranged for a photographer, please let us know who he is; if not, we will arrange to have you photographed either leaving the church, the manse, or at the reception. Please don't be shy about it.' *Kirkcaldy Mail*, 17 January 1939. The following week it followed up this plea with the following: 'Thank you for letting us know about the pictures – those of you who have done so. But there are still some who have not. We will be very pleased to hear from anyone in connection with a coming event suitable for photography.' *Kirkcaldy Mail*, 24 January 1939.

<sup>29</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, pp. 25-6; Edward Owens, 'All the World Loves a Lover: Monarchy, Mass Media and the 1934 Royal Wedding of Prince George and Princess Marina', *English Historical Review*, 133:562 (2018), 597-633.

<sup>30</sup> *Hawick News* was still offering these services in the 1980s: e.g., Advertising feature, *Hawick News*, 5 September 1986.

<sup>31</sup> Typically, this was aimed at women: 'It's called BRIDAL GIFT-PAX. Please ask for one.' *Hawick News*, 8 January 1965.

<sup>32</sup> Ann McLean, interview with author, residence, Bathgate, 18 February 2018.

It appears that publication reached its peak when it was primarily in the hands of hired photographers in this way. The diversity and inconsistency of practice across different local papers makes this evolution difficult to trace, but the *Lothian Courier* offers some indication. In 1953, the paper fit the general model outlined above, with only 25 wedding photographs published and most of these accompanied by an article, suggesting that these were ‘reported’ in the truest sense of the word.<sup>33</sup> In 1975, the number of photographs had risen to 86. They were less likely at this point to be accompanied by a full article, though generally some attempt was made at a unique headline and some detail given beyond the names and addresses of the spouses.<sup>34</sup> In 1985, a remarkable 309 photographs were included, a quantity which precluded the individualisation of previous reporting. Instead, pictures were grouped together in full page spread, often under the heading ‘Courier Brides’. Picture credits were universal by this stage, and the role of a hired photographer was foregrounded in a message published at the bottom on this page: ‘Getting married? Then get your photographer to send a print to the Courier for our popular brides page.’<sup>35</sup> A decade later the number of photographs had fallen back to 196, a sharp drop but still extensive compared to earlier coverage, while the format remained largely the same as in the 1980s. The peak of publication in the 1980s is perhaps best conceived of as the product of an overlap between community interest and commercial investment in publication on the part of photographers.

This is corroborated by survey responses (see table 3.1). Respondents were asked if their wedding photograph was published and, if so, how it was submitted to the newspaper. Because the survey is heavily skewed towards weddings in the last forty to fifty years, it does not give a clear picture of practice in the 1950s and 1960s, but it is suggestive nonetheless. Of respondents who married before 1979 and whose wedding photograph was published in a local paper, 10.6 percent had their picture taken by the newspaper’s photographer, while three quarters reported that their own photographer had submitted a copy directly to the newspaper. In the remaining cases, a friend or relative (9.6 percent) or one of the spouses (5.3 percent) had submitted the photo.<sup>36</sup> Newspaper staff photographers are much less prominent after this point. The figure for weddings from 1979 to 1988 is just 5.2 percent, and only two respondents report this manner of submission for a wedding after 1988. Submission by a photographer hired by the couple remained in the overwhelming

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<sup>33</sup> E.g.: ‘Bathgate Church Wedding’, *West Lothian Courier*, 25 June 1954.

<sup>34</sup> E.g.: ‘Hospital Church Wedding’, *West Lothian Courier*, 5 September 1975.

<sup>35</sup> *Lothian Courier*, 12 April 1985. This was not always included and the wording varied each time it was.

<sup>36</sup> These figures all exclude the response ‘can’t remember’.

majority – just under 70 per cent – until the turn of the century, accounting for fewer than half of responses thereafter.

**Table 3.1: Survey responses on publication of wedding photographs**

Year of wedding	% published*	Means of submission (%)*				No. published*
		Hired photographer	Newspaper photographer	Friend or relative	Bride or groom	
Pre-1979	55.2	74.5	10.6	9.6	5.3	94
1979-88	56.5	68.8	5.2	15.6	10.4	96
1989-98	54.6	69.5	1.1	22.1	7.4	95
1999-08	37.1	49.1	1.9	37.7	11.3	53
2009-18	18.0	41.2	0.0	38.2	20.6	34

\*Excluding 'don't know'/'can't remember'.

Significantly, the decline in hired photographers submitting directly to local newspapers coincided with the decline in the overall publication of wedding photographs. Around 55 percent of respondents reported that their wedding was featured in a local newspaper for every decade covered by the survey up to the turn of the century. For weddings in the first decade of the new millennium, just 37.1 percent had a photograph published, falling to 18 percent for the period 2009 to 2018.<sup>37</sup> It would appear that the publication of photographs taken by independently hired photographers coincided with the period of most widespread publication. The limits of charismatic, editorial inclusion were far surpassed by this more purely commercial endeavour. In fact, the distinction between the publication of photograph and straightforward advertisement became blurred in some places by the 1990s. *Hawick News* began including readers' wedding photographs in its advertising features at this time, a trend that would continue into the new millennium.<sup>38</sup> However, by this time, as table 3.1 suggests, publication was entering what would prove to be a period of terminal decline. The commercial imperative alone was not sufficient. It had to be sustained by the community interest that made readers buy a newspaper in the first place.

### Weddings and Space

If weddings suffused the print public sphere of mid-century Scotland, they were equally present in the physical everyday spaces of von Saldern's *Quartiersöffentlichkeit*. As we have seen, the spaces in which weddings took place changed rapidly around the Second World War. This rapid shift from diversity in wedding venues to the clear-cut binary of

<sup>37</sup> Even this low figure is frankly astounding given the paucity of local wedding reporting in the present day.

<sup>38</sup> E.g., a local couple's wedding photograph was included in a 'Hawick News Special Advertising Feature' on the Scottish Borders Wedding Fair 2007. *Hawick News*, 26 January 2007.

church or registration office can be thought of as a striking example of the specialisation of space, embodying the modern tendency towards taxonomy and rationalisation.

Indeed, this must be seen in the context of a thoroughgoing reordering of public and private space in the mid-twentieth century. Not only did unprecedented construction of social housing, slum clearance, and the creation of New Towns profoundly alter the urban fabric of Scotland; a more rigid delineation of the public and the private in this new order was also, so to speak, in with the bricks. In line with the gendered ‘breadwinner’ logic of the welfare state,<sup>39</sup> social housing presupposed the private domesticity of the nuclear family. Indeed, a married couple living with the parents of one of the spouses (in reality an extremely common experience for newlyweds)<sup>40</sup> was defined, for the purposes of housing allocation, as ‘homeless’.<sup>41</sup> When a family moved into a council house, moreover, they were often presented with a tenants’ manual emphasising the benefits of gardening but with little indication of local associational life, underling the normative privacy of the home.<sup>42</sup> It must also be stressed that, in Scotland, social housing was not a minority concern. Richard Rodger notes that by 1981, on the eve of the mass privatisation of housing unleashed by Right to Buy, at least 70 percent of housing stock was council-owned in 50 of the 53 Scottish local government districts then in existence.<sup>43</sup> At a structural level, then, mid-twentieth century society encouraged a model of domesticity that was strictly segregated from the outside world. This was not simply imposed from above, but chimed well with the instincts of many tenants, whose desire for privacy could subvert even the vision of planners and the assumptions of sociologists.<sup>44</sup> While overcrowding persisted after the Second World War, there was nonetheless a tendency in both public policy and in private hearts and minds to separate the spheres of the home and the outside world. The home was to be specialised as a place where a small family unit lived in quiet privacy, with none of the overcrowding and porous boundaries of earlier decades.

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<sup>39</sup> See Susan Pedersen, *Family, Dependence, and the Origins of the Welfare State: Britain and France, 1914-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), chapter 6.

<sup>40</sup> In 1962, the National Marriage Guidance Council issued a pamphlet dealing with this reality. See Gloria Gordon, ‘Living with In-Laws – Why Not!’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 7 March 1962. The columnist in this article agrees with the NMGC’s emphasis on newlyweds’ need for privacy but tries to find the positives in a situation unavoidable for many couples.

<sup>41</sup> The power of marriage to shape the actions of the welfare state in this regard is conveyed by a remark in a report by the Sub-Committee on Allocation of Council Tenancies: ‘Homeless families range from childless couples subtenanting spacious houses to families in cramped furnished rooms with, perhaps, no separate water supply.’ *Allocating Council Houses*, p. 18.

<sup>42</sup> McLean, ‘Community Life and Political Culture’, pp. 22-23.

<sup>43</sup> Rodger, ‘Urbanisation in Twentieth-Century Scotland’, in *Scotland in the Twentieth Century*, ed. by Devine and Finlay, p. 146.

<sup>44</sup> James Greenhalgh, *Reconstructing Modernity*, p. 176-183; Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*. For an overview of these issues seen within the Scottish context, see Yvonne McFadden, ‘Creating a modern home’, chapter 2.





Figure 3.1: An urban wedding procession. 'Minister's Daughter Weds Minister', Dundee Courier and Advertiser, 18 September 1939. ©D.C. Thomson and Co., image created courtesy of the British Library Board.

Within that society, as we have seen, weddings moved out of the manse, the bride's family home, the offices of 'marriage agents' – even out of hotels and restaurants – and into either the church or the registration office. However, if the specialisation of venues took place rapidly, other aspects of marriage ritual continued to trouble the boundaries of public and private for rather longer. Several practices peripheral to the ceremony itself but belonging to the orthopraxy of marriage formation served throughout the twentieth century to tie marriage ritual in spatial terms to the locality in which it was rooted. Perhaps the most emblematic of these – or at least the one which most easily lends itself to 'spatial' analysis – was the wedding procession. This involved the wedding party proceeding *en masse* from the place of the ceremony to the reception, sometimes led by a fiddler or piper. The procession was perhaps at base simply a practical means of getting from wedding to reception, but its social function can be conceived in much broader terms. Dion Georgiou has noted that more formal processions were a means by which even marginalised groups 'could assert their own legitimacy and synonymy with the locality'.<sup>45</sup> The function of a procession was thus much broader than simple movement. It broke down any barrier of exclusivity that might accrue to a ceremony in a religious space, a ritual and celebration for which invitations have been issued. However, as in the Balallan wedding, from which the couple were led away in a truck

<sup>45</sup> Dion Georgiou, 'Weaving Patterns in the Suburban Fabric: Carnival Procession Routes, Mapping Place and Experiencing Space on London's Changing Periphery, 1890–1914', in *Spatial Cultures: Towards a New Social Morphology of Cities Past and Present*, ed. by Sam Griffiths and Alexander von Lünen, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), p. 96.

‘propelled by the many well-wishers’, processional elements could be found in other, more spontaneous festivities surrounding the ceremony that clearly had little to do with the practicalities of transport. Between leaving the church and arriving at the house, the wedding party belonged to the neighbourhood and demonstrated that the neighbourhood belonged to it, mapping with its very movement the intimate connection between home and parish.<sup>46</sup>

It seems unlikely that the wedding procession was ever a universal practice in Scotland. It was less common outside of small rural communities, though as figure 3.1 shows it could also occur in urban settings.<sup>47</sup> However, another wedding-day custom that made similar use of public space was much more widespread throughout the twentieth century. This was the practice variously referred to as a ‘poor oot’, ‘scatter’, or ‘scramble’.<sup>48</sup> This typically involved a quantity of loose change being thrown, most often by the bride’s father, from a vehicle for local children to pick up, and would take place either as the bride left her home for the wedding venue, or upon leaving the venue itself. If this scattering of coins was less systematic in its mapping of ritual onto public space than the wedding procession, it nonetheless represented a significant subversion the notion of a wedding as a private event. Not only did it take place outdoors, but it actively incorporated relative strangers into the wedding celebration; it was not a treat for the children of the wedding party, but for those of the neighbourhood. Figure 3.2 shows a ‘poor oot’ taking place in Hawick in the 1950s, possibly in the then recently constructed Burnfoot council estate. In this rational, planned space of the post-war welfare state, wedding custom thus served as a kind of re-enchantment of public space, providing spontaneous contact between neighbours in an atmosphere of ludic disorder. Even without specific prompting on rituals peripheral to the ceremony itself, 38 survey respondents mentioned a ‘poor oot’ taking place in relation to their wedding, generally in response to the question regarding the ‘Scottishness’ or otherwise of the event (see chapter six). It is worth recalling at this point the sheer frequency with which weddings took place in the age of unprecedented nuptiality that followed the Second World War. Events

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<sup>46</sup> Elaine McFarland notes a similar spatial function in early twentieth century funeral processions in Scotland. E.W. McFarland, ‘Passing Time: Cultures of Death and Mourning’, in *A History of Everyday Life in Twentieth-Century Scotland*, ed. by Lynn Abrams and Callum Brown, p. 264.

<sup>47</sup> We recall also the variety performers’ procession to the sheriff court mentioned in chapter 1. Scran holds several press photographs of earlier, rural examples in Auchmithie and Orkney, as well as a 1970s example from Fair Isle, Shetland:

Auchmithie wedding procession <<https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/image.php?usi=000-000-503-475-R&куси=000-000-503-475-C&scache=49vaxzсор6&searchdb=scran>>; ‘Wedding walk’ in Orkney, c. 1923 <<https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/image.php?usi=000-000-467-924-R&куси=000-000-467-924-C&scache=4hujfzсорh&searchdb=scran>>; Fiddler Leading Traditional Wedding Procession, Fair Isle <<https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/image.php?usi=000-000-148-860-R&куси=000-000-148-860-C&scache=49vaxzсор6&searchdb=scran>> [all accessed 6 February 2020].

<sup>48</sup> ‘Poor oot’ will be used henceforth as this was the term most commonly used by survey respondents.

of this kind would not, then, be a rare occurrence. By their sheer repetition, they were quietly constitutive of community life even – or especially – in the new and somewhat alien spaces of mid-century urban Scotland.

[image removed for licensing reasons]

*Figure 3.2: A 'poor oot' in Hawick, possibly on the Burnfoot council estate, 1957. Source: Scran, ©Newsquest (Herald & Times).*

Beyond the activities of the day itself, weddings often entailed other practices that served to tie the couple into a wider community. Under the heading of ‘pre-wedding rituals’ falls a variety of practices involving couples and their respective peer groups, usually taking place in the weeks before the wedding and leading to some degree of ritualised humiliation of either bride or groom, or both. In twentieth century Scotland and elsewhere, these rituals shared many of the elements of community-building and spatial transgression with the wedding-day practices discussed above.<sup>49</sup> Even beyond the archetypal phenomenon of the ‘victim’ being tied to a post in some public space, these rituals could overturn the spatial norms of the town by a variety of more or less subtle means. In incidents cited respectively by Leonard, Charsley, and the ethnologist Margaret Bennett, policemen looked indulgently on public disorderliness when made aware of the special occasion; public transport was offered for free to brides in peripheral estates devoid of pubs in which to extract small change

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<sup>49</sup> See Sheila Young, ‘The Role of Costuming in Two Pre-wedding Rituals for Women in Northern Scotland’, *Cultural Analysis*, 15:2 (2017), 29-57 (pp. 30-32).

from unsuspecting men; and the pub itself undermined its own commercial function through the custom of the ‘penny pint’.<sup>50</sup> Sheila Young notes that, the ‘blackening’, the archetypal Scottish pre-wedding ritual (see below), often involves the bride, groom, or both, being driven around the local area in a trailer or similar, thus incorporating the embodied ‘mapping’ of the wedding procession into this more raucous rite of passage.<sup>51</sup>

[image removed for licensing reasons]

*Figure 3.3: A pre-wedding ‘ordeal’ on Lothian Road, Edinburgh in 1979. Edinburgh. Source: Scran. ©The Scotsman Publications Ltd.*

The workplace was a key site (or at least point of departure) for pre-wedding ritual. Leonard described this phenomenon under the heading of workplace ‘joking’,<sup>52</sup> and Charsley encountered similar activities in 1980s Glasgow. Such rituals were sometimes explicitly gendered, with the bride being provided with some manner of fancy dress and sexually suggestive gifts and/or verses by her female colleagues and subsequently paraded through the streets in search of men from whom to collect money in return for a kiss. Notionally symbolic items such as a chamber pot (or ‘chanty’) filled with salt were frequently included and could be used for collecting money or for the bride to ‘jump’ as part of her ordeal.<sup>53</sup>

<sup>50</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 193; Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, p. 104; Margaret Bennett, *Scottish Customs from the Cradle to the Grave* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1992), p. 120.

<sup>51</sup> Sheila Young, ‘The Evolution of the Contemporary Blackening’, *Folklore*, 128:3 (2017), 244-270 (p. 246).

<sup>52</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, pp. 145-47.

<sup>53</sup> Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, p. 101; Bennett, *Scottish Customs from Cradle to Grave*, pp. 115-120. See also Iona McGregor, *Getting Married in Scotland* (Edinburgh: National Museum of Scotland, 2000), chapter 6.

These practices, though not reported with the same regularity as weddings themselves, sometimes made it into the local press. For example, in 1959, an engaged couple who worked at Pesco in Hawick were pictured in a local paper being ‘blackened’ (or ‘ragged’, in the local usage) by their colleagues on the High Street.<sup>54</sup> Figure 3.3 shows a similar ordeal visited upon an employee at an Edinburgh garage, whose colleagues tied him to a lamppost on Lothian Road in the city centre. These examples correspond to the anthropology of workplace ‘joking’. Moreover, they demonstrate how such ritual spilled out of the workplace, blurring of the boundary between public and private, rational and ritual space.

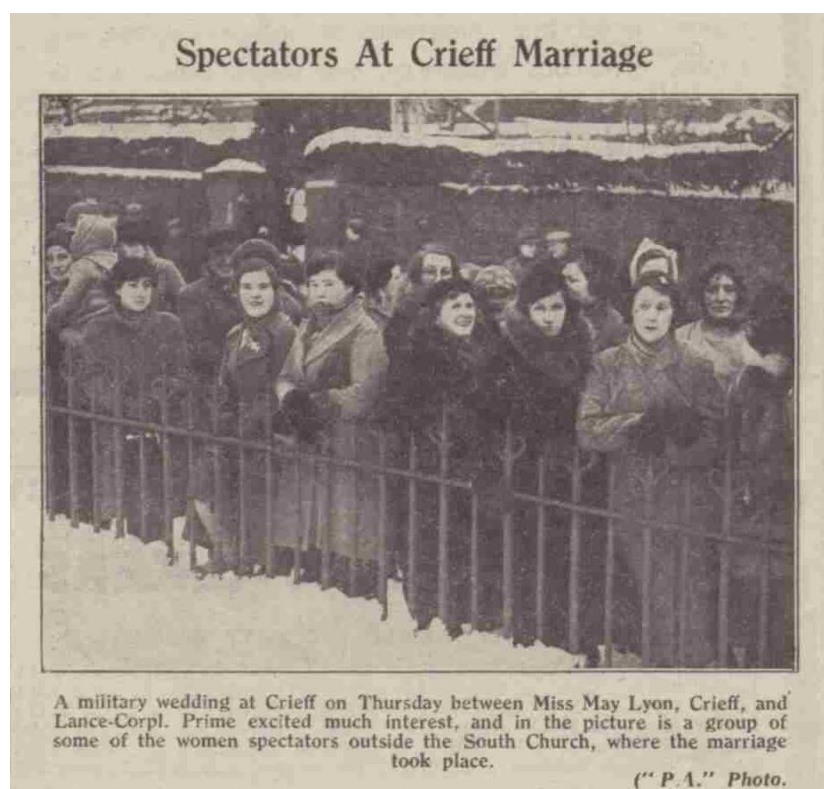


Figure 3.4: A ‘gathering of strangers’. Source: Perthshire Advertiser, 3 February 1940. ©Trinity Mirror, image created courtesy of the British Library Board.

Weddings in mid-twentieth century Scotland were thus surrounded by ritualised excursions into the wider community. This transgression of the line between public and private was not, however, unidirectional. There were also incursions by the community into the wedding. It has already been noted that weddings could be the occasion for a ‘gathering of strangers’, as curious locals came out to see the ceremony or, more commonly, the wedding party arriving at or leaving the church (see figure 3.4). Photographs and videos from the early to mid-twentieth century often show crowds of spectators, marked out as separate from the wedding party by their casual clothing, and reports such as that concerning the Auchtergaven wedding

<sup>54</sup> *Hawick News*, 12 July 1959.

that opened this chapter sometimes referred to the enthusiasm of such crowds as they braved ‘inclement weather’. Interest could always be piqued by the lavish nuptials of the great and the good, but this appetite was also catered for on the doorstep of local communities. In this sense, every wedding in a locality belonged to the local community, who asserted their interest and engagement by consuming the spectacle of ritual. Weddings, by their function as spectacle, thus temporarily altered the space of the church and its environs. While churches cannot be considered private spaces, they are specialised ones, with a distinct, sacred purpose. In the public orthopraxy of mid-century wedding culture a sort of spatial profaning of that purpose was carried out. Indeed, the celebratory use of churches and their surroundings became a point of tension in the decades after the Second World War (see chapter two). It was not unheard of for this function to extend to registration offices, though the generally more private nature of civil marriage makes evidence of this harder to track down.<sup>55</sup>

If weddings brought the community into otherwise tightly codified spaces, one final aspect of twentieth century wedding ritual enacted an even more intimate – if also more controlled – breach of the public/private divide. This was the ‘show of presents’, during which gifts received by the couple would be displayed in the bride’s parents’ home in the days before the wedding. Relatives and neighbours would be given a tour of the display, usually by the bride, who would have memorised the giver of each item and would recite this information for each group of guests. Louise Purbrick has shown how wedding gifts embodied the transmission of knowledge and meaning, as one generation’s conception of the material trappings of married life was passed on to the next.<sup>56</sup> In the show of presents, this intergenerational transmission of domestic ideals was enacted in an unusually explicit manner. The bride quite literally enumerated the contributions made to her household by her new and existing kin, a performance of the genealogical and social networks forged by the wedding itself.<sup>57</sup> This was not the ludic subversion of spatial divisions enacted in poor oots or pre-nuptial joking. The show of presents performed a more formalised function in the work of community and kinship. However, it brought these wider networks into the private, domestic sphere in order to achieve this.

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<sup>55</sup> On one of the local history Facebook pages used to gather survey responses, a user recalled going as a child to the municipal offices in the new town of Cumbernauld to gather coins from ‘poor oots’ at the registration office.

<sup>56</sup> Purbrick, ‘No Frills’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed by Miles et al, p. 84.

<sup>57</sup> Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, pp. 96-101.

[image removed for licensing reasons]

*Figure 3.5: A bride leading a group of guests at her 'show of presents', c.1955. Source: Still from At Muriel's Wedding, Moving Image Archive, dir. Frank Marshall.*

While not all shows of presents were the prim, decidedly middle-class affairs recorded in the Moving Image Archive (see figure 3.5), they were undoubtedly a rehearsed and fairly standardised ritual. At my mother's show of presents in 1985, she and her 'best maid' took it in turns to guide groups of three or four visitors around two bedrooms laden with gifts over the course of two days, an experience she remembers fondly but says was 'tiring'.<sup>58</sup> A lack of extensive evidence makes it difficult to trace the history of this custom, but it is perhaps not insignificant that the practice of listing gifts and their givers in (relatively elite) wedding reporting declined around the Second World War, a time when so many other aspects of wedding culture were self-standardising in Scotland. Indeed, in the 1930s, wedding announcements occasionally ended by giving the dates and times when the newlywed couple would be 'at home', presumably to receive well-wishers. The disappearance of this feature of announcements and of published lists of gifts received (and, indeed, of houses as wedding venues), when placed alongside the widespread practice of the show of presents, suggests a more standardised but also more private set of arrangements around the role of the home in weddings. We can only speculate as to the reasons for this shift. Was an upper-middle class practice emulated by a wider cross-section of society amid post-war prosperity? Did the

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<sup>58</sup> Ann McLean, interview with author, residence, Bathgate, 18 February 2018.

modernisation of space mean that such kinship work had to be formalised in place of a prior spontaneity? Whatever the reason, the show of presents was yet another example of the way in which weddings, in ways ranging from the formal to the carnivalesque, broke down modern spatial divisions in the name of community and kinship.

To be wholly surprised by these ambiguities of public and private space in mid-century wedding culture would be to give too much credit to a linear narrative of modernity as rationalisation. However, it is valuable to underline the extent to which weddings functioned to bring about these transgressions within a society that seemed otherwise inimical to them. No one set out to get married in order to provide an excuse for relative strangers to come together as a community based on physical proximity, but as we have seen, in various ways, this was what happened time and again in localities across Scotland. The question remains: should we see this as a communal hangover in modern times, a dying echo of the parish pump and the tenement stair in a world of high rises and tidy front gardens? I would argue that the structural basis of local life in mid-century Scotland was itself conducive to these modalities of community and publicity. Indeed, I have not been able to find examples of shows of presents held in houses where the wedding also took place, or of crowds gathered uninvited at hotels to see the wedding party. The modernisation of space seems in fact to have been conducive to certain new forms of community-building. The corralling of weddings into either church or registration office may have curtailed the ritual variety of earlier decades, but it also provided a more streamlined focus for the community, and arguably greater accessibility to these quotidian spectacles of local life. Marrying at home or in the manse represented a profound spatial ambiguity, but the church provided a space which, especially in the case of the Church of Scotland, was ostensibly at the service of the whole community – the parish – and not just the marrying couple. Indeed, even the registration office, though less amenable to spectacle, did serve to keep a greater proportion of weddings local to those marrying (see chapters one and two), and it was not unheard of for the same gathering of strangers to accrue to these ceremonies as well. In other words, if the spatial regime of modernity undid the much-romanticised (but arguably little-mourned) internal porosity of older working-class neighbourhoods, it nonetheless provided somewhat more regular and ritualised opportunities for sociability, however fleeting, in the relentless cycle of marriages that characterised the post-war decades. This offers a way of conceiving of the relationship between planned urban expansion and working-class sociability that moves beyond the standard crisis model. If the mid-twentieth century was a time of upheaval and nascent urban anomie, weddings may have played a small but significant role in stitching



together the fabric of new or simply altered communities, combining a customary sociability with a new spatial regime open to ritualization.

### Public Identities

The above concerns the relatively unthinking interventions made by marriage ritual in the lives of local communities. There were, however, more conscious articulations of the public realm within wedding celebrations. Weddings in the twenty-first century are often discussed in terms of the unique identity of the couple, or the individuals it comprises, manifested in the consumer and/or ritual choices made in planning them.<sup>59</sup> While the structures and idioms through which identity is articulated in weddings has certainly changed dramatically in recent decades, such expressions were not lacking in the mid-twentieth century. There was, however, a key difference in that the identities expressed were not typically individualistic or abstract in character. Rather, they inscribed couples and individual spouses into tangible local community networks in ways that not only cemented their belonging in the locality but could even indicate a stake in local industrial relations. This is not to say that more private identities did not exist or were not expressed. Rather, the normative idioms of distinctiveness, and the press which created the condition for their dissemination, favoured a distinctly corporate conception of identity.

Such public identities were not always captured in wedding photographs, which most commonly portrayed the bride and groom in relative isolation. However, one of the more common variations in mid-century wedding photography was the depiction of the couple leaving the church flanked by a 'guard of honour'. Predictably, this was a common sight during the Second World War, when it applied in a rather more literal sense, but it also maintained a conspicuous presence in peacetime. The archetypal non-military guard of honour was composed of Girl Guides or a similar youth group to whom the bride was leader, and accounts of such weddings abound in local newspapers from the 1930s into the 1980s (see figure 3.6). This ubiquity is perhaps to be expected, as the relationship between gender and place in mid-century weddings meant that when bride and groom came from different areas, the wedding would usually take place in the bride's parish (see chapter four).

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<sup>59</sup> Leeds-Hurwitz, *Wedding as Text*.



Figure 3.6: A typical guard of honour. Source: Dundee Courier and Advertisers, 9 March 1953. ©D.C. Thomson & Co., image created courtesy of the British Library Board.

However, a wide range of local associational and work identities relating to both brides and grooms appeared in guards of honour. Examples uncovered in a survey of the British Newspaper Archive include art students,<sup>60</sup> mountaineers,<sup>61</sup> fire fighters,<sup>62</sup> golfers,<sup>63</sup> hockey players,<sup>64</sup> rugby players,<sup>65</sup> dressmakers,<sup>66</sup> choristers,<sup>67</sup> skiers,<sup>68</sup> cyclists,<sup>69</sup> nurses,<sup>70</sup> and a Sunday school class.<sup>71</sup> Members of the guard of honour would often form an archway with objects associated with the activity they shared with bride or groom (in the aforementioned cases: T squares, axes, golf clubs, hockey sticks, measuring sticks, and bicycle wheels) under which the couple passed as they left the church.<sup>72</sup> Typically they would be dressed in the relevant uniform or gear, rather than the formal attire normally associated with wedding guests. Indeed, they were not necessarily guests at the wedding themselves.<sup>73</sup> This was, then, another way in which the church provided an ephemerally public space, at which a broader section of the community than that formally invited could attend.

As wedding photographs became more common in newspapers, this particular variety stood out as one of the few including people beyond the immediate wedding party. Most likely they were chosen by editors as appealing to readers who may not have known the couple

<sup>60</sup> 'Novel Guard for Broughty Bride', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 13 March 1953.

<sup>61</sup> 'Ice Axe Guard at Perth Wedding', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 28 December 1953.

<sup>62</sup> 'Peterhead 'Groom Has Unusual Guard of Honour', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 25 September 1976.

<sup>63</sup> 'Golfers Form Guard of Honour', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 4 April 1950.

<sup>64</sup> 'Hockey Captain Weds at Lerwick', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 10 August 1984.

<sup>65</sup> 'Cupar Groom's St Andrews Bride', *Fife Herald*, 22 September 1954.

<sup>66</sup> 'She's 'Bride' Again at Middlefield', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 28 March 1969.

<sup>67</sup> 'Choristers Form 'Guard'', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 5 January 1948.

<sup>68</sup> 'Carnoustie Man Weds at Blairgowrie', *Arbroath Herald*, 2 January 1953.

<sup>69</sup> 'Dundee Church Wedding', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 1 July 1933.

<sup>70</sup> 'Guard of Honour for Hospital Pair', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 2 August 1966.

<sup>71</sup> 'Busy Day of Weddings', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 2 April 1955.

<sup>72</sup> I have only found one example of a guard of honour at a civil wedding, where it seems to have been included almost as a parody of the practice at church weddings. When a singer starring in a show at Aberdeen Tivoli Theatre married, 'The cast sang as they waited for the bridal party emerging from the office, and provided a guard of honour by holding aloft tennis rackets and cricket bats borrowed from a sports field.' 'Stage Folk at Singer's Wedding', *Dundee Courier and Advertiser*, 5 July 1951.

<sup>73</sup> Gillis notes that all colleagues of the couple would be expected to pay for a gift, though most would not be invited to the wedding. Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 291.

personally but who may have shared some connection to or interest in the corporate identity represented by the guard of honour. Indeed, they were sometimes the prompt for a wedding photograph's inclusion in a publication that would not publish these as a matter of course, as in the case of a survey respondent married in 1977:

My husband was captain of a local cricket team and I was surprised by a guard of honour of cricket bats. As well as a normal photo in local paper, this photo featured in the 'Green Final' which gave the Saturday sports results. Not usual to have wedding photos there.<sup>74</sup>

Whatever the reason for their inclusion, these photographs are suggestive of the broader networks that had a stake in the marriages of individuals. It is particularly interesting that these should so often have been articulated around the bride. Though the groom was often the focus of the identity expressed, even this was sometimes reported as a guard of honour 'for the bride', and this appears to be the implication of the 'surprise' reported by the respondent above. As Charsley notes, part of the homogenised modern wedding aesthetic has been the emergence of the figure of the bride as an identity that all but negates that of the individual woman who adopts it.<sup>75</sup> In the case of guards of honour, however, the bride's identity as an independent actor in the local community was often foregrounded. Van Gennep noted that 'rites of incorporation' are prominent in weddings and, typically, this meant incorporation of the bride into the family or community of the groom.<sup>76</sup> However, if we think of passing through the guard of honour as such a rite, these brides were in fact *reincorporated* into their own community, emerging from a phase of separation and transition via a local associational identity. Even within the context of the intensely normative domestic role ascribed to women in post-war culture, the bride was thus often ushered into married life not only as an icon of heterosexual femininity but as an active member of the wider community. This may have only been at the level of symbolism; with work-based identities in particular the guard of honour would in many cases represent a world left behind by the newly married woman. Nonetheless, the guard of honour as rite of incorporation underlines the extent to which the public ritual of marriage formation problematised the privatised nature of post-war married life.

One particular guard of honour leads us to a more fraught source of local identity as expressed in weddings. In 1952, the *Motherwell Times* published a picture under the heading 'Factory's first wedding' (figure 3.7):

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<sup>74</sup> Survey response (female librarian aged 24 at time of wedding in 1977).

<sup>75</sup> Charsley, *Rites of Marrying*, pp. 66-73.

<sup>76</sup> van Gennep, *Rites of Passage*, p. 11.

Miss V. Dougan, 58 Cambusnethan Street, Wishaw, with her 'groom, Mr P. Docherty, 28 Beechworth Drive, Newarthill, are showered with confetti as they pass through an archway of fellow-employees holding special airguns manufactured at the Carfin factory of Millard Bros., Ltd. This was the first wedding of employees since the factory opened.<sup>77</sup>

The framing of this wedding report is indicative of the relationship between work, community and marriage in the period. It was not apparently a novelty that a factory should produce a couple – they were, it was implied, the factory's first of many to come – nor that the workplace should be so visible in that couple's nuptials. It was part of the expected cycle of local life. This particular guard of honour, then, ties mid-century wedding culture into the wider political economy of industrial Scotland. As we saw in the Balallan wedding, where a Post Office worker bride was toasted by her boss, employment featured among the public aspects and wider networks at play in marriage ritual. This was most evident where a particular employer played a wider role in the life of the couple. In the early to mid-twentieth century, many Scots were still employed in family-run firms, and these could dominate life



Figure 3.7: An industrial guard of honour. Source: Motherwell Times, 29 February 1952. ©Johnston Press Plc, image created courtesy of British Library Board.

in local communities. One feature of working-class wedding culture peculiar to such communities was workers' involvement in an employer's wedding, or a wedding in the employer's family. This should be viewed within the paradigm referred to by labour historians as 'paternalism'. It is in these terms that Catriona Macdonald and Bob Morris and Jim Smyth have written of such local industrial cultures, regarding Paisley and Fife mining towns respectively. This 'employer strategy' saw leaders of local industry cultivating a relationship with their workers that was as much charismatic as it was economic.<sup>78</sup> When employees invested emotionally in the life events of their

<sup>77</sup> 'Factory's First Wedding', *Motherwell Times*, 29 February 1952.

<sup>78</sup> Catriona M. M. Macdonald, *The Radical Thread: Political Change in Scotland, Paisley Politics, 1885-1924* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 36-73; Bob Morris and Jim Smyth, 'Paternalism as an Employer Strategy, 1800-1960', in *Employer Strategy and the Labour Market*, ed. by Jill Rubery and Frank Wilkinson, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 195-225. The nature of this dynamic in the town of Hawick is explored in McLean, 'Community Life and Political Culture', chapter 3.

employers, class divisions were obfuscated by a sense of personal allegiance, and the loyalty of workers was primed to withstand the vicissitudes of industrial capitalism.

Workers were sometimes invited to an event taking place outwith the working week, as when Selkirk mill workers were bussed up to St Giles' Cathedral in Edinburgh for the wedding of the mill director's daughter in 1938.<sup>79</sup> It was not uncommon, however, for this strand of paternalism to shape patterns of work and leisure more directly. When the director of South Mills in Dundee married in September 1941, his employees were given a day off to mark the occasion. It is not clear, however, to what extent they were free to enjoy this holiday as they pleased, and it was noted that 'the staff were present in the church.'<sup>80</sup> Another set of wartime workers were not so lucky. At a presentation of wedding gifts to their employer in 1940, staff at Den Burn Works in Brechin were told that 'owing to the pressure of Government demands it would be impossible to give the workers a holiday, such as was usual on these occasions, nor would it be possible to have any entertainment'. They were, however, promised an extra day's wages for the day of the wedding.<sup>81</sup> As this example demonstrates, paternalism meant that the boss's beneficence was bestowed on a discretionary basis. It was not a matter of workers' rights or state welfarism, but rather a facet of an informal relationship between employer and employee. Mid-century employers were thus able to draw on the same integrative function that weddings played in the wider community to present themselves as benevolent members of the latter. In other words, people were undoubtedly brought together by ritual, but it was certainly not always as equals.

## Decline

The culture sketched out above was a product of, and entirely dependent on, the social and economic order of the mid-twentieth century. Local newspapers have not died out, but the social, economic and, indeed, technological landscape in which they now operate mean that they are virtually unrecognisable as descendants of those discussed above. The result is not, moreover, simply a case of missing sources. As I have argued above, local newspapers not only reflected but were constitutive of the public culture of marriage formation for much of the twentieth century. The practices of which they once carried traces have receded in tandem with the very assumption that they might be worth reporting, that there might be an audience or, more to the point, a market for such ritual. This decline has coincided, I would

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<sup>79</sup> 'Border Wedding', *Southern Reporter*, 28 April 1938.

<sup>80</sup> 'Wedding of City Business Man', *Courier and Advertiser*, 6 September 1941.

<sup>81</sup> 'Brechin Employees Honour Director', *Courier and Advertiser*, 18 October 1940.

argue, with a general reorganisation of the spatial basis for both ritual and community and the ways in which these intersect.

Weddings have, of course, themselves become a less common occurrence (see chapter four). Therefore, even if they had continued to be publicised at the same rate, or to enact public-facing, community-based rituals in the same proportions as in the middle decades of the century, the numbers involved would make these far less powerful as vectors for local identity formation and community building than was once the case. Indeed, the decline in local reporting appears to have outpaced even demographic transition. By the 1990s, wedding announcements were becoming increasingly rare, and written reports appeared only as part of what we would recognise as the news cycle; that is, not as a matter of course, but only when fulfilling certain criteria of novelty, tragedy or controversy.<sup>82</sup> The most striking change, however, has been the decline of wedding photograph publishing in the twenty-first century, coming slightly later than in the case of reports and announcements. As noted above, just 18 percent of survey respondents married after 2008 had their wedding photograph published, a figure that in all likelihood masks a much greater real decline.

This near disappearance of local wedding reporting has a structural basis in the evolution of the local press. In the early twentieth century, local papers – in common with larger regional and national titles – gave little indication of a news cycle signposted by eye-catching headlines. They read instead more like some combination of a community newsletter and a newspaper of record. Often the front page would be dedicated to notices issued by local civil society groups regarding upcoming meetings, and here too would feature announcements of births, marriages and deaths. In later decades, from around the 1960s, the front page was developing its present-day function in highlighting a particularly sensational or significant story that would entice the reader to follow up on the subsequent pages. This function was absent in earlier decades. It was assumed, perhaps, that the reader would at least skim the whole issue as a matter of course, and so did not need to be appealed to in this way. Of course, advertising and commercial imperatives always played a prominent role in the local press. These newspapers were commercial endeavours and should not be romanticised as being unambiguously at the service of the public.<sup>83</sup> However, the dense front pages of the middle decades of the twentieth century indicate a strong core readership and a well-defined

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<sup>82</sup> E.g.: ‘Guests Vow to Save the Day for Newly-weds Scot and Adele’, *Hawick News*, 22 June 2007.

<sup>83</sup> Matthews portrays the provincial press in England as ruthlessly commercial, but Hobbs takes issue with this, arguing that their civic orientation should be taken more seriously. See Hobbs, *A Fleet Street in Every Town*, pp. 385-86.

local function for the press. Over time, wedding announcements moved towards the back pages, increasingly lost among advertisements and miscellany. Wedding photographs underwent a similar reorganisation. Where before they had been slotted in as and when space was available, they were from the 1960s increasingly grouped into their own sections of the newspapers, under headlines such as ‘Spring Weddings’ or ‘Courier Brides’. Partly this was in response to the sheer quantity of photographs published from the 1960s to 1990s, but it was also part of a broader reorganisation of local newspapers. Increasingly, they were organised into sections targeting distinct sections of the readership, undermining at the level of formatting the assumption of a shared general interest based on geography alone.<sup>84</sup>

These changes alone did not cement the final collapse of wedding reporting, but they did perhaps indicate the malaise that would lead to it. If readers could no longer be assumed to engage with the local press as a matter of course, the potential for circulation and therefore advertising revenue was gravely damaged. In this context, the logic underlying photographers’ submission of wedding photographs to local papers no longer held. As noted above, this was a key feature of the overall decline of publication. This means that in recent decades, it has not simply been the case that fewer photographs are published; within the rump of local wedding reporting that remained, we can also see evidence of changed dynamics of publicity. The shift visible in survey responses regarding the means by which wedding photographs ended up in local newspapers points to two significant features of this development (see table 3.1). First, the proportion of respondents who submitted their *own* photograph to the newspaper doubled twice over the period, from around 5 percent of those married before 1979 to around 10 percent in the following three decades, and again to just over 20 percent of those married between 2009 and 2018. In theory, this represents a democratisation of the process, removing it from the exclusionary local hierarchies doubtless at work in the decisions of local reporters and editors. The more significant shift in these figures, however, concerns the percentage of photographs submitted by friends or relatives. This grew steadily in the last decades of the twentieth century – by about 6 percent in both the 1980s and the 90s – and then rapidly, accounting for just under 40 percent of weddings in the first two decades of the twenty-first. Respondents were not asked to specify who precisely among their friends and relatives submitted the photograph, but it is highly likely that parents or other older relatives of the couple have been prominent among these.<sup>85</sup> This

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<sup>84</sup> Guarneri places this development in the early twentieth century for the US local press. *Newsprint Metropolis*, pp. 34-5.

<sup>85</sup> Leonard suggests that announcements were intended to inform the broader networks of the couple’s parents, rather than those of the couple themselves, of the marriage. *Sex and Generation*, pp. 125-26.

would suggest a generational dynamic to the cultural significance of publication. Just as weddings in the middle decades of the century were often dominated by the older generation (see chapter five), so much of what remains of local wedding reporting hinges on the kinship work of the parents of new spouses.

These may appear to be contradictory trends. If both relatives and couples themselves are more involved in publication than before, the overall trajectory outlined here of declining participation and privatisation is somewhat problematised. However, the situation becomes clearer if we consider the major shift to be the declining involvement of external parties, namely photographers, whether hired by the couple or sent by a local paper. As the onus of publication has been increasingly placed on the couple and their kin, the older generation have been readier to take it on, but the overall effect has been that more and more weddings are simply not publicised in this way. We might think of this development as a kind of disenchantment of the publishing process. Rather than a spontaneous confirmation of status or belonging, having one's photograph in the local paper became a simple matter of choice. This represents a profound shift. Even if the motive was primarily commercial, publication was formerly was a channel by which a significant percentage of local weddings were offered up in the local public sphere as part of the fabric of community life. Left solely to the discretion of the individual families involved, the imperfect inclusivity of the earlier practice was abandoned almost entirely rather than expanded upon. This parallels the classic shift from place-based to elective communities that even Lawrence's revisionist study has not been able to dispense with. Seen from the perspective of the kind of local public sphere outline in this chapter, the net result of such a dynamic is unambiguous decline.

While the economics of the local press and wedding photography are undeniably key to understanding the decline of local wedding reporting, there is another aspect of the mid-century social order than must be factored into this account: gender. It has been noted that appealing to female readers may have been part of the original logic of local wedding reporting. Indeed, this is supported by a more generalised coding of wedding reporting as feminine. When wedding photographs began to be grouped together for publication, the headlines chosen often referred only to the brides, even when the pictures depicted couples. Some papers even took this to its logical conclusion by publishing cropped photos showing only the bride.<sup>86</sup> Written reports likewise devoted substantially more space to the description of bridal and other female wedding outfits than to any other detail of the event. This was

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<sup>86</sup> E.g.: 'Monday Brides', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 30 August 1982.



derided as frivolous in a 1939 column in the *Perthshire Advertiser*, in terms that gave a suggestive glimpse behind the anonymity of local reporting: ‘The explanation is that weddings are now usually “covered” by women reporters [...] When men reported marriage ceremonies, the lady, and not her attire, was the principle theme.’<sup>87</sup> Corroborating Virginia Woolf’s (misquoted) line, according to which ‘for most of history, Anonymous was a woman’,<sup>88</sup> it would appear that the neutral omniscience of wedding reports concealed an industrious workforce of highly mobile female local reporters.<sup>89</sup>

If it is true that many reporters tasked with covering weddings were women, then this represented a professionalisation of the broader dynamic by which the public-facing aspects of wedding culture more generally fell to women. Gillis identifies this as a feature of wedding culture that crossed class boundaries.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, we have already seen how fulfilling the ‘moral’ criteria of the white church wedding was a deeply gendered burden (see chapter two). In this context, consuming and facilitating the publication of wedding announcements and photographs was part of a larger gendered labour of publicity. Indeed, wedding reporting was not the only aspect of publicity that was highly gendered; many of the spatial dynamics of marriage ritual discussed above also hinged on the gender dynamics of mid-century Scotland. The classic capitalist division of the public and private – whatever its more ambiguous reality – rendered sociability at the neighbourhood level a decidedly female affair.<sup>91</sup> As much of their labour centred on the home, mid-century women were the primary agents of local social networks. This not only made them the ideal audience for the local press, but also fostered the kind of relationships that eased the spatial transgressions of, for example, the show of presents, or the crowd gathering outside the church. For this reason, women would be key to the decline of that culture. Brown has identified women’s abandonment of religious observance in the 1960s as a key motor for secularisation.<sup>92</sup> In a parallel and connected development, the distinctive public culture of weddings in the mid-

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<sup>87</sup> “‘Bride in White Organza’”, *Perthshire Advertiser*, 7 June 1939. Owens notes that female reporters were deliberately used to report on royal weddings to target an imagined female audience, ‘All the World Loves a Lover’, pp. 613-14.

<sup>88</sup> The actual line is: ‘I would venture to guess that Anon, who wrote so many poems without signing them, was often a woman.’ See Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One’s Own*, ed. by David Bradshaw and Stuart N. Clarke (Chichester: Wiley Blackwell, 2015), pp. 36-37.

<sup>89</sup> Another untold history of female labour related to weddings which demands further research is that of the female registrar. One significant implication of the 1939 Act which, as far as I can tell, went unremarked at the time was that women would now regularly be performing weddings, at a time when female ordination was rare and controversial within mainstream religion. On the latter point, see Lesley Orr, “‘Impudent and Mannish Grown?’: “Women’s Ministry” in the Church of Scotland”, *Practical Theology*, 2:1 (2009), 7-25.

<sup>90</sup> Gillis, *For Better, For Worse*, p. 286.

<sup>91</sup> von Saldern, *Häuserleben*, pp. 26-27; 156-57. Berman identifies a similarly gendered modernity in the life and work of the influential urbanist Jane Jacobs. See *All That Is Solid Melts into Air*, p. 322.

<sup>92</sup> Brown, *The Death of Christian Britain*, pp. 191-92.

century quickly lost critical mass as women were emancipated from home and neighbourhood.

However, it was not only women-centred rituals that declined over the course of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Marriage ritual as a whole bore witness to a profound shift in the very nature of public space. Poor oots all but disappeared around the turn of the twenty-first century (see chapter six), and the contexts in which they survived longest are highly suggestive as to the underlying dynamics of ritual change. One of the latest examples I have found occurred in Melrose, in connection with another distinctive local tradition of public space. In keeping with the Borders custom of ritualised mass-participation ball games, when a local woman marries in Melrose, she is often presented with a ball to kick into the crowd, and the money scattered at the poor oot is sometimes referred to as ‘ball silver’, allegedly in reference to its original use in purchasing the ball.<sup>93</sup> Such public-facing marriage rituals, whatever their specific origins, are maintained as part of the unusually strong civic identity of the Borders burghs, with their powerful – if now largely symbolic – relationship to space archetypally embodied in the Common Ridings.<sup>94</sup> Sheila Young has identified a similar dynamic in the development of the pre-wedding ritual of blackening in recent decades. In her account, this once occurred all over Scotland in both rural and urban areas, but has become restricted over the course of the twentieth century to rural communities in the North East.<sup>95</sup> Both cases appear to fit into a broader historical development by which the general use of *local* public spaces for wedding or pre-wedding ritual has become restricted to those places where there is an actively embraced and consciously distinctive tradition of using space in this way. The breaching of the public/private boundary within the community to which the couple or one of the partners belongs, once a very common occurrence, seems thus to be strongest where these practices of publicity have been tied into a narrative of distinctive local cultural heritage. Indeed, it is perhaps not insignificant that the latest example of a wedding procession I have been able to find took place in Fair Isle, a place with a highly distinctive identity even within the much-studied and much-mythologised Shetlands Islands.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Scran holds a video of this practice, recorded in 2001: Wedding custom: Scatter after a wedding (video clip) <<https://www.scran.ac.uk/database/record.php?usi=000-000-583-670-C&scache=1a6q2ahbro&searchdb=scran&PHPSESSID=r8kk8lp24fd64lts5383okmaj6>> [accessed 15 August 2019].

<sup>94</sup> See Gwen Kennedy Neville, *The Mother Town: Civic Ritual, Symbol, and Experience in the Borders of Scotland*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), chapter 3.

<sup>95</sup> Sheila Young, ‘The Evolution of the Contemporary Blackening’, p. 262.

<sup>96</sup> See n. 47 above.

When we consider the rise in internal ‘destination’ weddings in Scotland, discussed in chapter four, it would appear that these developments are part of a wider reformulation of the relationship between space, place and ritual. Although couples in the Borders, the North East, and Shetland ritualised their *own* communities by the practices outlined above, in doing so they implicitly engaged in a similar process of placemaking as is constituted by the destination wedding. That is to say, both practices are part of a culture where weddings do not *produce* social space on a universal basis, but instead through a kind of specialisation. There are places to come from and places to get married, and the overlap between the two has receded under this new spatial regime of wedding culture after modernity. As with the publication of wedding photographs, the ritualization of space has become a matter of choice, rather than a matter of course. The result is a tendency towards a decline in those practices that once took public space as a legitimate component of marriage ritual on the basis of proximity alone.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, I have presented weddings as a constitutive element of community life in mid- to late twentieth century Scotland. In doing so, I have perhaps dwelled on the positive aspects of this dynamic. It is best, then, to conclude with an example that introduces a crucial caveat to this image. In 1961, the *Aberdeen Evening Express* published a photograph of an ‘attractive’ secretary at a Fraserburgh pneumatic tool factory. The occasion was her engagement to an engineer at the same firm, some forty years her senior. Despite the fact that neither bride nor groom was ‘prepared to discuss the situation’, an accompanying article speculated about the engagement – ‘the bombshell which has become No. 1 talking point in cafes, pubs and at street corners in Fraserburgh’ – in some detail. The article included the couple’s addresses, as well as the far from innocuous detail that the groom’s children were older than the bride.<sup>97</sup> It was at best an intrusive piece of local journalism, and at worst a prurient exercise in muckraking. If the guards of honour, poor oots, and shows of presents discussed above present a rosy image of mid-century wedding culture, the gossiping reception of a Fraserburgh engagement should remind us that, as in any situation where human beings come together, the truth is messier and more resistant to nostalgia than it appears at first glance. Communities, after all, are not groups of people who like each other, but simply who share a common life in some way. The fact that this final example concerned a small-town story reported in a regional title underlines the model of community I have

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<sup>97</sup> ‘Loreen, Robert quiet on wedding’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 10 May 1961.

tried to convey in this chapter; bound by place but not by overwhelming intimacy, and where a wedding was of legitimate common interest, whatever the nature of that interest.

Much has been done by recent scholarship – particularly the work of Jon Lawrence – to challenge a romanticised perception of early and mid-twentieth century working-class community. We have come to recognise that the flourishing discipline of sociology in the 1950s had its reasons for finding a straightforward decline in what was really a more complex process of state intervention and individual desire. It has been stressed that elective affinities are older than we have previously assumed, and that people’s fundamental sociability is a point of significant historical continuity. These are vital developments, but they should not disguise the very real changes to social life that have taken place over the course of the twentieth century. Nor should the desire to recognise aspects of personal identity as alternative bases for community blind us to the fact that community is a *social* phenomenon, and so exists within and is shaped by material structures and relationships of power, as much as by personal inclinations. This chapter has focussed on the public-facing aspects of marriage formation in mid-twentieth century Scotland in order to shed light on these structures of community, and the significant role played within them by ritual.

At first sight, the society of mid-twentieth century Scotland does not seem particularly amenable to a vibrant community life linking individuals and families to a larger whole. These decades represented the height of a domestic ideal of privacy in married life that was increasingly realised in the spatial regimes of private and – particularly relevant in the Scottish context – public housing, as well as in privatised leisure practices. However, this was also a time of corporate belonging at work and beyond, with social life arranged around public more than individual vectors of identity and belonging. Weddings presented sites where these aspects of post-war life could flourish, through the temporary re-enchantment of space rationalised and specialised by modernity. The totemic sites of failed modernism – the bare and windy streets of council estates, the concrete expanse of a New Town centre – could be filled with children scrabbling for coins, or become the site of a carnivalesque procession of factory or office workers doing their best to make a public spectacle of their departing colleague. Indeed, when my parents married in 1985, my mother’s arrival at the church – built as an extension charge on a 1960s council estate – still drew the ‘gathering of strangers’ mentioned by Sym in the 1930s.<sup>98</sup> Such practices were not, furthermore, simply a case of preserving a ‘pre-modern’ communality; there is much to suggest that these were

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<sup>98</sup> Ann McLean, interview with author, residence, Bathgate, 18 February 2018.

forms of sociability that emanated from the very structures of life in statist, welfarist, urbanised mid-century Scotland. The conditions of near-full employment, often organised under firms with a strong charismatic relationship with the localities in which they were rooted, were ideally suited to blurring the lines between private and public, work and leisure. Perhaps most significantly, the advent of civil marriage and the universalisation of church venues for religious marriage concentrated ritual in sites of legitimate public interest, fostering the ‘gathering of strangers’, the common ground that provided the ‘local’ in local community. Modernity, as it was experienced in mid-twentieth century Scotland, did not kill community, but provided new – arguably more formalised or at least standardised – channels for its creation and articulation.

Beyond these opportunities for gathering, the local press represented indispensable infrastructure for the projection and reification of the public function played by weddings in the physical spaces of local life. Geographies of circulation provided a spatial structure onto which imaginations of community could be mapped. Simply by printing wedding announcements, reports, and photographs – whether they did so out of ideals of civic belonging, or simply to sell advertising – the local press legitimised and fed a mutual interest in the intimate relationships and lifecycles of neighbours and strangers on the basis of proximity alone. By emphasising the corporate identities often expressed in marriage rituals, the press further tacitly encouraged a model of active local citizenship and civic engagement. To this extent, local newspapers were a structural element of the process through which weddings overwhelmed the public/private dichotomy crystallised by modernity, as well as a tool for converting space into place by the articulation of shared identities. Affluence and improved housing conditions may have encouraged a culture of ‘keeping oneself to oneself’, but the local press ensured that community could continue to be experienced and imagined on a distinctly local basis.

The unprecedented nuptiality of the immediate post-war decades, combined with a newly-realised – though long-established – ideal of domestic privacy, could have been a motor for profound privatism, paving the way for alienation and anomie. There should be no doubt that these are features of modernity as we have seen it develop in Scotland and elsewhere. However, as this chapter has shown, several key structural factors accompanied this transition, allowing *weddings* – if not marriage – to take on a decidedly public function. These were, namely: a strong local press (not unrelated to a much more ‘local’ system of local government than would later be the case, on which it could report); robust levels of

employment in industries that were highly locally-grounded; relative security of housing tenure within a society dominated by public rental.<sup>99</sup> All of this provided ample opportunity for ritual to be publicised, in the widest sense of the term. If the ‘golden age’ of marriage sowed the seeds of privatised and alienated social life – a world where there was no such thing as society, only individual men and women and families – it would take the erosion of those wider structures of community for this to come to pass.

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<sup>99</sup> Lawrence notes that ‘between 1914 and 1950 families in Britain were less mobile than they had been for generations’. *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 22.

## **Section 2: Weddings after Modernity**

### **Chapter 4: Deregulation and Decline: The Law and Demographics of Scottish Weddings, c.1977-2018**

#### Introduction

In section one, it was argued that mid-twentieth century wedding culture is best seen through the lens of modernity, as this provides a framework for understanding the thoroughgoing hegemony and homogeneity of marriage formation and its rituals in that period. The virtual universalisation of regular marriage in the mid-twentieth century enforced some degree of wedding ritual as a prerequisite to marriage, and the wedding culture that developed in this context was stratified by strict social and moral criteria attached to ritual form. Section two explores what came after this period in the history of marriage formation, as marriage became less universal and the ritual surrounding it less constrained by law and social norms. If, as we saw in section one, marriage was part of the standard route into adulthood for the first post-war generation, this was less and less the case for their children and grandchildren. These generations nonetheless maintained a cultural significance for wedding culture that far surpassed the real reach of marriage in Scottish society. In order to understand this sustained wedding culture, we must first address the structural contradictions that underlay it. This chapter outlines the legal framework and demographic realities of marriage formation in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, providing the structural contexts for the wedding culture discussed in chapters five and six.

The developments of major significance in this regard can neatly be summed up under the headings of 'deregulation' and 'decline'. The former refers to legal reforms, beginning with the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 and continuing along the same lines through to the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014, which gradually relaxed the already fairly minimal restrictions on the ceremonial form taken by weddings in Scotland. Perhaps paradoxically, this deregulation took place alongside a parallel process of decline in the overall number of people marrying in Scotland each year. Even as the liberalisation of wedding ceremonies facilitated a growing commercial culture of conspicuous consumption, the place of marriage in the demographics of Scottish society was on the wane. As Michael Anderson notes, however, the decline of marriage was not synonymous with the decline of long-term romantic relationships, as cohabitation rose exponentially in the same period.

However, even this does not account fully for the decline in marriage.<sup>1</sup> What cohabitation did achieve, however, was to displace marriage as the only socially acceptable means of family formation. The decline of marriage was an overdetermined phenomenon, rooted in myriad social, cultural and economic developments, and formed an integral part of what is now commonly regarded as the Second Demographic Transition.<sup>2</sup> Nonetheless, the growth of pre- or non-marital cohabitation in particular encapsulates the significance of the decline, demonstrating its fundamental alteration of the lifecycle that had been so thoroughly standardised in the mid-twentieth century.

The decline of marriage is not, of course, unique to Scotland. However, the distinctive legal and demographic history of this process in Scotland serves to illuminate the local dynamics of a transnational phenomenon, allowing greater insight into the contemporary history of marriage formation. Jane Mair has suggested that Scotland has ‘less a law of marriage and more a law of weddings’.<sup>3</sup> While this is primarily a comment on the state’s withdrawal from the substantive prescription of the behaviour of spouses within marriage, it also points to the fortunes of ritual in an age after modernity. As we shall see, there has been a growing popular tendency to conflate the ritual of weddings and the legal institution of marriage, and the direction of reform in Scotland’s ‘law of weddings’ has done little to discourage this. For reasons that will become clear below, this makes Scotland particularly well placed to provide a case study in marriage after modernity.

#### The 1977 Act and Beyond<sup>4</sup>

The Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977 remains the substantive legislation underlying marriage formation in Scotland. The Act was the first major legislation in this area since 1939 and replaced much of the legislation previously in force.<sup>5</sup> It was the fruition of enquiries concluded almost a decade earlier by the Kilbrandon Committee, which reported in 1968. This enquiry awaits thoroughgoing research of the kind that Dempsey devoted to the Morison Committee. Such an investigation falls outwith the scope of the present study, but

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Anderson, *Scotland’s Populations*, p. 208.

<sup>2</sup> See Ron Lesthaeghe, ‘The Second Demographic Transition: A Concise Overview of its Development’, *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America* 111:51 (2014), 18112–18115.

<sup>3</sup> Jane Mair, ‘Revisiting Marriage as a Legal Concept’, unpublished conference paper. I am grateful to Professor Mair for granting access to this paper.

<sup>4</sup> Parts of this and the following section which discuss the law as it currently exists are adapted from my article ‘Beyond Belief: The Law and Practice of Marriage Formation in Contemporary Scotland’, *Child and Family Law Quarterly*, 30:3 (2017), 237-257

<sup>5</sup> Marriage (Scotland) Act 1977, Schedule 2.



the report and the legislation that followed on from it offer crucial context to the development of wedding culture in this transitional period. It is also worth noting this process was not greeted with a great deal of attention in the press and was perhaps even less understood by contemporary Scots than the 1939 Act. A brief note in the *Aberdeen Evening Express* erroneously claimed that Scots law was being brought into line with English and Welsh law to allow legal recognition of non-Christian weddings.<sup>6</sup> In fact, there is nothing in the 1977 Act, nor in the Kilbrandon Report, to suggest that harmonisation with English and Welsh law was either intended or enacted. The considerable distance between the two jurisdictions was in fact maintained and, arguably, even increased. England and Wales retained a rather complex set of legal preliminaries, including banns proclaimed by the Established Church, as well as stricter residence requirements and a ‘buildings-based’ system of celebrant registration, all of which put them at odds with developments north of the border (see below).

A surprising continuity between the Morison and Kilbrandon reports was the spectre of ‘runaway marriage’ at Gretna.<sup>7</sup> The much more detailed statistics available for the period from 1974 onwards mean that we can gauge more accurately the real scale of the ‘problem’ at this time. As noted in chapter two, there was a marked revival in the use of Gretna as a wedding destination in the 1950s and ‘60s. However, by the middle years of the 1970s, only around 75 couples on average married at Gretna each year, and a third of the grooms and two fifths of the brides involved were normally resident in Scotland. As with the Morison Committee, Kilbrandon’s preoccupation with Gretna was rooted in other contemporary anxieties surrounding marriage. The sensitivities of foreign governments regarding underage citizens wishing to avoid parental consent requirements were a concern, and the Committee consulted with foreign ministries on the matter.<sup>8</sup> Of greater significance than ‘international good manners’,<sup>9</sup> as the report described its approach to Gretna, however, was a broader concern with early marriage. The Committee gave serious consideration to the merits of raising the marriage age. Ultimately, they decided against doing so, fearing it would cause an increase in illegitimacy,<sup>10</sup> but the cultural weight of these anxieties is evident in their decision to reproduce in full in the Report the evidence submitted by the Marriage Guidance Council on the matter.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 24 November 1976.

<sup>7</sup> Kilbrandon Report, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>11</sup> This concerned imposing a requirement for parental consent for underage marriage. See *ibid.*, appendix 4.

The eventual solution to the Gretna question indicated the direction in which the law would continue to develop in subsequent decades. Instead of imposing stricter residence requirements in order to prevent runaway marriage to Scotland,<sup>12</sup> the Committee recommended that the residence requirement be abolished, and the 1977 Act provided that the qualification should instead depend on individual parties' entitlement to marry according to their jurisdiction of legal domicile.<sup>13</sup> This also meant that couples now had to submit notice of their intention to marry in the registration district where the wedding was to take place, not in their district(s) of residence, as was previously the case for couples resident in Scotland.<sup>14</sup> This solution defused the political tensions around runaway marriage, but it maintained Scotland's place as a wedding destination for couples who could legitimately have married at home. This reform would fundamentally shape the profile of marriage formation in Scotland for decades to come. Insofar as it registered in the press at the time, the 1977 Act was seen as putting an end to marriage at Gretna, but this could not be further from the truth.<sup>15</sup> In 1977, 80 couples married at Gretna; in 1978, the number was 228. By the mid-1980s, an average of almost 900 couples married there each year, rising to almost 4,000 by the mid-1990s,<sup>16</sup> and reaching a peak of 5,555 in 2004. The impact was not confined to Gretna. Between 1974 and 1977, an average of around 1.5 percent of marriages in Scotland involved couples in which neither party was normally resident in the country. In 1978 this rose to 2.2 percent; by 1985 it was 5.7, and in 1990 it was 10.9. The increase continued and, since 1996, the share of Scottish marriages represented by such couples has never fallen below 20 percent, reaching a remarkable peak of 30.2 percent in 2004. A disproportionate share of these weddings have taken place at Gretna since 1974, hovering close to 50 percent since 1992.

The full cultural implications of this dynamic are explored in greater depth in the following chapters. For the moment, it will suffice to underline the disconnect it creates between the statistics of marriage in Scotland and the demographics of the resident Scottish population. The decline in marriage visible in Scottish civil registration statistics in fact *exaggerates* the extent of marriage in Scotland (see Appendix 1). A clearer image is given by census data. In the 1971 census, the percentage of men in the 30 to 34 age bracket who had never been

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<sup>12</sup> Under the Marriage Notice (Scotland) Act 1878, 15 days' residence was required for the publication of notice.

<sup>13</sup> Kilbrandon Report, p. 22; 1977 Act, s. 3(5).

<sup>14</sup> 1977 Act, s. 3; s. 26(2).

<sup>15</sup> This was overwhelmingly the tenor of the press clippings collected by the Committee itself. NRS/HH41/2067, press reports, 'Report of Committee on Marriage Law of Scotland (Kilbrandon Committee)'.  
<sup>16</sup> Based on aggregates for 1983-85 and 1995-97.

married was at its lowest since the census began, at 14.2 percent. Of women of the same age, only 9.2 percent had never married, and this figure was even lower in 1981, at 8.9 percent.<sup>17</sup> For men, this figure rose rapidly from the 1980s onwards, reaching 24.9 percent in 1991 and far surpassing the previous peak in 2001, with 45.2 percent of men in this cohort never having married. At the time of the last census in 2011, 58.2 percent of men in their early 30s had never married. The figures for women have undergone a similar trajectory. The proportion unmarried in their early 30s roughly doubled between 1981 and 1991 (to 17.4 percent) and again between 1991 and 2001 (to 35.1 percent), reaching almost half in 2011 (49.7 percent).<sup>18</sup> The census and civil registration data thus both show a trajectory of decline in the overall uptake of marriage in Scotland, but in the latter case it is attenuated by Scotland's prominent role as a marriage destination. For this reason, I have attempted as far as possible to isolate the resident population of Scotland in the marriage statistics, in order to explore the cultural and demographic reality of marriage formation within Scottish society, rather than simply within Scottish territory.

The 1977 Act resolved the question of Gretna, albeit with rather counterintuitive consequences. When it came to the other major preoccupation of the Kilbrandon Committee, however, the problem more or less resolved itself. At the time of the report's publication, the average age at marriage for both men and women was close to an all-time low of 26 and 24 respectively, where it remained more or less unchanged from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s.<sup>19</sup> From around 1974, however, before Kilbrandon's recommendations were even enacted, the marriage age for both men and women (excluding non-resident couples) began a steady and sustained upward trajectory. Anderson notes that census data suggests the 'flight from early marriage' happened later in Scotland than in England.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, when we isolate marriages in which neither partner had previously been married, we see that the upward trajectory begins around 1980 rather than 1974. Particular attention is due to these 'bachelor/spinster' marriages because they encapsulate the household formation dynamic that was archetypal, in both ideology and reality, in the post-war period. Isolating such cases in the period of marriage's decline underlines the complexity and incompleteness of a culture

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<sup>17</sup> Anderson, *Scotland's Populations from the 1850s to Today*, p. 207.

<sup>18</sup> The 35-39 age bracket would give a better comparison over time, as the average age at bachelor/spinster marriage (see below) for resident men has fallen within the 30-34 bracket since 2005, meaning that in 2011 this group would contain a substantial number of men still likely to marry. Anderson's tables do not, however, contain this data, nor is it available from the standard census outputs.

<sup>19</sup> It should be noted that the NRS data used throughout this study includes same-sex marriages but is not coded for gender. 'Partner 1' and 'partner 2' designate grooms and brides respectively in opposite-sex marriages, but are gender neutral for same-sex marriages. However, due to the relatively small number of these, the terms 'bride and groom' remain largely representative when discussing gender differences in age at marriage, etc.

<sup>20</sup> Anderson, *Scotland's Populations from the 1850s to Today*, p. 208.

shift liable to appear more radical than it really was. Indeed, in the 1970s, the average bachelor/spinster bride was 21 and the average bachelor/spinster groom 23, and throughout the 1980s the average couple of this kind would still both be 25 years of age or under (excluding non-residents). Early marriage was clearly still a reality in Scotland well into the late twentieth century.<sup>21</sup> These figures must, however, be qualified by highlighting the proportion of the total that were bachelor/spinster marriages. In 1974, they made up just under 81 percent of all marriages in Scotland (excluding non-residents); by 1980 it was 74.8 percent, falling to 69.3 percent in 1990, and reaching a low of 60.8 percent in 2000.<sup>22</sup> It may have lasted longer in Scotland than in some other places, but the post-war norm of widespread early marriage as a standard element of the lifecycle was gradually eroded from the 1970s onwards.

Overall, then, the changing demographics of age and marital status occurred independently of the 1977 Act. However, another aspect of the Kilbrandon Report which did directly influence the landscape of marriage in Scotland was its recommended reform of the system of denomination. The basic mechanism for organising solemnisation and ensuring registration of marriages in Scotland has been described as a ‘schedule system’, in contrast to England and Wales’s ‘buildings-based system’. In Scotland, instead of an appointed person overseeing the legality and registration of marriages performed in officially designated places of worship,<sup>23</sup> the state authorises marriage celebrants as representatives of recognised denominations, with registration accomplished by means of a marriage schedule. The latter is issued after a notice period,<sup>24</sup> and the couple sign it during the wedding ceremony, as do their witnesses and celebrant, before returning it to the registrar. It is thus the celebrant, rather than the church or other venue, that is authorised for the purpose of solemnisation. This has been the case throughout the modern history of Scots marriage law, and it was this system that underpinned the diversity of venues found in religious weddings prior to the Second World War. The major innovation of the 1977 Act was to set out in statute how new denominations could register celebrants, and which denominations would be permanently recognised.<sup>25</sup> The latter are known as ‘prescribed bodies’, and their

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<sup>21</sup> Indeed, even sociologists working on marriage in England found that it was still linked to the transition to adulthood in the late 1980s. Lewis, *The End of Marriage?*, p. 131.

<sup>22</sup> Interestingly, the proportion of bachelor/spinster marriages among residents has risen steadily since 2000, reaching 69.1% in 2018, roughly the rate seen in the early 1990s; however, the total number of marriages has remained relatively low.

<sup>23</sup> This is the case in England. On this system, see Kennett, ‘The Place of Worship in Solemnization of a Marriage’.

<sup>24</sup> This is now 28 days, under the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Act 2014 Act, s. 18(2).

<sup>25</sup> The Church of Scotland still enjoys special statutory status and its celebrants are automatically authorised to perform marriages between people of different sexes. 1977 Act, s. 8(1)(a)(i).

celebrants are automatically authorised,<sup>26</sup> while other organisations may apply to register celebrants under section 9 of the Act, providing that the Registrar General agrees that they qualify as religious (or, since 2014, belief) bodies.<sup>27</sup>

The result of this reform was the first legal weddings solemnised according to faiths other than Christianity and Judaism, as well as the expansion of the number of denominations falling under these categories. It should be stressed that the Act did not provide for the registration of religious organisations, but rather of their celebrants. Nonetheless, the latter are authorised on the strength of their organisations' qualification as a religious (or belief) body, and the organisation provides the denomination under which a marriage is registered. Embedded in the system, then, is the assumption that an institution of some sort must oversee the exchange of matrimonial consent. However, the relationship between the institution and the couples it married was not prescribed by the 1977 Act, and existing regulations to this effect concerning Jewish and Quaker weddings were removed. Prior to the Act, Jewish weddings could only take place between two Jewish partners, and the requirement for Quaker weddings was that at least one party officially belong to the Quaker faith.<sup>28</sup> Denomination thus remained a fundamental aspect of the administration of marriage formation, but its definition was significantly liberalised, albeit still within the realms of religion as traditionally understood.

On the surface, the reform did little to change the overall profile of marriage in Scotland. The Church of Scotland, civil marriage, and the Roman Catholic Church remained (in that order) the dominant forces in marriage formation, accounting for around 94 percent of all marriages until the late 1980s. However, the new system of celebrant registration did see a proliferation of new denominations that, with very few exceptions, registered an extremely small number of marriages (if any). Although this shift barely registers in national-level marriage statistics, significant local permutations offer crucial insight into the nature of denomination in late twentieth century Scotland. I have discussed this elsewhere with

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<sup>26</sup> Specified in the Marriage (Prescription of Religious Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 1977. These were: The Baptist Union of Scotland; The Congregational Union of Scotland; The Episcopal Church in Scotland and other Churches of the Anglican Communion; The Free Church of Scotland; The Hebrew Congregation; The Methodist Church in Scotland; The Religious Society of Friends; The Roman Catholic Church; The Salvation Army; The Scottish Unitarian Association; and The United Free Church of Scotland.

<sup>27</sup> 1977 Act, s 9(2). Organisations could already be authorised at the discretion of the Registrar General, but the register had no statutory basis before the 1977 Act. See Lyall, *Church and State in Scotland*, p. 166. At the time of the Kilbrandon Committee, the list kept by the Registrar General named 132 organisations, but it is not clear how many of these were actively registering marriages at this point. See Kilbrandon Report, p. 33.

<sup>28</sup> Clive and Wilson, *The Law of Husband and Wife*, p. 102. The requirements were removed by the 1977 Act's repeal of the Marriage Notice (Scotland) Act 1878. See 1977 Act, schedule 3.

reference to Gretna,<sup>29</sup> and the revealing case of Bathgate Community Church is considered in chapter six. For the moment, it will suffice to note the numbers involved. In the period from 1974 to 1976, 92 denominations accounted for all marriages registered in Scotland, rising to 142 in 1983 to 1985, and again to 235 in 1995 to 1997.<sup>30</sup> While the number of religious denominations on offer has never been slight, the 1977 Act clearly expanded the possibilities offered by the Scottish ‘schedule system’.

As noted above, a major consequence of the new system of celebrant registration was the legal recognition of a wider range of religious wedding ceremonies. The Kilbrandon committee had heard evidence from the Jamiat Ittihad-ul-Muslimin (Muslim Mission) and the Sikh Sabha Association and it appears that these bodies made their case by stressing their communities’ compliance with the civil law of Scotland, particularly with regard to monogamy.<sup>31</sup> It is not clear why these groups had to justify themselves in this way. There was no question of reforming the legal *effects* of marriage as opposed to the procedures of its formation. The implication is that there was some concern that granting legal recognition to a broader variety of rituals might in some way undermine the law of marriage. Beyond what this says about inter-community relations in Scotland at this time, it underlines the importance implicitly attributed to ritual even in fairly technical legal contexts. This point is reinforced in the evidence given by the groups, which drew analogies between their respective faiths and the Christian denominations already authorised to perform weddings. Particularly telling is the Sikh Sabha’s claim that the Sikh marriage ceremony, as the Report put it, ‘in its essentials, differs very little from that of a Quaker marriage, even as regards the nature of the respective celebrants.’<sup>32</sup> The Report recommended that religious marriage celebrants of all faiths should be eligible for authorisation to perform weddings. This recommendation apparently met with no great resistance. When the new Act came into force in 1978, Hindu, Muslim and Sikh organisations were quick to register celebrants. It should be stressed, though, that not all Scottish adherents of these faiths who get married do so by having a legally recognised ceremony according to their own religious customs. Since 1978 there have been a few hundred officially non-Christian religious weddings each year in Scotland (though the numbers vary greatly), but this is not enough to account for the relevant

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<sup>29</sup> McLean, ‘Beyond Belief’, pp. 243-6.

<sup>30</sup> Numbers derived from three-year rather than single-year datasets have been used here, as the small numbers of marriages registered by some denominations means that a larger sample is needed to give a true sense of the number of denominations generally in operation.

<sup>31</sup> Kilbrandon Report, p. 37.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

populations.<sup>33</sup> Many still have civil weddings for the purpose of legal recognition, before enjoying the full religious celebration, separate from any state oversight. Sometimes this is not entirely a matter of choice. As throughout the period examined here, popular knowledge of the law of marriage formation remains patchy. Indeed, one survey respondent married in a civil ceremony in the late 1990s because she mistakenly believed that ‘this was the only option for legal marriage of Muslims.’<sup>34</sup>

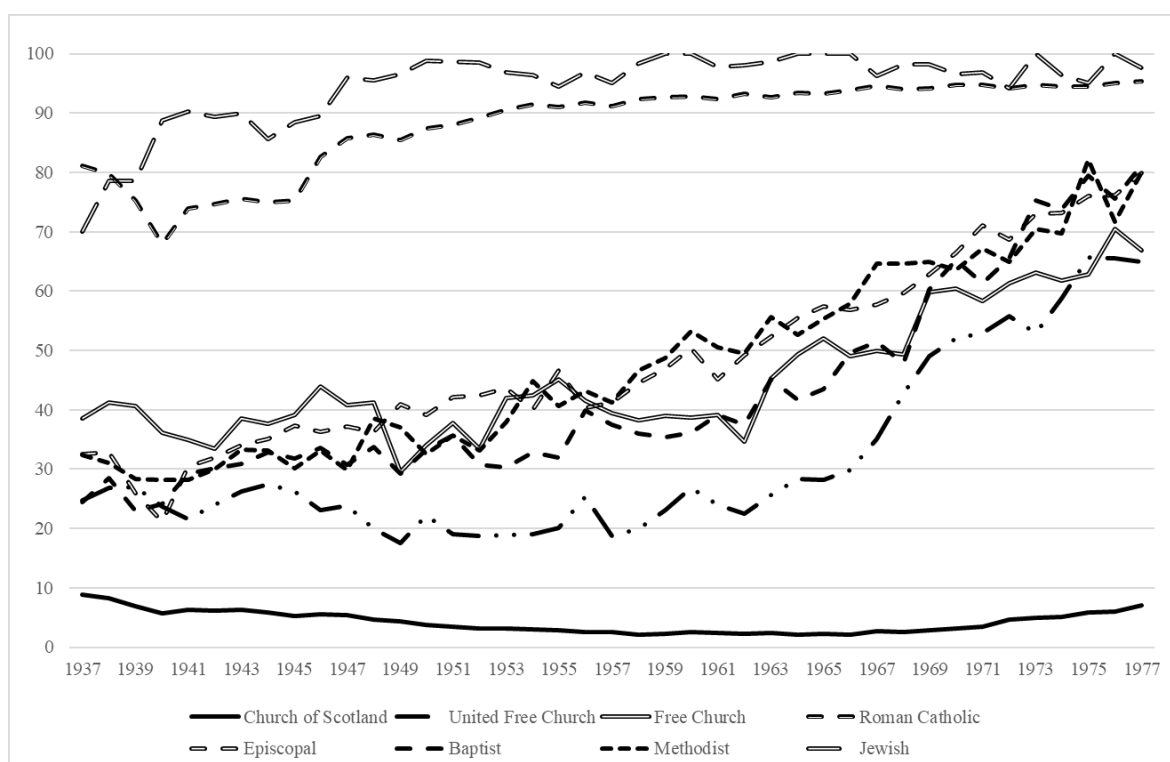


Figure 4.1: Marriages preceded by civil publication for both parties, by denomination (percentage of total marriages registered under a given denomination), 1937-1977. By 1977, data was also available for the Congregational Church, Christian Brethren and Salvation Army, as well as the aggregate of remaining denominations. All of these showed the same trend towards civil publication, but have been removed from the graph for the sake of legibility.

The final area in which the 1977 Act effected thoroughgoing reform was the legal preliminaries to marriage. As with the rest of the Act, these reforms garnered scant public attention. In one sense this is unsurprising, given the rather technical nature of the subject. However, the Act resolved an issue that had caused considerable controversy upon the publication of the Morison Report four decades earlier, making the muted reception a significant indicator of cultural change as Scotland entered the late twentieth century. The reform in question concerned the legal effect of bans proclaimed by the Church of Scotland.

<sup>33</sup> Although it appears to have enjoyed proportionally greater uptake than in England and Wales. See McLean, ‘Beyond Belief’, pp. 249-50.

<sup>34</sup> Survey response (female TV producer aged 31 at time of wedding in 1998).

At Kilbrandon's recommendation, this was abolished. Remarkably, the Church did not oppose this measure.<sup>35</sup> Popular practice around the preliminaries to marriage had changed significantly since the Church proved its civic credentials during the Second World War. While the use of banns had grown among many denominations during the 1930s, the trend by the 1960s was towards civil publication among all denominations for which figures are available (figure 4.1). Banns were increasingly the preserve of Church of Scotland weddings, of which only around 2.5 percent were preceded by civil publication for both partners in the 1960s. By the time its legal effect was abolished, at least two thirds of marriages solemnised by each other denomination involved no proclamation by the Church of Scotland. Among Catholics, who had made significant use of banns during the war, 97.6 percent of weddings in 1977 were preceded by civil publication only, and even within Church of Scotland weddings there were signs of a drift away from banns, with 7.1 percent of couples married by the Church dispensing with its preliminaries in the last year of their legal status. If the 1939 Act's failure to reform preliminaries had confirmed the Church's 'national' status in matters of marriage, the 1977 Act formalised its decline.

Less sensitive than the abolition of banns, but similarly indicative of the direction of historical change, was the abolition of a more recent addition to the legal preliminaries to marriage: the sheriff's licence. As noted in chapter one, this was introduced alongside civil marriage to allow couples who, for legitimate reasons, could not fulfil the statutory notice period to seek dispensation through the local sheriff. The 1977 Act ended this practice, placing all discretionary powers of exemption in the hands of the Registrar General for Scotland.<sup>36</sup> While this was undoubtedly a marginal issue – in 1977 under 2 percent of marriages were preceded by sheriff's licence – it nonetheless indicates a certain structural disconnect between weddings and the places and communities in which they were situated. As we have seen, this came in the context of another reform that uncoupled residence and place of marriage, with couples now required to submit notice only in the district where the marriage was to take place. In this geographical sense, but also in the proliferating denominations and the abolition of the few 'membership requirements' for religious marriage, the 1977 Act was the first major step in legislating the primacy of personal choice in marriage formation.

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<sup>35</sup> Kilbrandon Report, pp. 19-20.

<sup>36</sup> 1977 Act, schedule 3.



## The Politics of Ritual: Reform in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

After the 1977 Act, there were no major reforms to the law of marriage formation until the twenty-first century. During this time, the denominational profile of weddings at the national level also remained remarkably constant. The inclusion of non-resident couples in national figures creates the impression of a continued growth in the civil marriage rate (see figure 4.2 and Appendix 1), followed by a reversal of this in the late 1990s in favour of the Church of Scotland, as well as a number of smaller Christian denominations. When non-resident couples are removed, however, the state of equilibrium between Church of Scotland and civil as the two most common ‘denominations’<sup>37</sup> remains constant, with some minor fluctuations, into the early years of the new millennium. In other words, for couples resident in Scotland at the time of marriage, the choice of denomination was likely to be much the same in the year 2000 as it would have been in 1980.<sup>38</sup>

This denominational stasis conceals considerable ritual change. This is discussed fully in chapters five and six, but it is also suggested by the statistics, notably in the speed with which the denominational profile was overhauled upon the introduction of new legislation in 2002. The Marriage (Scotland) Act 2002 allowed civil marriages to take place in ‘Approved Licensed Venues’; that is, outwith the registration office in places authorised by the local authority for weddings to be conducted by registrars.<sup>39</sup> Similar legislation introduced in England and Wales in 1994 had seen a surge in the rate of civil marriage, and in Scotland the effect was the same.<sup>40</sup> In 2002, 39.8 percent of Scottish weddings (excluding non-resident couples) were civil ceremonies, and by 2004 this had surged to 47.1 percent. Registration office ceremonies, which had, of course, previously been the only available form of civil ceremony, fell in the same period to 33.9 percent of the resident Scottish total, and have continued a slow decline up to the present, accounting for 23.5 percent of such weddings in 2018. The corollary of this was that, for the first time since the 1970s, an increasing rate of civil marriage was reflected in a declining share for the Church of Scotland. Between 2002 and 2004, this fell from 38.7 to 33.3 percent of residents’ weddings. Clearly there was a great

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<sup>37</sup> For the purposes of registration, ‘civil’ is a category of denomination, with multiple civil ‘denominations’ now recorded based on whether the wedding took place in a registration office, an Approved Licenced Venue, or a place agreed between the couples and local authority. See below.

<sup>38</sup> The exception to this was a considerable decline in the share accounted for by Catholic weddings, which fell from 14.8% in 1980 to 9.2% in 2000 (excluding non-residents). Interestingly, this decline does not appear to have correlated with the fortunes of either the Church of Scotland or civil marriage, suggesting that Catholics may have been defecting to the Church of Scotland as much as to civil ceremonies.

<sup>39</sup> Marriage (Scotland) Act 2002, s 1.

<sup>40</sup> John Haskey, ‘Marriage Rites: Trends in Marriages by Manner of Solemnisation and Denomination in England and Wales, 1841-2012’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al, pp. 30-31.

demand for non-religious ceremonies affording greater personal choice as to venue, and this demand was suddenly met by the law.



Figure 4.2: Civil marriage rate by residence of parties (percentage of total marriages registered for each group), 1974-2018.

The rate of civil marriage levelled off at around 49 to 50 percent from 2006 onwards, with roughly equal shares taking place in registration offices and in other venues.<sup>41</sup> Further deregulation of civil venues by the 2014 Act does not appear to have made any discernible difference to the overall civil marriage rate. This reform effectively applied the flexibility of religious (and now belief) marriage to civil ceremonies, removing the need for an Approved Licenced Venue and requiring instead simply that the place of marriage be agreed between the couple and the local authority.<sup>42</sup> Of greater significance to the overall denominational profile of Scottish weddings was the recognition of the Humanist Society of Scotland (HSS) as a ‘religious’ organisation for the purposes of celebrant registration in 2005. This was a discretionary fudge on the part of the Registrar General, but the 2014 Act resolved the contradiction of Humanist ‘religious’ weddings by extending the registration of celebrants allowed under the 1977 Act to Humanist and other non-religious ‘belief’ organisations.<sup>43</sup> It should be noted that ‘belief marriage’ does not constitute a separate category of ceremony.

<sup>41</sup> However, in 2017 it fell below 48% of resident couples for the first time since 2004, dropping again to 46.9% in 2018. This is a very small change and it is too soon to tell if it indicates a new period of decline, but it is suggestive in the context of continued growth in Humanist ceremonies (see below).

<sup>42</sup> 2014 Act, s 21(2). Restrictions were, however, introduced concerning the use of religious premises for civil weddings; 2014 Act, s. 12(2)(a); s. 13(2)(a).

<sup>43</sup> 2014 Act, s. 12.

The main legal distinction in this regard is now between ‘civil’ and ‘religious or belief’ weddings. The existing regulations surrounding religious weddings, including the lack of restrictions with regard to venue, were thus applied automatically to belief marriage. In practice, this revealed a similar demand for personalised ritual as that catered to by the liberalisation of civil venues. Within five years of their introduction, Humanist ceremonies accounted for just over 8 percent of weddings among resident couples, a figure that reached 25.1 percent in 2018.<sup>44</sup> This remarkable rise was almost entirely at the expense of the Church of Scotland. The decline that had begun with the introduction of Approved Licensed Venues continued unabated after the civil rate levelled off, and the ‘national’ Church’s share among residents fell from 29.6 percent in 2006 to 11.1 percent in 2018.

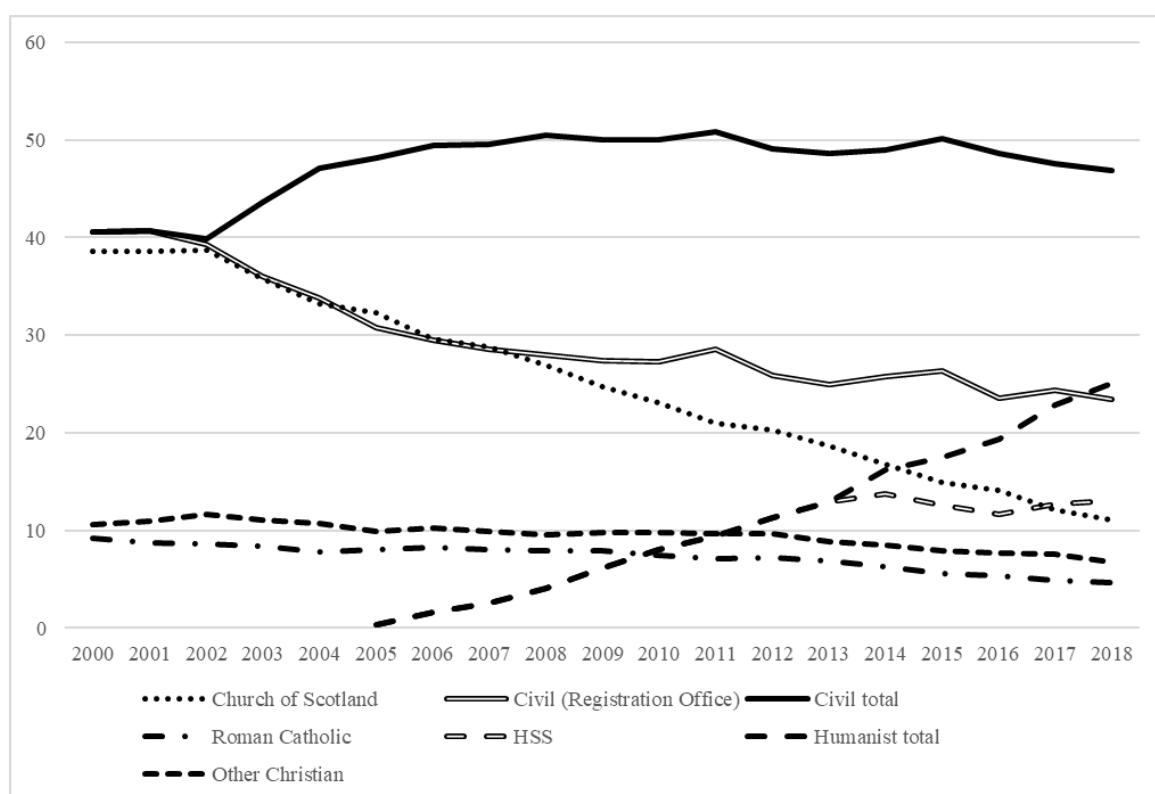


Figure 4.3: Marriages among resident couples by major denomination (percentage of total), 2000-2018.

The past two decades have thus seen a complete overhaul of the denominational profile of marriage formation (see figure 4.3). However, even beyond the dramatic decline of the Church of Scotland and the new addition of Humanism, a subtler change in the overall denominational landscape has also occurred. It was noted above that the number of denominations grew substantially after the introduction of the 1977 Act. One might therefore

<sup>44</sup> Another distortion caused by the inclusion of non-resident couples in statistics is to underplay slightly the significance of Humanist weddings, as these are virtually absent from the Gretna wedding industry. When non-resident couples are included, the Humanist total for 2018 is 22.2%.

expect the introduction of belief marriage to lead to further expansion, but this has not been the case. While new Humanist ‘denominations’ have indeed emerged (see chapter six), the overall number has in fact fallen slightly. This began, however, not with the 2014 Act, but apparently in response to the liberalisation of civil venues. From 235 in the mid-1990s, the number of denominations registering marriages fell back to 216 for the period from 2004 to 2006, and in 2016 to 2018 there were only 213. This would suggest that part of the reason for the expansion of religious denominations after 1977 was popular demand of freedom for choice in venues, rather than a diversification in religious affiliations (see chapter six).

The twenty-first century has thus seen a rapid expansion in the range of options available to couples wishing to marry in Scotland. It might be expected that this would make marriage a more attractive prospect for couples in long-term relationships. However, neither venue liberalisation nor Humanism had any impact on the overall number of resident Scottish couples choosing to get married. After the wartime marriage boom, the number of marriages registered in Scotland stabilised at between 40,000 and 44,000 per year from around 1949 to 1974. From 1974, excluding non-resident couples, the number of marriages declined steadily until around 1997, stabilising thereafter at between 20,000 and 23,000 annually (see Appendix 1).<sup>45</sup> The period since the 1977 Act has thus been one of decline in terms of the numbers of Scottish couples marrying. The liberalisation effected by that act and subsequent reforms may have opened Scotland up as a wedding destination, but it did not increase the uptake of marriage among Scots.

One twenty-first century reform that did open marriage to a larger constituency – though the longer-term effect on overall nuptiality appears to be minimal – was the introduction of same-sex marriage by the 2014 Act. This was achieved not by expanding existing legislation to cover same-sex couples, but rather by duplicating it.<sup>46</sup> This was meant to ensure that organisations could not be forced to solemnise such weddings against their will, a curious measure given that, as Brown et al note, no religious organisation in Scotland has ever been forced to solemnise a marriage to which it objected on any grounds.<sup>47</sup> As a result of this, there is now a separate set of prescribed bodies for same-sex marriage, and organisations authorised to register celebrants for opposite-sex marriage are not automatically registered

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<sup>45</sup> The number of resident marriages reached its twenty-first century peak of 23,459 in 2015, but this figure is inflated by the conversion of civil partnerships to marriages following the 2014 Act.

<sup>46</sup> 2014 Act, s. 2(b).

<sup>47</sup> Brown et al, *Religion in Scots Law*, p. 124.

for same-sex marriage, and vice versa.<sup>48</sup> Significantly, the extension of marriage formation to same-sex couples is not the only means by which this new constituency has been included in wedding culture. The 2014 Act also extended the category of denomination to civil partnerships, allowing them to be registered by means of a religious or belief ceremony.<sup>49</sup> Accordingly, there are now also prescribed bodies for civil partnership registration.<sup>50</sup> This reform has been criticised as a regressive inclusion of religion in an area of the law that was originally free from its influence.<sup>51</sup> However, in light of the discussion in this chapter, it seems in keeping with the emphasis on ritual in recent marriage law reforms. While civil partnerships are still a distinct legal category, and are registered rather than solemnised, the 2014 Act paved the way for their symbolic inclusion in wedding culture. This is not insignificant. When they were first introduced, some registrars expressed their disapproval of civil partnerships by agreeing to register them but refusing any provision of an ‘all-singing, all-dancing ceremony’.<sup>52</sup> To this extent, the official sanction of ritual in civil partnership registration clearly has profoundly political implications.

The practical consequences of extending the ritual culture of marriage formation to civil partnerships are likely to be limited, given the extremely small number of couples concerned.<sup>53</sup> However, the symbolic implications are potentially significant, given the recent

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<sup>48</sup> The Quakers and Unitarians are prescribed bodies for same-sex marriage, as stipulated in the Same Sex Marriage (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/305). Humanist Society Scotland was added to this list by the Civil Partnership, Marriage Between Persons of Different Sexes and Same Sex Marriage (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Amendment Regulations 2016 (SSI 2016/427), which prescribed it for all three purposes listed in the title of the legislation. The prescribed bodies for opposite-sex marriage named in The Marriage Between Persons of Different Sexes (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/304), Sch 1 are: The Baptist Union of Scotland; The Free Church of Scotland; The Free Presbyterian Church of Scotland; The Liberal Jewish Community in Scotland; The Methodist Church; The Orthodox Jewish Community in Scotland; The Reform Jewish Community in Scotland; The Religious Society of Friends (Quakers); The Roman Catholic Church; The Salvation Army; The Scottish Episcopal Church and other Churches of the Anglican Communion; The Scottish Unitarian Association; The Synod of Scotland of the United Reformed Church; The United Free Church of Scotland.

<sup>49</sup> 2014 Act, s. 24. The NRS does not keep a record of the denomination of such ceremonies.

<sup>50</sup> The Civil Partnership (Prescribed Bodies) (Scotland) Regulations 2014 (SSI 2014/303), named the Scottish Unitarian Association as the only prescribed body for civil partnership, with Humanist Society Scotland added in 2016 (see n. 48 above).

<sup>51</sup> K.M. Norrie, ‘Civil Partnership in Scotland, 2004–2014, and Beyond’, in *From Civil Partnership to Same-Sex Marriage: Interdisciplinary Reflections*, ed. by N. Barker and D. Monk (Abingdon: Routledge, 2015), p. 54.

<sup>52</sup> ‘Couples in Partnership Ceremonies’, *BBC News*, 20 December 2005.

<<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/scotland/4543274.stm>> [accessed 22 April 2018]. This controversy centred on the Western Isles, and it is perhaps not insignificant that only two civil partnerships have ever been registered in Na h-Eileanan Siar council area.

<sup>53</sup> 67 civil partnerships have been registered on average in Scotland each year since the introduction of same-sex marriage, compared to an annual average of 540 for the years 2005–2014. See Table MT.03: Civil Partnerships by Sex, Year and Council Area 2005 to 2018, <<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/statistics-and-data/statistics/statistics-by-theme/vital-events/marriages-and-civil-partnerships/marriages-and-civil-partnership-time-series-data>> [accessed 31 January 2020].

successful campaign for opposite-sex civil partnerships.<sup>54</sup> While the rationale of this campaign was grounded in the logic of equality between opposite- and same-sex couples, much of it also rested on a critique of marriage as an inherently patriarchal institution. A detailed assessment is outwith the scope of the present study, however it should be noted that wedding culture featured heavily in these critiques. The following is taken from the ‘Why Does it Matter?’ section of the Equal Civil Partnerships campaign website:

Many of those who support equality between women and men view marriage as a sexist institution – typified by traditions such as the father ‘giving the bride away’ to the husband, or the bride playing the role of ‘unspoiled’ virgin through the wearing of white. Whilst some people choose to do away with such symbolism, many other different-sex couples seeking legal union would prefer to drop the sexist associations of marriage entirely and form a civil partnership instead.<sup>55</sup>

Besides what it indicates about the conflation of marriage and weddings, this raises an important question: how meaningful will civil partnerships be as an alternative to marriage when extended to all couples in Scotland, given that the law now provides for something very much like wedding for their registration?

Beyond civil partnership reform, the 2014 Act’s extension of wedding culture raises more fundamental questions about marriage formation in contemporary society. It was noted in chapter one that a major consequence of the 1939 Act is the implicit insistence in law that marriage be formed by ritual means. As Scotland has moved out of the era in which that Act was implemented, its law of marriage formation has nonetheless doubled down on ritual. However, these reforms differ in one crucial respect from the 1939 Act. In place of the welfarist programme of providing swift and standardised – if potentially unromantic – access to the legal protections of marriage via an extensive municipal infrastructure, reform post-1977 has focused on the individual preferences of couples with the means to pursue meaningful ritual consumption.

This has not only taken place at the level of legislation. We also see the transition from welfarism towards more exclusively cultural concerns in the local administration of civil weddings. Beginning in the 1970s there was a spate of investment in facilities for civil weddings, primarily through the introduction of marriage ‘rooms’ or ‘suites’ that would

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<sup>54</sup> Enacted in England and Wales in the Civil Partnerships, Marriages and Deaths (Registration etc) Act 2019, s. 2. At the time of writing, the Scottish Government has recently introduced the Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill to the Scottish Parliament.

<sup>55</sup> This was included under the heading ‘The Feminism Factor’. ‘Why does it matter?’, *Equal Civil Partnerships* <<http://equalcivilpartnerships.org.uk/why-does-it-matter/>> [accessed 10 April 2019].

provide a specialised ritual space for marriage, alongside the option of marrying in the actual office of the registrar. This development is explored in detail in chapter five. For the purposes of this chapter it must simply be underlined that, at first, such facilities were offered at no extra charge to the couples using them. A detailed survey of each individual local authority would be required to expose this history in full, but it would appear that charges began to be introduced in the early 1990s.<sup>56</sup> It was stressed at the time that charges would be minimal (in Fife it was £15 over and above the statutory fee for the marriage), but it was a symbolically significant development. It came at the same time as the liberalisation of civil venues was being legislated for in England and Wales, a reform which, Stephen Cretney notes, was informed by the broader trend towards the marketisation of public services under the Thatcher and Major governments.<sup>57</sup> Though national legislation to this effect would not be introduced in Scotland until 2002, local authorities were enacting a similar change on the ground, marketizing a municipal infrastructure that had been introduced and developed up to that point with an implicit ethos of accessibility.<sup>58</sup> From its introduction in 1940, civil marriage had represented a relatively inconspicuous alternative to religious marriage. Marriage suites may have disrupted this specialisation to some extent, but the introduction of differential charges introduced a more concrete economic hierarchy of ritual within civil marriage for the first time.

The question of cost has particular significance in the context of declining marriage rates. In Jane Lewis's study, the most common reason given by one sample of cohabiting couples for not marrying was that they could not afford to, 'meaning that they could not afford a big white wedding'.<sup>59</sup> The law does not, of course, demand a 'big white wedding', but it does demand a wedding. As we see throughout this study, weddings are defined in popular culture as much as – or perhaps more than – in law. Whatever the orthodoxy of the state, orthopraxy imposes certain criteria of consumption when a marriage is formed. The Scottish Wedding Directory survey for 2018 found the average cost of weddings among respondents to be £35,674. The accuracy of this figure might be challenged (especially as the same survey vastly overrepresented Humanist weddings: 49 percent among respondents as opposed to 25

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<sup>56</sup> 'Couples to Pay More to Tie the Knot', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 28 January 1992; 'Up Goes the Cost of Tying the Knot!', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 19 March 1993. The former article noted of Fife that the 'cash-strapped regional council [was] set to join many other authorities' in introducing the charge.

<sup>57</sup> Cretney, *Family Law*, pp. 30-32.

<sup>58</sup> On the marketisation of local services, see Patricia McCafferty and Gerry Mooney, 'Resisting the Neoliberal "Modernisation" of Public Services in Contemporary Scotland: The Case of Public Sector Workers', in *Neoliberal Scotland*, ed. by Davidson, McCafferty and Miller.

<sup>59</sup> Jane Lewis, *The End of Marriage?*, p. 133. This also appears to be a factor even in the relatively modest weddings envisioned by poor women in the USA. See Edin and Kefalas, *Promises I Can Keep*, pp. 115-17.

percent among resident couples in NRS figures) but if it is evenly remotely indicative, it suggests a staggering pressure to consume among marrying couples.<sup>60</sup> Under the 1977 Act, religious and belief celebrants are forbidden from ‘carrying on a business of solemnising marriages’.<sup>61</sup> However, there is no such protection for couples against the costs peripheral to the solemnisation itself, and these now apply as much to civil as to religious or belief ceremonies. If there is a popular conflation of weddings and marriage, it has not been discouraged by the direction of reform in Scots law as outlined in this chapter. The decline in marriage is undoubtedly overdetermined, but we should not discount the possibility that one factor in this dynamic is a kind of gentrification of marriage under neoliberalism. More focussed research is required to ascertain the nature and extent of this phenomenon; coding a sample of NRS marriage records for social class would be a good place to start. In the absence of such a study, this chapter concludes with a consideration of one final index of the changing structural basis of popular practice in marriage formation in Scotland: geography.

### Destination Weddings: The Geography of Marriage since the 1970s

The geographical distribution of weddings in Scotland is much harder to ascertain than features such as denomination, age, and prior marital status, and does not lend itself as easily to clear analysis of trends over time. However, it is no less indicative of underlying structural dynamics, and so repays the effort of attempting some broad analysis. While NRS does code for the registration district in which a marriage is registered, the birthplace and usual residence of parties to marriage are coded only at country level. It is therefore impossible to gauge from civil registration statistics alone the exact extent to which couples resident in Scotland have moved within the country for the purpose of getting married.<sup>62</sup> However, it is possible to trace the changing numbers marrying in certain districts. This is, however, complicated by the ever-shifting administrative geographies of registration, as we shall see below. These technical difficulties notwithstanding, the remainder of this chapter outlines

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<sup>60</sup> Steph Telfer, ‘How Much Does the Average Scottish Wedding Cost and More, According to Scottish Wedding Census 2018’, Scottish Wedding Directory, 3 May 2019. <<https://www.scottishweddingdirectory.co.uk/wedding-inspiration/cost-average-scottish-wedding-scottish-wedding-census-2018-results/>> [accessed 30 January 2020]. This is the survey regularly reporting in the press since its inception in 2013; see for example John Jeffay, ‘Average Cost of Weddings in Scotland Revealed’, *Scotsman*, 22 April 2019. <<https://www.scotsman.com/news/people/average-cost-of-weddings-in-scotland-revealed-1-4912501>> [accessed 30 January 2020].

<sup>61</sup> 1977 Act, s 10(1)(d)(ii).

<sup>62</sup> Couples *leaving* Scotland to marry have not been considered here for reasons of scope. It has been suggested that up to 20% of UK couples marry abroad, but this is an industry estimate. See Karen Wilkes, *Whiteness, Weddings and Tourism in the Caribbean: Paradise for Sale* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), p. 1.



the geographical dynamics of marriage formation since the 1970s, arguing that this has been another axis of deregulation and decline.

Marriage formation in Scotland has always taken place under a rather different spatial regime to that in operation elsewhere in the UK. In contrast to England and Wales, there is no formal 'parish link' required of couples wishing to marry in the (formerly) established church, and even before the liberalisation of civil marriage venues, couples in Scotland were not restricted to marrying in the registration office of the district in which one or both of the parties was usually resident. The only genuine spatial connection required between a couple and the legal or administrative infrastructure of marriage formation concerned preliminaries. However, as already mentioned, the 1977 Act shifted the location of publication to the district where the wedding was to take place. The Kilbrandon Report's discussion of preliminaries presents an account of community life in the late 1960s that suggests the very notion of publicising an intended marriage was one entirely out of step with contemporary Scottish society:

In the years up to the end of the last century when most people lived and died in the same community in which they were born, and the Church was the focal point for disseminating information of all kinds, proclamation of banns was probably the best, if not the only, method of publicising an intended marriage. But if one of the primary purposes of banns is to make the intended marriage known to anyone who would have reason to object, and to give him an opportunity of doing so, then obviously they no longer fulfil that purpose. Banns may be called in any church, appointed for the purpose by the local Presbytery, which is located within the registration district in which the party resides. It is sufficient, in order to make our point, to say that the City of Glasgow forms a single registration district. [...] The criticisms made about the effectiveness of banns apply with equal force to the marriage notice. [...] such effect as it might have had at one time must now be less because of the increased mobility of the population, combined with the fact that the notices are displayed outside registration offices which are often located in inconvenient places. [...] We were advised not only that very few objections to marriages are lodged with registrars each year but also that it is very rare indeed for an objector to come forward because he has seen a notice displayed.<sup>63</sup>

The Committee recommended not only that banns should lose their legal effect, but that the practice of displaying lists of intended marriages outside registration offices should be discontinued. The 1977 Act only implemented the first of these recommendations, but the point had been made. Scottish communities in the late twentieth century were simply too big, too anonymous for publication to serve any purpose.

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<sup>63</sup> Kilbrandon Report, pp. 20-1.

If the reforms to legal preliminaries tended towards removing community oversight from the regulatory structures of marriage formation, there is much to suggest that similar developments in local administration have taken place. The number of registration districts recording marriages has declined consistently throughout the period for which data is available. When we consider the same three-year datasets used above to indicate the number of denominations in operation at a given time, we see a gradual decline in the number of districts, from 389 in 1974 to 1976, to 339 in 1998 to 2000. After this point, the number drops more quickly, falling by about 30 every three years in the new millennium, so that in 2016 to 2018 there were only 164 districts represented in the data. While some of the missing districts are simply sparsely populated areas, naturally registering no marriages in a given period, the use of a three-year data set should reduce this effect.<sup>64</sup> We can reasonably infer, then, that well over half of the districts operating in the mid-1970s had been lost through amalgamation by 2016. In these cases, it should be stressed, the abolition of a district for administrative purposes does not mean that weddings could no longer take place in that geographical area, but instead that these marriages would be registered elsewhere.

This is not, however, a simple matter of altered parameters of data collection. The abolition of a registration district potentially means the loss of a registrar, as under the terms of the Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965, each district had to have a registrar and registration office.<sup>65</sup> For religious weddings, the absence of a local registrar meant a longer journey to collect and return the marriage schedule. With regard to civil marriage, the loss of a registrar meant the end of such ceremonies in a given area. Not all registrars were authorised to perform civil weddings, so we do not find these in all districts. There appear to have been 310 registration offices in operation in the early days of civil marriage (see chapter one); by the time of the Kilbrandon Report in 1968, the number was 260.<sup>66</sup> Over the years for which data is available, the number of districts registering civil marriages in fact remained fairly constant at around 240 from the mid-1970s until the early 1990s. At this point it increased, reaching a peak of 263 in the period from 1992 to 1994. This coincides with the introduction of charges for marriage suite facilities, so it is possible

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<sup>64</sup> There are 401 separate districts represented in the data, so in no single three-year period were marriages registered in every possible district.

<sup>65</sup> The Registration of Births, Deaths and Marriages (Scotland) Act 1965, s. 8. When civil registration was first established by the 1854 Act, there were 1,027 districts, roughly coterminous with parishes, each of which had a registrar. Cameron, 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly', in *Medicine, Law and Public Policy in Scotland, c. 1850-1990*, ed. by Mark Freeman et al, p. 88.

<sup>66</sup> The Kilbrandon Report notes that this was out of a total of 501 registration districts, which suggests a major round of amalgamations took place between 1968 and 1974. Kilbrandon Report, p. 38.

that more offices were opened in the hope of raising revenue by this means.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the registration office at Gretna underwent a major renovation around this time.<sup>68</sup> Whatever the reason for the expansion, it had little impact on the number of civil weddings performed and was quickly reversed. The number of districts recording registration office ceremonies declined slowly through the rest of the 1990s, and sharply thereafter. In 2001-03 there were 236, and by 2016-18 there were just 141, a drop of over 100 from the early-1990s peak. The liberalisation of civil venues likely had a part to play in this development. In 1997 it was reported that plans to find new premises for Inverness's registration office could be abandoned if civil venue liberalisation was enacted in Scotland. The ability of registrars to marry couples outwith council premises was clearly conceived as sufficient reason to halt further investment in those facilities.<sup>69</sup>

At the national level, the redrawing of the civil marriage map was facilitated by the Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006, which effectively made local authorities and registration districts coterminous, meaning that Scotland thenceforth had, strictly speaking, only 32 registration districts, and therefore legally required only 32 offices and registrars.<sup>70</sup> This legal minimum has not been transposed to reality. Many historic registration districts are still used for the purposes of data collection, and in 2018 there were 126 districts recording registration office ceremonies, meaning that a district registrar must be available in these areas. However, the path has been cleared in law for provision in this area to be culled to little more than a skeleton of the former structures. Given the fortunes of local government in Scotland over the past decades, there seems little reason to believe this will not eventually come to pass.

This ever-shifting registration structure, combined with the lack of data on place of usual residence, makes it impossible to chart exactly the shifting connection between marriage formation and locality in Scotland. However, by mapping the actual incidence of marriage, we get a sense of some overall trends in the geographical distribution of weddings over

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<sup>67</sup> There is certainly evidence that some local authorities were actively courting such custom. At the turn of the century, Stirling Council was advertising its civil wedding facilities online to foreign couples in a section of their website titled 'Romantic Stirling'. 'Stirring Stirling Internet Wed-site', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 22 November 1999.

<sup>68</sup> G.W.L. Jackson, 'Marriages at Gretna, 1975-2000', GROS Occasional Paper No. 4 (2001), p. 3.

<sup>69</sup> 'Search May Not Be Needed', *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 28 March 1997. The particular case of Inverness is, moreover, indicative of the geographical trends discussed here with respect to wedding tourism: 'Scores of couples who flock to the Highlands every year for a romantic wedding get an almighty let-down if they tie the knot at Inverness registrar's office. [...] Councillors have long agreed the office is a poor advert for Inverness'.

<sup>70</sup> Local Electoral Administration and Registration Services (Scotland) Act 2006, s. 37(2).

time.<sup>71</sup> It is difficult to disaggregate those areas which have seen a real rise in the number of marriages registered from those that have simply become the only registration district for an area which was once composed of several. The latter explanation most likely applies to districts such as Inverurie, St Andrews, Dalkeith, Haddington, Bathgate and Livingston, situated in areas where many districts have become defunct since the 1970s. There are, however, several districts which have seen an increase representing more than a side-effect of redrawn boundaries. In the districts of Portree, Broadford, Lochalsh, Tobermory, Aviemore, Pitlochry, Aberfeldy, Callander, Aberfoyle and Menteith, and Arran the average annual number of marriages registered has increased appreciably since the 1970s. All of these districts are located in the Highlands and Islands (or at their periphery in the last three cases); that is, scenic areas which have been at the heart of the touristic appeal of Scotland since the nineteenth century. In contrast are districts such as Peterhead and Fraserburgh in the North East, and a number of the remaining districts in the West of Scotland, including Airdrie and Coatbridge in the central belt and Saltcoats in Ayrshire, all of which have seen a disproportionate *decrease* in the number of marriages registered. These are names associated more with post-industrial decline than the romantic pull of tartanry. It is not, however, a simple rural/urban split. In the same category fall the surviving Borders burgh districts, as well as Stranraer in the south west. What the areas of declining registration appear to have in common is the absence of a significant tourist industry, whether domestic or international. The results of mapping registration data in this way should, it must be stressed, be approached cautiously. The dataset used includes non-resident couples. This ensures all registration districts are included, but it is likely to overstate the influence of tourism compared to the behaviour of the resident Scottish population. This caveat notwithstanding, the findings presented here confirm that the decline of marriage in Scotland has not been a simple matter of fewer weddings across the country, but has been accompanied by a marked shift in the *places* of marriage.

One final piece of evidence confirms that there has been a growing tendency towards wedding tourism within Scotland. Survey respondents were asked where they were resident at the time of their wedding and were given the following options: ‘The same town/area as where the wedding took place’; ‘Elsewhere in Scotland’; and ‘Outside of Scotland’. Of those

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<sup>71</sup> This analysis was carried out by creating a Google map with markers indicating each registration district, shaded on a spectrum according to the number of marriages registered there in one three-year period per decade from the mid-1970s to mid-2010s. An interactive version of the map, as well as another showing the most popular denomination in each district for the same three-year periods, can be found at: <https://theviewfromwestrigg.wordpress.com/2019/03/28/scottish-wedding-maps-top-denomination-and-number-of-marriages-per-district-1970s-2010s/>

who married before 1978, 79.5 percent (151 respondents) got married where they were normally resident. For those marrying between 1978 and 2002, the figure was 66.2 percent (309), falling to 62.4 (186) percent for those married most recently (2003 to 2018). The initial fall was largely accounted for by respondents who were resident elsewhere in Scotland, while the further decrease in the most recent sample was caused by a greater number of non-residents married in Scotland among the respondents. This would place the major culture shift among residents, at least in this sample, in the period between the 1977 and 2002 Acts.

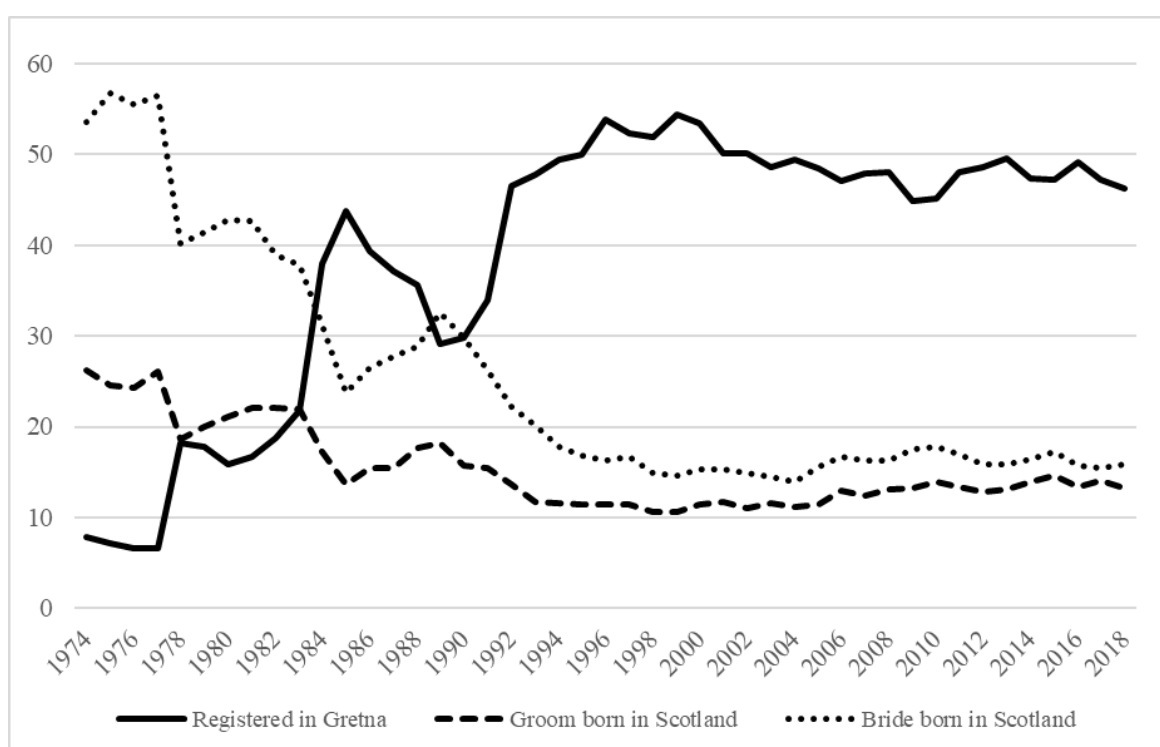


Figure 4.4: Marriages in which neither party is resident in Scotland by birth country of bride and groom and place of registration (percentage of total), 1974-2018.

It is not insignificant in this respect that the vast majority of survey respondents were women. Leonard noted that weddings customarily took place close to the home of the bride's family.<sup>72</sup> It is possible to glean from wedding announcements in the period when these were still common whether the bride or groom was resident in the place of the wedding. This was done systematically in the pilot sample of wedding announcements, taken from the *Kirkcaldy Mail* for 1938, and subsequently discontinued in favour of gathering a wider range of sources on venue. However, this pilot sample does provide rare quantitative insight into the role of place in marriage ritual. Of 113 announcements which gave sufficient information for this

<sup>72</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 13.

to be determined, only 19 (16.8 percent) concerned weddings where neither party was resident locally to the wedding venue. Of the remaining weddings, 36 involved couples who were both local, 47 where the bride only was local, and 11 where it was the groom. In other words, of all the weddings announced in which only one party was local to the venue, in over 80 percent of cases the connection was through the bride.

This is, of course, a rather limited source from which to extrapolate. However, the importance of a connection to place through the bride can also be seen in registration statistics. As was noted above, NRS does not code for district of birth or residence, but it does provide data on the country of birth and residence of all those marrying in Scotland. When we consider the country of birth for partners in non-resident couples, we see a stark gender difference in the proportion of non-residents born in Scotland and returning to marry there (see figure 4.4). Before 1978, well over half of all non-resident brides had been born in Scotland, compared to around a quarter of grooms. After the abolition of residence requirements, the figures began a sustained decline for both men and women, sharper in the latter case. The gap between men and women has narrowed over the years, but in 2018 non-resident brides were still slightly more likely to have been born in Scotland: 15.8 percent of women compared to 13.3 percent of men.<sup>73</sup> The proportion of Scots-born brides and grooms bears a marked inverse correlation to the share of all non-resident marriages taking place at Gretna, suggesting a shift within non-resident marriage away from returning to the Scotland of one's birth and towards choosing Scotland as a romantic destination. More detailed research would be required to find out whether 'homecoming' weddings have decreased in recent years, but what we can say with certainty is that they have become proportionately less important to the overall profile of marriage formation. If these findings can be generalised speculatively for the resident population, it would appear that a kind of bridal 'parish link' is a further aspect of genuine local connection that has disappeared from Scottish wedding culture, through a combination of legal liberalisation and social change. This is significant not only in terms of behaviour on the ground, but also because it betokens a departure from a previous legal agenda. In the period of scant legislative attention to marriage formation between the 1939 and 1977 Acts, two of the three minor legal reforms that did occur were intended, as Kilbrandon would later put it, 'to relieve the difficulties experienced by Scots, serving or working furth of Scotland, in meeting the requirements of

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<sup>73</sup> These figures are, we recall, slightly inaccurate due to the gender-neutral inclusion of same-sex marriages in the data from 2014 onwards.

the law relating to residential qualifications prior to marriage'.<sup>74</sup> At the level of legislation and in practice, an assumed and enacted connection between place of birth or residence and place of marriage has been replaced by a rather different conception of place. The latter has become, to some extent, an extension of ritual aesthetic, determined by preference rather than proximity or connection.

### Conclusion: Scotland and Gretna

This chapter has attempted to convey the important structural changes in marriage formation in Scotland 'after modernity'. In order to do this, it has been necessary at times to remove the traces of wedding tourism to Scotland in order to get at the *Scottish* reality of the situation. However, as we have seen, the growth of tourism is not entirely unrelated to domestic developments. Indeed, the country's major wedding tourism destination, while demographically rather different to the country as a whole, serves as a useful microcosm of the wider forces at play in historical change at a societal level, illuminating the evolution of the modern regime of marriage formation in Scotland. At the beginning of the period, Gretna's appeal was that it offered a place for young couples to marry without parental approval if their jurisdiction of origin made this a legal requirement. Its prominence as a wedding destination was not, of course, merely a matter of practicality. Foreign couples marrying there were going to considerable extra inconvenience on top of making it to Scotland, and one must conclude that it was the 'spurious air of romance' so derided by reformers in the 1930s that attracted them, as much as the legal practicalities.<sup>75</sup> Nonetheless, there was a tangible, practical background to the decision to marry at Gretna. Moreover, it was one that extended beyond the technicalities of marriage law and into the wider culture. Marriage in the 1960s and 70s was as much a matter of transition into adulthood – or, at the very least, a prerequisite to socially acceptable cohabitation – as a step towards romantic self-fulfilment. Gretna, for all its romance, was in part a practical solution to a practical problem, a contradiction nicely encapsulated in the overwhelming majority of 'anvil' marriages that were in fact solemnised in the local registration office. And indeed, even if it was essentially a kind of legal fiction, actual, physical residence – a genuine relationship to place – was required for the wedding to take place.

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<sup>74</sup> Kilbrandon Report, p. 9.

<sup>75</sup> Morison Report, p. 8.

By the late 1970s, however, something had changed in both law and culture. In 1968, the Kilbrandon Committee had confidently asserted that ‘[a]s soon as the word goes round Europe, and elsewhere, that Scotland is no longer a Cythera where minors can get married in defiance of their parents, the embarkation for Scotland for that purpose will dwindle away.’<sup>76</sup> They were right, in a sense. The mushrooming numbers of non-resident couples marrying in Scotland had no obvious practical reason for doing so. The legal peculiarity of Scotland was now to facilitate, by a lack of residence requirements, the phenomenon of the destination wedding, rather than to allow the subversion of restrictive rules at home. Underlining this is the fact that non-resident couples, including those marrying at Gretna, were by the late 1970s older on average than resident Scottish couples.<sup>77</sup> In other words, the balance between practicality and romance that had long constituted Gretna’s (and by extension, Scotland’s) appeal shifted overwhelmingly in the direction of the latter. The simple fact of tourism is not the only indicator of this shift. As I have argued elsewhere, an apparent religious revival in Gretna following the liberalisation of civil wedding venues in England and Wales demonstrates the extent to which the denomination system in Scotland could be used to serve aesthetic purposes rather than the ends of religious equality (see chapter six).<sup>78</sup> Where once Gretna’s geographical and legal reality presented a practical solution to the needs of a specific demographic, it is now a place more purely cultural in construction, serving the desires of a rather more diffuse constituency. Simply put, a kind of wedding that was once a means to an end became an end in itself.<sup>79</sup>

The legal and demographic frameworks that shaped Gretna’s final transition from space of convenience to place of romance were, of course, part of a much larger social change. Just as the practical, legal conditions of Gretna’s utility were removed, the very connection between marriage and social adulthood was vanishing. No longer a prerequisite – either normative or practical – for cohabitation, parenthood, or respectability, marriage was untethered from its utilitarian grounding in the mid-century social order, becoming instead more purely expressive of personal identities and relationships. Sociologists have long conceptualised this transition as one from ‘institution’ to ‘relationship’ (see introduction). What the history detailed in this chapter shows is its ritual corollary: the manifestation in

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<sup>76</sup> Kilbrandon Report, p. 32.

<sup>77</sup> Non-resident grooms have been older than the Scottish average throughout the period for which data is available, non-resident brides since 1976. The average age of *all* men and women married at Gretna increased substantially in 1978, from 27.6 to 31.8 and from 22.1 to 28.1 respectively. In the case of women, this was a rise from two years below average to four years above in the space of a year.

<sup>78</sup> McLean, ‘Beyond Belief’, p. 243-46.

<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Howard notes that Gretna equivalents in the USA remained ‘traditional’ wedding destinations after the legal peculiarities that created them no longer held. *Brides, Inc.*, p. 216.



weddings of a profoundly altered culture of marriage. On three distinct axes – its place in the lifecycle, its relationship to organised religion, and its spatial connection to local communities – marriage formation has evolved from being structured by ‘objective’ determinants into a subjective regime of personal choice. To a greater extent than ever before in modern history, couples marrying in Scotland choose when, how, and where they marry on an *individual* basis. The successive liberalising and deregulating reforms that began with the 1977 Act have reflected and bolstered this basic logic of individualism.

This ‘individualism’ demands certain caveats. As noted, insofar as there is a standard history of weddings, it has tended to present a linear progress towards individual self-fulfilment in ritual culture. In the case of marriage formation in Scotland, two features in particular should make us wary of characterising contemporary developments as unequivocal progress. The first is the means by which individual choice in ritual has been achieved, namely through the system of denomination, in which celebrants are registered only as representatives religious or belief organisations. The emergence of separate ‘denominations’ of Humanism since the introduction of belief marriage should be enough to underline the contradictions inherent to this system. Individual choice is only supported insofar as it is refracted through a complex array of service providers, with the state demanding – or perhaps assuming – that these represent distinct religious or belief communities.

The second, and more serious, caveat concerns the nature of individualism when choice is conceived of largely as a matter of consumer freedom. For it must be noted that marriage is still a matter of pragmatism for many couples. The social imperative to marry may have been weakened over the past decades, but when it comes to protections upon relationship breakdown, or the recognition of the existence of a relationship in such contexts as employment and citizenship, marriage remains the gold standard and a practical necessity in many cases. Tinkering with the ritual parameters of denomination and venue does not expand access to marriage, and offers nothing to cohabitants in legally unprotected relationships. Marriage and civil partnership retain a monopoly on the legal protections they offer, and a culture that subsumes these into a moveable feast of postmodern ritual risks exacerbating their exclusivity. Decades spent expanding the ‘how’ and the ‘where’ of weddings has tended to occlude the ‘who’ and, indeed, the ‘whether’. The culture may be individualistic, but the structural reality is more than slightly institutionalised and exclusive.

## Chapter 5: Wedding Culture in Transition, c.1960-1990

### Introduction: The Other '68

The year 1968 has become emblematic of the rupture in post-war society, one candidate among many for the decisive caesura between an optimistic post-war social democracy and the less certain social and economic order that replaced it. The revolutions of that year, though frustrated, have been taken to signal a moment of profound radicalism that was part of a thorough re-ordering of society.<sup>1</sup> Flashpoints such as these are significant to the historian for the way they distil not only contemporary historical forces, but also subsequent memories and mythologies of particular historical moments. The very weight of such moments in official history and collective memory lends a unique heuristic value to counterexamples; aspects of those moments that seem to contradict the popular interpretation. As such, it will be useful to highlight two significant facts related to the history of marriage formation presented here that also happen to concern the year 1968. The first is that it was the year Diana Leonard conducted her fieldwork among marrying couples in Swansea. A Marxist feminist, Leonard's analysis in many ways embodied the ferment of that year, but in her research subject she found another '68, in working-class lives bound by a deeply conventional and rigidly gendered social order. The second aspect of this 'other' 1968 is statistical. This was the year in which the number of religious weddings in England and Wales reached its peak.<sup>2</sup> The conservatism Leonard found was not, then, the reserve of a minority still invested in the institution of marriage. It was part of a quantifiably common experience of the lifecycle among the '68 generation.

As the foregoing suggests, the decades on either side of 1968 are the subject of intense historiographical debate as to their historical realities and cultural legacies. There is however, something approaching a consensus as to their importance as a period in which the post-war social, economic, and cultural order was dissolved, or at the very least profoundly transformed, with the 1980s often taken to represent the consolidation of the new status quo. Of particular relevance to the present study are debates over secularisation and the sexual revolution, as well as the broader narrative of individualism within which these are often subsumed or, indeed, taken for granted. Related to these is the emotional history of marriage, in which individualism finds its emotional corollary in the transition from 'institution' to

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<sup>1</sup> See Robert Gildea and James Mark, 'Introduction', in *Europe's 1968: Voices of Revolt*, ed. by Robert Gildea, James Mark and Anette Warring (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>2</sup> Haskey, 'Marriage Rites', in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al, p. 30.

‘relationship’, securing the primacy of emotional self-fulfilment in the choice of partner and in married life. While there are proponents of both ‘long’ and ‘short’ views of these transitions,<sup>3</sup> it is hard to ignore the compelling evidence in legislative reform and statistical indicators of private behaviour of a rapid rise of the so-called ‘permissive society’.<sup>4</sup> However, scholars have also increasingly come to recognise that, as Eleanor Bell posited in the introduction to a volume on the arts in Scotland in the period, “‘the sixties’, represents an idea in the popular imagination rather than a strict period of time falling neatly between the start of 1960 and the end of 1969.”<sup>5</sup> Similar reassessments of the 1970s and 1980s and their mythic status in (particularly British) collective memory have also begun.<sup>6</sup> The notion of these periods as ideas rather than straightforward historical realities raises the inevitable question of *whose* idea; on whose experience, whose memories, are the popularly and to some extent officially accepted myths of the period based?

This problem was already apparent to Leonard at some point between her fieldwork and the publication of her study in 1980. She saw the received narrative of profound social change in the 1960s as deriving from the generalisation of a particular strand of middle-class experience.<sup>7</sup> Though studying a Welsh city, Leonard did not add a national perspective to this class critique. Seen from the vantage point of the 2020s, however, the differentiation of the experience of the 1960s was undoubtedly geographical as well as socioeconomic in character, factors which overlap productively in Brown’s recent assessment of the importance of Blackpool in Britain’s revolution of mores.<sup>8</sup> As far as Scotland is concerned, the received wisdom was for a long time that articulated by Richard Finlay when he wrote that the ‘swinging sixties passed Scotland by’.<sup>9</sup> This was of course, a gross oversimplification, but it speaks to the extent to which a purely radical view of the 1960s has obscured their true implications for Scottish society. Reflecting on the question on the fiftieth anniversary of the Paris revolt, the research group Scottish Critical Heritage put it

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<sup>3</sup> For a recent overview of these debates from a revisionist perspective, see Brewitt-Taylor, ‘Christianity and the Invention of the Sexual Revolution in Britain’, pp. 519-24.

<sup>4</sup> On ‘permissive’ legislation in Scotland, see Roger Davidson and Gayle Davis, *The Sexual State: Sexuality and Scottish Governance, 1950-1980* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Eleanor Bell, ‘Introduction’, in *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion, Revolution?*, ed. by Eleanor Bell and Linda Gunn (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013), p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> See Robinson et al, ‘Telling Stories about Post-war Britain’; Matthew Hilton, Chris Moores and Florence Sutcliffe-Braithwaite, ‘New Times Revisited: Britain in the 1980s’, *Contemporary British History*, 31:2 (2017), 145-165.

<sup>7</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 61.

<sup>8</sup> Callum Brown, *The Battle for Christian Britain: Sex, Secularism and the Morality Crisis, 1945-1980* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), chapter 3.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Finlay, *Modern Scotland, 1914–2000* (London: Profile Books, 2003), p.292.

thus: ‘Scotland has its own version of the ‘68 myth: it didn’t happen here.’<sup>10</sup> Scotland’s stasis is, of course, as mythical as Paris’s or London’s revolt. Indeed, as the contributors to Bell’s volume demonstrate, there was plenty of (counter-)cultural ferment in 1960s Scotland, but as elsewhere this avant-garde can serve to obscure a more ambiguous dynamic at the level of society as a whole. If there is a broader truth of the Scottish Sixties it is probably closer to Tom Devine’s assessment in the same collection that ‘For the Scots of the time the decade was not one of drastic revolution but rather a transitional bridge between an old society [...] and later modernity.’<sup>11</sup>

Indeed, approaching the 1960s, 70s, and 80s from the angle of marriage formation, this model of profound but gradual change provides a compelling framework. There is certainly plenty of evidence across the various sources used in this study that could be added to the case for the ‘other’ 1968 of sustained conservatism. However, the task of approaching social change at the transition from social democracy to neoliberalism demands greater nuance than simply pointing out conservatism where there is a myth of progress. The point here is not to contrast a conservative Scotland to ‘swinging’ London, nor for that matter to try and excavate a ‘swinging’ Scotland or conservative London. Nor is it to double down on or disprove Scottish exceptionalism in the face of ‘no alternative’ Thatcherism. My aim is instead to flesh out something of that ‘transitional bridge’ Devine locates in the experience of the majority of Scots. This chapter therefore takes the three decades from 1960 to 1990 as the focus for a qualitative exploration of wedding culture in a period of transition. Instead of seeing this as a linear progression from conservative to liberal, or from communal to individualistic culture, the focus on marriage ritual emphasises the extent to which social change took place against cultural touchstones of continuity. Seen in this context, weddings emerge less as a site for the expression of nascent individualism and youthful rebellion than as an increasingly independent and reified cultural artefact of their own.

### Religious Weddings in Transition

In 1968, a Marriage Guidance counsellor told the *Aberdeen Evening Express* that religious marriages were more likely to end in divorce. ‘I can think of no explanation for this,’ she said, ‘but I do think that some couples get married in church for the ‘look’ of things rather

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<sup>10</sup> ‘Rethinking Radical Scotland: *les années ’68* in Scotland, fifty years on’, Scottish Critical Heritage. <<https://scottishcriticalheritage.wordpress.com/current-projects/>> [accessed 23 August 2019].

<sup>11</sup> Tom Devine, ‘The Sixties in Scotland: A Historical Context’, in *The Scottish Sixties: Reading, Rebellion, Revolution?*, ed. by Bell and Gunn, p. 45.

than on religious grounds.’<sup>12</sup> The statistics on which this claim was based had likely been misunderstood,<sup>13</sup> but the fact that it was aired at all betrays a perception that religion was playing an increasingly peripheral and instrumentalised role in marriage formation. This was not an entirely novel phenomenon. As we saw in section one, the choice to have a religious ceremony was long understood in cultural as well as spiritual terms. It is not hard to believe, then, that in the context of declining religiosity in the 1960s the balance of considerations might have shifted further away from the orthodox. However, religion should not be entirely marginalised in our assessment of wedding culture. Both in terms of personal belief and institutional influence, the Scottish churches continued to play a significant and changing role in Scottish society in the second half of the twentieth century. The Church of Scotland, which married the majority of Scottish couples until 1969 and remained the single largest wedding provider for the rest of the century, enjoyed a privileged position in wedding culture. However, it also displayed considerable anxiety regarding the motivations of the couples it married, concerns that were increasingly dominated by the phenomenon of early marriage in the 1960s and ‘70s.

In 1975, the Church’s Committee on Moral Welfare published a pamphlet entitled *Today’s Questions About Marriage*. Squarely aimed at teenagers and young adults, this document pleaded with Scotland’s youth to value marriage and the place of religion in it. In one telling segment, the authors remarked that:

One often gets the impression that young people forget the all-important thing about marriage. They remember the caterer, the photographer, the florist and the band, but they forget God who alone can transform two clashing egos into a happy union, who alone can make them humble enough to readily forgive and equally readily say “I’m sorry”.<sup>14</sup>

Survey responses suggest that the Church’s fears were far from unfounded. Only 43.4 percent (66) of relevant respondents married before 1978 cited religious belief as the reason for choosing a religious wedding. Other reasons given for religious marriage had more to do with conformity than belief. 16.4 percent (25) had church weddings simply because it was the ‘done thing’, 13.8 (21) because they were ‘brought up’ to be married religiously, 10.5

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<sup>12</sup> ‘Marriage... Old-fashioned, Out-dated – Can It Survive?’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 18 March 1968.

<sup>13</sup> GROS published figures on divorce by manner of solemnisation throughout the 1960s, and it seems the counsellor had misinterpreted the fact that 69.4 percent of divorces that year related to religious marriages as meaning that the divorce *rate* was higher among such couples. In fact, 81.1 percent of marriages in the previous decade had been religious, suggesting that the divorce rate for religious marriage was in fact lower than that for civil marriage.

<sup>14</sup> David L. Levison and James A. Simpson, *Today’s Questions About Marriage* (Edinburgh: St Andrew Press, 1975), p. 26. I am grateful to Dr Charlie Lynch for this reference.

(16) because it was ‘traditional’, and 9.7 (15) because of pressure or expectation from family members.<sup>15</sup> Few respondents explicitly articulated an indifference towards religion, but some took the opportunity to reflect on its relative insignificance at the time from the vantage point of the present. A female respondent recalled that ‘[We] hardly ever went to Church since our wedding [...] Many people never went to Church but had a Church wedding.’<sup>16</sup> Another respondent, a man married in 1977, wrote ‘[I] Would have a Humanist wedding now. Not available then.’<sup>17</sup> This respondent had married in church both because it was ‘the done thing’ and because his father was a deacon in church in question. In this case, religion formed part of culture both normative and personal, but its ritual significance evidently had little to do with belief. This dynamic was articulated particularly clearly in the response of a woman married in 1973 who attributed her choice of both ceremony and attire (a white wedding dress) to her parents’ wishes: ‘In 1973 people were not so accepting of couples living together. My parents wished it to be ‘above board’. I was already questioning religion but viewed a church wedding as a means to an end.’<sup>18</sup> This remark makes explicit what a popular culture of respectable religiosity heavily implied: religious marriage was the surest path to cohabitation without censure. In that context, it is perhaps not surprising that even a fairly elaborate wedding could be conceived of as a ‘means to an end’.

The presence of religion was nonetheless significant, even in the most perfunctory church ceremony. Weddings still provided an important point of contact between churches and local communities, not least in the case of young people. It is important to recall as well that the period considered in this chapter saw average ages at marriage reach their lowest point (see chapter two and four). Not only did this leave couples marrying for the first time particularly open to family influence, it also provided an extra avenue for church involvement in youth culture. The Church was a major provider of recreation for young people, and the church extension charges in particular could monopolise youth recreation in areas underserved by other amenities.<sup>19</sup> For some young people this was an entry into adult life shaped by Christian belief, but for many the entertainments provided were easily separated from the religious message they were intended to support. The Church’s contact with young people

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<sup>15</sup> Some respondents gave multiple answers, meaning the total exceeds 100 percent here.

<sup>16</sup> Survey response (female clerical worker aged 19 at time of wedding in 1974).

<sup>17</sup> Survey response (male social worker aged 22 at time of wedding in 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Survey response (female teacher aged 20 at time of wedding in 1973).

<sup>19</sup> Brown says that the church’s popularity in the provision of recreation was ‘crumbling’ by the 1970s, and had suffered from mass culture and population dispersal in the 1950s. *Religion and Society in Scotland since 1707*, pp. 167-70. I suspect (albeit on a purely anecdotal basis) that this may be overstated. My parents and paternal grandparents (who with one exception did not come from particularly religious families) met through participation in Church of Scotland youth groups on council estates in the 1980s and 1950s respectively.

did, however, enhance its privileged access to wedding culture. In May 1967, a day-long course entitled ‘Paving the Way to Marriage’ was held in Aberdeen for female members of Young Farmers’ Clubs from across the North East of Scotland. Speakers included a representative of Aberdeen Marriage Guidance Council and an Aberdeen jeweller, and the Church of Scotland was represented in the form of a minister’s wife. It is not clear, however, that religion was much discussed on the day. As the minister’s wife in question told the *Press and Journal*, ‘My talk will be quite practical on how to fix the banns and so on and on the etiquette of weddings.’<sup>20</sup> Although, as we have seen, the Church was prone to expressing frustration at the ritual preoccupations of the young couples it married, it seemed happy on such occasions to court precisely this kind of interest in its services in its relationship with Scotland’s youth.



*Figure 5.1: A 1973 pre-marital guidance class in Greyfriars Church, Aberdeen. Charles Milne of Aberdeen Marriage Guidance Council (right) addresses engaged couples from the pulpit, with Rev. George Goldie at his side. Source: Aberdeen Press and Journal, 16 January 1973. ©D.C. Thomson & Co., image created courtesy of the British Library Board.*

The presence of the Marriage Guidance Council indicates another strand of the dominant presence of religion in wedding culture. From at least the late 1950s local Marriage Guidance Councils were working with ministers to provide pre-marital counselling to couples wishing to marry in church (see figure 5.1).<sup>21</sup> Leonard found similarly blurred lines between the religious and the secular in 1960s Swansea, noting that ‘St Mary’s, as the ‘mother church’ of

<sup>20</sup> ‘Getting to the Church on Time’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 24 March 1967.

<sup>21</sup> On the history of the Marriage Guidance Council, see Chettiar, “‘More than a Contract’”.

Swansea, organizes a series of wedding preparation classes each year, open to any couple in the town, with talks by the Family Planning Association, a solicitor, the Marriage Guidance Council, a priest (about the marriage service) and others.’<sup>22</sup> It is not clear that any of this pre-marital contact influenced the future beliefs or practices of the couples in question. Indeed, Church membership was in steady decline from its 1956 peak for much of the period discussed here. Nonetheless, the involvement of agencies such as the Marriage Guidance Council blurred the line between religion and the broader phenomenon of youthful marriage. It signalled the hegemony of the Church of Scotland and religion more generally in the default wedding culture. Whatever their personal faith, young people would have had to make a conscious choice to opt out of this culture; a choice, moreover, to abandon not just religion, but the white dress and the church setting that had become so engrained in the popular image of correct marriage ritual.

The churches thus retained a powerful position as service providers and ritual experts at a time of high marriage rates and socially and commercially reinforced norms of ceremonial consumption. Elaine McFarland and Ronnie Johnston have written of the long afterlife in Scotland of the ‘discursive Christianity’ first posited by Callum Brown, evident in the popular acceptance among workforces of industrial chaplains.<sup>23</sup> The continued popularity of church weddings and couples’ willingness to submit to religious pre-marital counselling must be placed in that same context. Industrial chaplains were not witness to a great revival or even maintenance of formal church affiliation. Instead they were accepted as ambassadors of religion in the workplace, an area of more immediate importance to the average Scot. Marriage was almost as universal an experience as work in Scotland between the Second World War and the 1980s. It was as servants of that cause that the churches enjoyed a prolonged relevance to popular experience as most other indicators of their vitality entered into serious decline.<sup>24</sup>

By the later part of the period considered in this chapter, this dynamic was beginning to unravel. Of survey respondents married in religious ceremonies between 1978 and 1989, 41

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<sup>22</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 35. The churches also ran their own marriage preparation classes, sometimes taking place in the manse. Ann McLean, interview with author, residence, Bathgate, 18 February 2018.

<sup>23</sup> Elaine McFarland and Ronnie Johnston, ‘Faith in the Factory: The Church of Scotland’s Industrial Mission, 1942–58’, *Historical Research*, 83:221 (2010), 539–64; ‘“Out in the Open in a Threatening World”: The Scottish Churches’ Industrial Mission 1960–1980’, *International Review of Social History*, 55 (2010), 1–27; ‘With God in the Workplace: Industrial Chaplains in Scottish Heavy Industry, 1970s–1990’, *Oral History*, 38:1 (2010), 55–67.

<sup>24</sup> By the 1970s the question of the survival of religious rites of passage beyond church membership was being studied as an anomaly. See W. S. F. Pickering, ‘The Persistence of Rites of Passage: Towards an Explanation’, *The British Journal of Sociology*, 25:1 (1974), 63–78.



percent gave active religious belief or membership as the reason, roughly the same figure as for the earlier period. However, the wider context of this ambivalent religiosity had shifted. More respondents married in this period cited pressure from – or a desire to please – family as the reason than had done so previously (23.6 compared to 9.7 percent), but fewer said that it was simply the ‘done thing’ (5.6 compared to 16.4 percent). This suggests a generational dynamic to the continued popularity of church weddings, with couples more likely to see it as a preference of their parents in particular rather than a generalised societal norm. There is, however, also some indication of more personal reasons for marrying in church among this cohort. They were more likely to cite ‘tradition’ as their motivation (18.5 percent compared to 10.5 percent), and departed from earlier responses in identifying the draw of the church venue, with 8.4 percent citing this as their reason, often articulating this more in terms of disdain for registration offices than active appreciation of religious premises. As one respondent, married in 1982, put it, ‘[the] only alternative to chapel/church then was [the] registry office and [I] didn’t fancy that. Might have looked elsewhere had modern day alternative venue choices been available.’<sup>25</sup>

This increasingly subordinate position of the Church of Scotland is also hinted at in the occasional expression of a hardening in Church attitudes towards the instrumentalization of Christian ritual in the name of popular orthopraxy. We recall the remarks made by ministers in the 1950s regarding those parishioners who used the Church only for baptisms, weddings and funerals. In the 1970s, such resentments appeared to resurface. In 1970, the *Aberdeen Evening Express* reported an Aberdeen Episcopalian’s suggestion that ‘spongers’ who only used the Church for weddings and other occasions without otherwise supporting it should be made to pay for such services.<sup>26</sup> A similar complaint was made in Strathbogie and Fordyce Presbytery in the same year about ‘the “dead wood” of the Church – people who used it for baptisms and weddings yet failed to support it at other times’.<sup>27</sup> Even stronger language was used in the middle of the decade when a Musselburgh Church of Scotland Minister spoke of the ‘parasites’ and ‘shirkers’ who thought that ‘the Church is there to provide a public service, a free public service – if you like as part of the National Health Service, Spiritual Department.’<sup>28</sup> It is intriguing that members of the ‘national’ church articulated these

<sup>25</sup> Survey response (female teacher aged 22 at time of wedding in 1982).

<sup>26</sup> ‘Make Kirk ‘Spongers’ Pay, Says City Man’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 26 October 1970. A *Press and Journal* article on this noted that ‘there is little support from clergymen [...] for Mr Harwood’s suggestion of a sale of charges, although there was sympathy for the intention behind it.’ ‘Spongers Should Pay £20 to Wed in Church’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 26 October 1970.

<sup>27</sup> ‘Scunnered’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 4 November 1970.

<sup>28</sup> ‘Minister Warns His Parish ‘Parasites’: Keep Away...’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 28 July 1975. These comments may have been part of a wider phenomenon; Pickering suggests – though it is not clear on what

grievances with the imagery of rationing in the post-war decades, and in the language of welfare dependency on the eve of neoliberalism's ascendancy. In a sense, this was a spiritual institution bristling at its own worldliness. It is unclear how representative of the wider clergy these views were, but their airing in the press suggests a certain intensification of the tensions always present, particularly within the Church of Scotland as a 'national' wedding provider. If these had been marginal concerns in the 1950s, the 60s and 70s saw a change that provided a solid basis for more serious anxieties: the rise of civil marriage.

### The Rise of Civil Weddings, c.1960-1978

While religious marriage remained in the majority, civil marriage rates were nonetheless growing in the 1960s and 70s. This period marked the transition from one period of stability in the denominational profile of marriage in Scotland in the first decade and half following the Second World War, to another lasting from the late 1970s until the turn of the century (see Appendix 1). As always, these figures conceal a considerable degree of local variation, with the large burghs (as they were known until local government reorganisation in 1973-5) showing particularly marked disparities. Of the civil marriage hotspots of the immediate post-war years, the Fife burghs remained consistently above average, while Perth and Inverness saw a degree of convergence with the remainder of the large burghs, likely confirming the importance of flight from the counties to their earlier prominence. New hotspots did, however, emerge. Close to average for much of the post-war period, Falkirk underwent a surge in civil marriage around 1966 and by the late 1970s was the town with the highest rate, surpassing even Edinburgh. Stirling showed signs of mirroring this trajectory, but saw a resurgence of religious marriage from the mid-1970s. The four cities shared a relatively gentle upward trajectory from around 1960. Glasgow consistently had the most religious denominational profile and Edinburgh the least, with Aberdeen and Dundee somewhere in between. A closer look at Glasgow suggests that the presence of a large Catholic community continued to act as a break on the rate of civil marriage at least until the 1980s (albeit only in comparison with the other cities). From 1957 to 1981, the share of weddings in Glasgow performed by the Catholic Church remained stable at around a quarter while the civil rate rose at the expense of the Church of Scotland and, to some extent, the smaller Protestant denominations (see figure 5.2).<sup>29</sup> This greater resistance of the Catholic

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basis – that a sharp decline in the rate of Church of England baptism may have been caused by clergy applying with greater rigour rules about attendance for parents seeking baptism. 'The Persistence of Rites of Passage', p. 65.

<sup>29</sup> In the 1980s, the Catholic share actually grew, but this appear to have been due to a drop in overall numbers. See below.

church to the ‘secularisation’ of weddings was most likely the result of the doctrinal importance of marriage as a sacrament. As one respondent, married in 1988, put it: ‘my husband was a catholic [so] a register wedding [sic] was not an option.’<sup>30</sup>

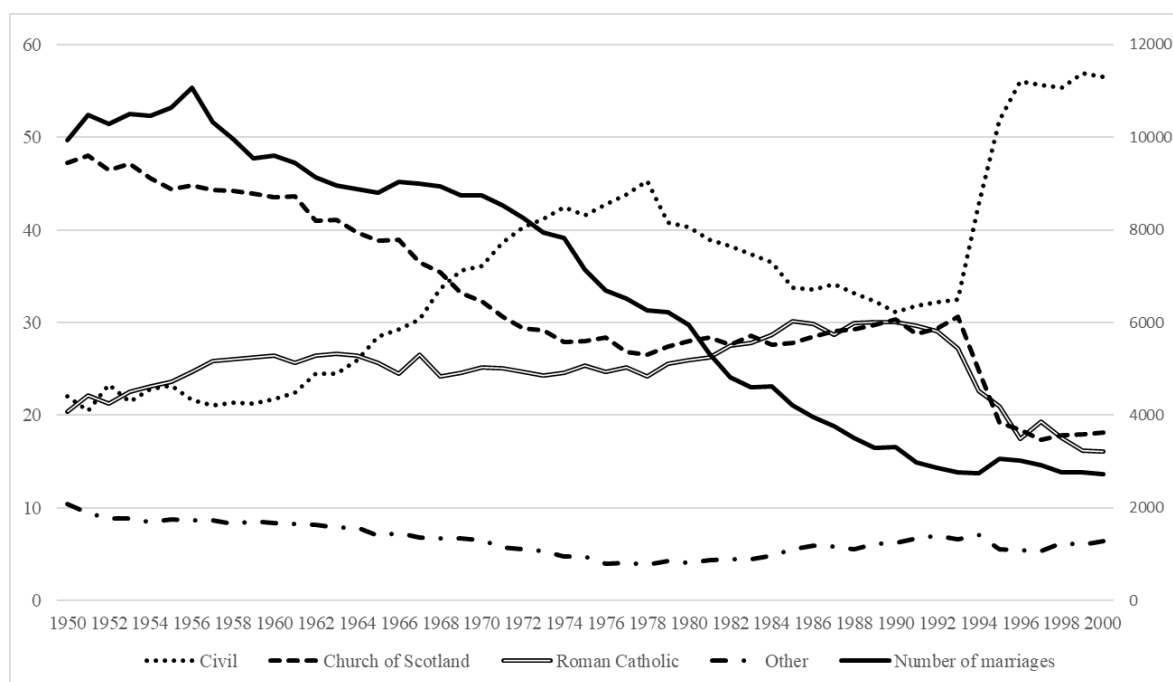


Figure 5.2: Marriages in registered in Glasgow by denomination (percentage of total), and number of marriages (secondary axis), 1950-2000.

In 1974, the first year for which comprehensive data are available, couples marrying in civil ceremonies were somewhat older and more likely to have been previously married than the average. However, 26.5 percent of bachelor/spinster marriages were formed by civil ceremonies in that year, with such marriages accounting for 61.6 percent of all civil weddings compared to 80.9 percent of all weddings.<sup>31</sup> Remarriage thus remained a key part of the culture of civil weddings, but a sizeable minority of first marriages were also part of that culture. The emphasis on first marriages in the survey means that it offers insight into the motivations behind these civil weddings in particular. The reason most commonly given for civil weddings before 1978 (15 respondents or 42.9 percent) was a lack of religious belief.<sup>32</sup> This was followed by ‘convenience’ (8, or 22.9 percent), and then cost (6 or 17.1 percent), meaning that for 40 percent of respondents the minimal consumption associated

<sup>30</sup> Survey response (female clerk aged 22 at time of wedding in 1988).

<sup>31</sup> Interestingly, women marrying in civil ceremonies were slightly more likely to have been previously married than men. The difference is slight (72.9% of brides compared to 74.3% of grooms single in 1974) but it is the inverse of the national average and was consistent (but declining) throughout the 1970s (69.7% of brides, compared to 70% of grooms, were single in 1979 civil weddings). It may indicate that, as with wedding consumption more generally, the ‘moral’ basis for a civil wedding was concentrated on the bride’s and not the groom’s personal history.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that three quarters of the weddings concerned took place in the 1970s.

with civil weddings was part of the reason for choosing this option. The only other responses with any significant representation were the mixed religious backgrounds of the parties (4 or 11.4 percent) and bridal pregnancy (3 or 8.6 percent). Among these respondents, there is thus a clear indication that, for many couples, the choice of civil marriage was less to do with a rejection of religious marriage than with practical exclusion from it, whether on ‘moral’ or financial grounds.

Nonetheless, the question of religious (dis)belief demands particular attention. It must first be stressed that, although a lack of religious belief was the most commonly given reason for choosing a civil ceremony, it was not cited by a majority of respondents. Nor did this group of respondents state their irreligion as an active position or positive characteristic. One respondent declared herself ‘agnostic’, but the rest simply indicated an absence of religion, rather than articulating an atheist, humanist, or other non- or anti-religious identity.<sup>33</sup> As may be expected, these responses were largely confined to the 1970s. The outlier in this regard was a groom who gave this response regarding his wedding in 1962. Significantly, his responses suggest a wedding that was remarkable in more ways than one. He wore a kilt, a choice which places him some decades ahead of the majority of his fellow countrymen (see chapter six). Despite this element of elaboration, moreover, he described his ceremony as a mere formality:

Only Bride & Groom, Best Man & Maid. No family invited. Drinks after in a Hotel. No pregnancy or other pressure to marry, probably the opposite - we just wanted to formalise the relationship.<sup>34</sup>

This respondent was not alone in combining irreligion with an ambivalence towards marriage as an institution, though he may have been somewhat ahead of his time in holding this attitude. Another non-religious respondent, married in a civil ceremony in 1975, reported that ‘We only got married because both sets of parents disapproved of cohabiting at the time.’<sup>35</sup> For the majority of civil marriages in the survey, however, the choice was rather more complex. These respondents did not question the importance of marriage *per se*, but found that in order to achieve it they had to negotiate financial constraints, intergenerational tensions, and cultural norms surrounding conspicuous consumption. In this context, religious ambivalence was simply another factor in favour of muted celebration. A female respondent married in 1976 who gave lack of religion as the reason for the ceremony nonetheless

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<sup>33</sup> Survey response (female student aged 19 at time of wedding in 1977).

<sup>34</sup> Survey response (male, unemployed, aged 21 at time of wedding in 1962).

<sup>35</sup> Survey response (female clerk aged 19 at time of wedding in 1975).

elaborated in a later response that ‘Cost was an overriding factor. Didn't want to spend money on a wedding that could be better spent on a home.’<sup>36</sup> In this case, marriage was clearly a prerequisite to setting up home. Civil marriage, far from indicating ambivalence about marriage as an institution, could be an indication that the couple simply placed greater emphasis on the marriage than on the wedding. As another non-religious respondent put it: ‘The ceremony itself was not that significant to me - the decision to marry him was very significant.’<sup>37</sup>

The latter respondent was a 26-year-old computer programmer at the time of her marriage in 1973. It is therefore likely that she enjoyed a greater degree of independence than the average 1970s bride. Many respondents who married young and aimed for minimal consumption found the attitudes of family members to be a complicating factor. A secretary married at age 19 in 1971 was unusual in explicitly rejecting the white wedding aesthetic, and was the only respondent to give the desire for a lack of ‘fuss’ as the main reason for choosing a civil ceremony.<sup>38</sup> She was clearly aware of the atypical nature of her wedding and of the tensions surrounding it:

It was significant at the time because in our social circle most weddings were church weddings... white dress, veil etc which I absolutely did not want. I remember overhearing an elderly aunt saying.... of course it's not a real wedding!

Similar difficulties faced those who chose a civil wedding explicitly to *avoid* such tensions. Such was the case of a couple simultaneously of mixed and no religion:

Our rather "minimalist" wedding was partly because we didn't want to waste money on a huge party but also because my family are non-religious but mother-in-law was a devout catholic. Any wedding ceremony was going to upset someone or other so we married with two friends as witnesses and didn't tell anyone else until later. My mother-in-law never forgave us, never spoke of our wedding and never gave our children any presents.<sup>39</sup>

Civil weddings were clearly not exempt from the wider tensions of kin and community that one might expect to find the more public-facing religious ceremonies. Nonetheless, they provided a potential strategy for working around the social implications of religious marriage – even if attempts to this end were not always successful.

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<sup>36</sup> Survey response (female clerical worker aged 24 at time of wedding in 1976).

<sup>37</sup> Survey response (female computer programmer aged 26 at time of wedding in 1973).

<sup>38</sup> Leonard found that this was the only socially acceptable reason for doing so in 1960s Swansea. *Sex and Generation*, p. 208.

<sup>39</sup> Survey response (female lab technician aged 19 at time of wedding in 1975).

As the above suggests, civil weddings existed within a cultural field dominated by the white church ideal. Leonard saw them essentially as a scaled down version of the latter,<sup>40</sup> but to conceive of the distinction only in terms of scale is to ignore the complexity of the negotiated practices that formed the reality of popular culture. We find an indication of this complexity in survey responses which detailed the ‘Scottishness’ of a civil wedding with reference to a ‘poor oot’. As discussed in chapter three, this custom linked the wedding celebration to people with no personal connection to the couple. When it appeared in connection with civil ceremonies, it thus lent a decidedly communal element to ceremonies otherwise marginalised in the mainstream ritual culture of marriage. Significantly, this element was found even in the case of one civil wedding that was the result not of choice, but constraint. A 20-year-old student at the time of her wedding in 1963, the respondent in question gave an account mingling tradition and social stigma:

I was pregnant and my family didn't want the embarrassment of having our minister perform the ceremony. [I wore] a grey skirt and jacket suit, pink silk blouse, pink wide-brimmed hat, white shoes, bag and gloves. I already had all of these and nobody thought I should have a new outfit. I don't remember having "something new" but my aunt loaned me a pair of earrings for "something borrowed". I had blue flowers embroidered on a handkerchief in my handbag for "something blue". [...] My father threw some coins out of the taxi window for neighbourhood children to scramble for as we left home.<sup>41</sup>

This respondent’s pregnancy seems to have precluded her marrying in church, and even in a specially bought outfit, but not the inclusion of ‘something borrowed, something blue’, nor a treat for the local children in the form of a ‘scramble’. The ritual elaboration of civil marriage evidently entailed a negotiated position in relation to the dominant wedding culture, rather than a complete rejection of it.

Indeed, some respondents recalled the steps they took to contrive greater consumption. Sometimes these steps blurred the boundaries between white church wedding and civil wedding, resulting in the previously almost unthinkable phenomenon of the white civil wedding. One of the brides married in a white wedding dress had borrowed it from someone else, because ‘We had no money as such.’<sup>42</sup> It is perhaps not insignificant that this was one of the earliest white civil weddings mentioned in the survey, taking place in 1973. The anomaly of a white civil wedding was in this case produced by financial constraints on desired consumption and the fortuitous availability of a borrowed dress. Such transgression

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<sup>40</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, p. 34.

<sup>41</sup> Survey response (female student aged 20 at time of wedding in 1963). This quotation combines responses to the questions on denomination, attire, and Scottishness.

<sup>42</sup> Survey response (female clerical worker aged 18 at time of wedding in 1973).

of the apparently fixed boundaries of religious and civil marriage could take place in even more surprising ways. One bride, 16 at the time of her marriage in 1970, married in a civil ceremony because she and her fiancé were of different religions. In response to the ‘Scottishness’ question, she responded ‘Bible with Heather on.’ This is a cryptic but fascinating response. Brides in church weddings were often pictured holding a Bible in place of the more commonly seen horseshoe, and it seems that this bride managed to bring this tradition into her civil ceremony. Significantly, this respondent was also the protagonist of the earliest white civil wedding (1970). Once again, it would appear that a thwarted desire for a church wedding found its expression in a subversion of the habitual material culture of the registration office ceremony. The norm of the church wedding thus had purchase even beyond the numbers published statistics tell us were married by religious rites.

There is also, however, some evidence that civil marriage afforded a certain degree of emancipation from the pressures facing young people marrying in the 1960s and 70s. As Louise Purbrick has shown, much of the logic of gift-giving in weddings was based on the intergenerational transfer of cultural values, and this dynamic was reflected in the prominent role played by a couple’s parents and their generation in planning and on the day itself.<sup>43</sup> Certainly it was a common refrain among respondents having married in church that the wedding had been ‘almost entirely arranged by my mother.’<sup>44</sup> Part of this dynamic was financial. Paying for the wedding oneself could be a way around this, and this seems to have led to many young couples seeking to affirm their independence through the low-consumption option of civil marriage. This was the case for an electrician, married at 19 in 1973, who wrote ‘My wife and I paid for the wedding ourselves as we felt that we could then do things our way.’<sup>45</sup> It was not impossible to have a cheap church wedding, and a number of respondents recalled, for example, making their own wedding dresses or relying on friends and family to provide catering as a way to cut costs for a church wedding. There was nonetheless a certain association between civil marriage and a kind of glamorous independence, perhaps not unrelated to such spectacles as Mick Jagger’s St Tropez town hall ceremony in 1971.<sup>46</sup> There was also a particular Scottish precedent for such intrigue around

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<sup>43</sup> Purbrick, ‘No Frills’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed by Miles et al, p. 84.

<sup>44</sup> Survey response (female worker at residential school aged 19 at time of wedding in 1974).

<sup>45</sup> Survey response (male electrician aged 19 at time of wedding in 1973).

<sup>46</sup> ‘Fights, Tears and Curses as Mick Jagger Weds His Nicaraguan Beauty’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 13 May 1971. This was a compulsory civil ceremony required by French law before a religious wedding. Because these are open to the public, the civil ceremony was heavily photographed in the press and so would have been the overriding public image of the wedding. The article cited here carried such a picture and only mentioned the religious ceremony in its last sentence.

civil weddings, albeit on a more mundane scale, in the steady trickle of ‘runaway marriages’ from south of the border in the 1950s and ‘60s.<sup>47</sup>

Relating to this air of youthful independence, there is also evidence in civil registration of a differing intergenerational dynamic between religious and civil marriage. In a study of marriage certificates in England and Wales, John Haskey found that fathers were much more likely to be witnesses to religious than civil weddings. Civil weddings were, however, more likely than religious weddings to have other relatives of the couple acting as witnesses, suggesting the possibility that the couple’s own generation might have had a greater presence on such occasions.<sup>48</sup> Perhaps most crucially, however, civil weddings simply offered an escape from the dominant culture of the white wedding, which could have an agency of its own, even over those who did not willingly submit to it. One bride, married aged 19 in 1973, recalled her white church wedding almost as if it happened entirely without her input:

On hindsight, we gave it little consideration, it was the 'done thing'. None of my family nor my spouse's family were religious. [...] As a bit of a tom boy, I went with the flow and really wasn't too excited about all the preparations and traditions...I still think there's too much emphasis on weddings rather than the marriage.<sup>49</sup>

Opting for a civil ceremony was, in the 1960s and 70s, the decisive break required to excuse oneself from ‘going with the flow’ in this way, whether that meant breaking with parental expectations, religious authority, or simply the pattern of a hegemonic ritual culture.

In the period in which it grew from a relatively invisible minority option to a robust alternative to the Church of Scotland, civil marriage thus represented elements of both subversion and compromise. For some couples it signalled the failure to access a church wedding, for others a positive assertion of independence from both church and community, and, for others still, some combination of these factors. One important contrast between mid-century civil weddings and those of the later 1970s and 1980s does, however, suggest the decline of moralistic or social pressures in the choice of ceremony. The absence of religious belief was behind 67.9 percent of civil weddings described in the survey for the period from 1978 to 1989, compared to 42.9 percent of those taking place before 1978. The other major

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<sup>47</sup> In 1959, a *Montrose Standard* columnist gave a wry account of the long-haired students, ‘look[ing] as traditionally Bohemian as the artists they hope[d] to be’, who had taken up residence in the town for three weeks in order to have a civil wedding there. ‘Runaway Lovers’, *Montrose Standard and Angus and Mearns Register*, 23 July 1959.

<sup>48</sup> Haskey, ‘Marriage Rites’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al, p. 50.

<sup>49</sup> Survey response (female, unemployed, aged 19 at time of wedding in 1973).



reason for having a civil ceremony, namely the desire for a wedding that was ‘quiet’, ‘cheap’ or ‘convenient’ had, in contrast, almost halved, with 23.2 percent of respondents giving at least one of these reasons. In other words, compared with their counterparts in the previous two or three decades, couples opting for civil ceremonies in the 1980s were much more likely to be making a positive choice in doing so. Though there certainly remained barriers to a church wedding for some who would have preferred that option, civil weddings were now as likely to represent a rejection of religious influence as exclusion from it.

#### Across the Divide: Wedding Culture, c.1970-1990

By the end of the 1970s, the rate of civil marriage had topped out at around 40 percent of weddings among the resident population of Scotland. While this meant that religious marriage was still in the majority, it nonetheless indicated a profound undermining of the Church of Scotland as the ‘national’ religious institution. Since the Catholic Church retained far more of its nominal members at the point of marriage, the gains made by civil marriage were overwhelmingly at the expense of the Church of Scotland. A new era was underway. Now, for the majority of Scots, the choice of ceremony was between the Church of Scotland and the registrar, and for the first time since civil marriage was introduced the two were on an equal footing. At the level of statistics, then, it would appear that a balance had been reached between civil and religious marriage. This was not, however, a case of perfect equilibrium between two distinct wedding cultures. Instead, as civil marriage reached the significant minority position it would retain until the turn of the century, its ritual aesthetic became less easy to distinguish from that of its religious counterparts. By the mid-1970s, it was not uncommon to see a white wedding dress in a registration office ceremony. In the decade that followed, popular practice as reported in the local press became increasingly homogenous across the religious/civil divide. In many ways this was an indication that the forces that had driven the rise of civil marriage in the 1960s and 70s had receded. There remained, nonetheless, tensions between individual desire and social obligation, but these were increasingly playing out *within* a homogenised wedding culture rather than between strictly segregated categories of religious and civil. In order to understand this transition, we must examine the changed culture of ritual consumption that framed the decision-making of couples marrying in the period.

It is difficult to discern the precise contours of the evolution of civil wedding culture from the visual record alone. The number of civil wedding photographs published in most local

newspapers in the 1960s and 70s is simply too small to form the basis for confident conclusions. However, such photographs did begin to appear more commonly in the 1980s. In 1985, the *Lothian Courier* published photographs of 52 civil weddings, and in two thirds of these the bride wore a recognisably ‘traditional’ white wedding dress, rising to just under three quarters a decade later (albeit out of a total of just 26 such photographs). Throughout this period, over 90 percent of all wedding photographs published in the newspaper featured a white wedding dress. Civil weddings were thus still the most reliable place to find a less formal or conventional wedding aesthetic, but the majority were indistinguishable in this respect from religious weddings.<sup>50</sup> In Hawick, where wedding reporting was generally more representative than in most places, the majority of brides marrying in civil ceremonies were photographed wearing white wedding dresses in most sample years from 1974 onwards. In the earlier years sampled, only one such wedding was found. In the visual culture of the local public sphere, the phenomenon of the white civil wedding thus appears to have been well established by the 1980s.

Evidence from survey respondents married between 1978 and 1989 confirms the existence of this development but suggests a rather less dramatic evolution. 36 percent of relevant brides had worn a wedding dress in this period, compared to 22.2 percent in the years up to 1978. The disparity between the survey results and the visual evidence is highly suggestive. Instead of a wholesale adoption of the white wedding aesthetic by couples opting for civil ceremonies, we find the partial incorporation of civil marriage into the mainstream culture of wedding reporting, framed as it was by the commercial imperatives of the wedding industry (see chapter three). Nor was the distinction between the ritual culture of religious and civil weddings completely elided by the white civil wedding. Instead, it would appear that Leonard’s assessment of civil weddings as pared back versions of church weddings, while an oversimplification of early practice, applies to this later period. Throughout the 1970s, Aberdeen photography firm Studio Morgan offered colour photography for church weddings from £40, whereas prices for the same service at civil ceremonies started at £10.<sup>51</sup> While this must be seen as part of a major shift in the visibility of civil ceremonies, it nonetheless clearly indicates not only that the photographer’s job was expected to be less onerous on such occasions, but more significantly that prices could not be inflated to the same extent as in the more readily commercialised church celebrations. However, the very

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<sup>50</sup> In 1979, the same newspaper ran an advertising feature claiming that, ‘Today, more bridal dresses are in demand for registry office affairs, and about 20 per cent of all sales are now for civil ceremonies – a figure which has never been reached before.’ ‘Brides Ring the Changes’, *West Lothian Courier*, 13 April 1979.

<sup>51</sup> Advertisement, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 9 May 1977.

inclusion of civil weddings within the same consumerist paradigm that had proliferated around church weddings signalled an appreciable shift in the bases of wedding culture. No longer was it a question of ‘earning’ a white wedding by fulfilling externally determined criteria of religious or social conformity. Instead, the aesthetic was detached from its ‘moral’ foundations and placed on the open market.<sup>52</sup>

Survey responses suggest that for a minority of couples, the highly moralised established routes to civil marriage nonetheless remained in operation, or at least framed decision-making. One respondent, married in 1988, explained that her civil ceremony was because ‘we had lived together and had a child’.<sup>53</sup> Remarriage was also among the reasons given for choosing a civil ceremony, and this was particularly relevant for Catholics who, although more likely than many others to marry in the faith they were raised in, also faced stricter criteria around access to church ceremonies. More significant, and more surprising, however, was the way that these kinds of social pressure interacted with the new aesthetic options available for civil marriage by the later 1970s and 1980s. A medical photographer married in a registration office in 1979 due to her reluctance to join a church nonetheless wore a white wedding dress ‘because that’s what my mother wanted me to wear.’<sup>54</sup> A typist married three years later had a similar experience. Opting for the registration office due to both a lack of religious faith and a desire for a small wedding, family pressure nonetheless resulted in her adopting the white wedding aesthetic: ‘[I wore a] Borrowed white wedding dress. My mother practically insisted on it!’<sup>55</sup> Such experiences serve as an important reminder that the partial shedding of the moralistic parameters of white wedding culture was not an unambiguous case of emancipation. Some of those ‘white civil wedding’ brides were not so much subverting the norm as being pressured into a compromised version of it. If civil weddings in the 1960s and 1970s offered an opportunity to escape normative wedding culture, the opening of the registration office to greater conspicuous consumption was, by the 1980s, beginning to compromise their ability to perform that function.

In order to understand this development, it is crucial to acknowledge the profound change in the material contexts of civil marriage ritual in this period. It was not simply the case that white wedding dresses began to appear in the same registration offices that had hosted more

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<sup>52</sup> Howard places the adoption of the white wedding aesthetic among previously-married US brides in the 1980s. *Brides, Inc.*, p. 175.

<sup>53</sup> Survey response (housewife aged 22 at time of wedding in 1988).

<sup>54</sup> Survey response (female medical photographer aged 21 at time of wedding in 1979).

<sup>55</sup> Survey response (female typist aged 18 at time of wedding).

mutated affairs in previous years. The venues of civil weddings were themselves transformed, though there would be no legislative intervention to this end until 2002. Instead, the change came from within the local authorities, which began in the late 1960s and 1970s to invest in the beautification of registration offices. These initiatives were focused on developing ‘marriage suites’ within registration office buildings, giving couples the choice – at no extra charge – of either marrying in the registrar’s office itself or opting for a ceremony in a dedicated space not compromised by use for other civil registration functions. In 1971, an Aberdeen registrar noted that around 70 percent of the couples he married chose the latter option. As if to underline the new seemliness of civil weddings, it was reported that he made this remark ‘with a still fresh-looking red carnation in his button-hole at the end of his long day’.<sup>56</sup> Five years later Grampian Regional Council approved a £545 investment in a wedding room for Inverurie registration office, noting that ‘Many couples, having seen the facilities, change their plans and arrange for the service to take place in Aberdeen.’<sup>57</sup> Some registrars attributed rising rates of civil marriage to these developments,<sup>58</sup> and they appear to have been sanctioned from the highest level. A 1975 article noted that the wedding room of the registration office in Forres Community Centre had ‘earned the special commendation of the Registrar General.’<sup>59</sup> Civil marriage was thus opened not only to greater ceremonial elaboration; in the distinction between the marriage suite and the office, there also emerged the possibility of differentiated levels of consumption *within* civil marriage. The close association between civil and ‘quiet’ weddings thus began to be eroded.

It is difficult to ascertain just how widespread the phenomenon of the ‘marriage suite’ was. Outlining its development would take quite substantial dedicated research, especially given the restructuring of local authorities in the 1990s and the subsequent closure of many registration offices (see chapter four).<sup>60</sup> However, observing civil registration statistics at the local level can offer some clues as to the effects of the emergent white civil wedding culture on popular practice. Glasgow’s case proves particularly telling in this respect. As figure 5.2 shows, the trajectory of civil marriage in Glasgow was not unlike the Scottish average in the 1960s and 70s, rising fairly rapidly at the expense of the Church of Scotland (albeit with a smaller civil rate than in other cities). However, from a peak of 45 percent in 1978, the share

<sup>56</sup> ‘No Hitch as 27 City Couples Take Plunge’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 10 July 1971.

<sup>57</sup> Untitled, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 9 December 1976.

<sup>58</sup> ‘More Couples Choose Civil Weddings’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 4 January 1978.

<sup>59</sup> Cuthbert Graham, ‘Forres Opts for Quality of Life’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 14 June 1975.

<sup>60</sup> In addition to those discussed above, I have found mention of investment in similar civil marriage facilities in Bathgate in 1967, Motherwell in 1968, and Perth in 1978: ‘Wed at the Registry’, *West Lothian Courier*, 27 January 1967; ‘Newmains couples are first to be wed in new Registry Office’, *Wishaw Press*, 5 January 1968; ‘Stanley has married over 400 couples’, *Perthshire Advertiser*, 28 August 1987.

of Glasgow weddings taking place at Martha Street registration office began a steady decline that would last until the early 1990s. At the same time, the overall number of marriages registered in Glasgow was dropping rapidly. This development had begun in earnest around 1970, but did not affect the existing denominational profile, which continued to reflect the dynamics we would expect to find based on the national average. From 1978, however, we see a continued fall in the number of marriages accompanied by a decline in the civil marriage rate that benefitted the Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic Church, as well as the remaining denominations (viewed on aggregate), equally. In other words, it would appear that marriage in general was not simply on the decline in Glasgow, but that the city was losing a disproportionate share of its civil weddings in particular.

It is, of course, almost impossible to disaggregate this decline in marriage from the dramatic depopulation of Glasgow that took place in the middle decades of the century, nor from the later decline in the marriage rate for Scotland as a whole. However, when we consider Glasgow as part of a wider ‘Greater Glasgow’ region encompassing those principal areas to which the population was dispersed, a plausible explanation begins to emerge that has as much to do with wedding culture as with demographic change.<sup>61</sup> The period of declining civil marriage in the 1980s coincided with Glasgow reaching its lowest share of all marriages registered in this region in the period from 1974 to 2016. From 44.7 percent in 1974-1976, the share of marriages registered in the City of Glasgow fell to a low of 27.9 percent in 1992-1994, with the most rapid decrease taking place between 1977 and 1988. This decline appears to have benefitted three registration districts in particular: Eastwood in East Renfrewshire, and, to a lesser extent, New Kilpatrick and Bishopbriggs in East Dunbartonshire. In each of these districts, the denominational profile of weddings went from predominantly Church of Scotland to predominantly civil between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, seeing a substantial rise in the number of marriages registered in the same period.<sup>62</sup> In other words, there appears to have been a significant transfer of weddings from Martha Street in Glasgow to the registration offices at Giffnock (Eastwood), Bearsden (New Kilpatrick) and Bishopbriggs. The histories and affluence of these areas make it unlikely that

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<sup>61</sup> This is a dataset I have contrived on the basis of civil registration districts’ organisation under present-day local authorities in NRS data. For this analysis, I have combined into one super-region: East Dunbartonshire, East Renfrewshire, Glasgow City, Inverclyde, North Lanarkshire, Renfrewshire, South Lanarkshire, and West Dunbartonshire. The aim was to create an area with Glasgow at its centre which would include the city’s main overspill areas, suburbs, and major independent urban areas within easy reach.

<sup>62</sup> Eastwood registered 1,070 weddings in 1974-76, 48.3% of which were Church of Scotland; this compares to 1,885 weddings in 1983-85, 67.4% of which were civil. In New Kilpatrick the corresponding figures were 591 weddings, 57% Church of Scotland in 74-76, compared to 962, 57.1% civil in 83-85. For Bishopbriggs: 279, 45.9% Church of Scotland in 74-76; then 582, 54.3% civil in 83-85.

their absorption of civil weddings from Glasgow was the delayed result of mid-century slum clearance or social housing developments. It seems much more probable that the local registration offices benefitted from the wave of investment in ‘marriage suite’ facilities mentioned above. Either Glasgow couples sought more salubrious settings for their civil ceremonies, or natives of affluent surrounding areas abandoned the practice of going to the city for such weddings when these were subsumed within the culture of conspicuous consumption previously reserved for religious marriage. Most likely it was some combination of the two.

This is, of course, a largely speculative assessment of what was going on in the 1980s. However, a dramatic reversal of the fortunes of civil marriage in Glasgow in the mid-1990s would appear to confirm the hypothesis. In 1994, the rate of civil marriage in Glasgow leaped from 32.5 percent the previous year to 42.7 percent, rising again to 51.8 percent in 1995, and plateauing at a remarkable 56 percent in 1996. In the same period, the seemingly relentless decline in marriage numbers in the city was halted, and even briefly reversed to a very small extent (see figure 5.2). This time, the cause is easy to pinpoint. In 1994, the City Council leased the Category A listed and recently renovated West End townhouse at 22 Park Circus, using it from then until 2015 as a registration office with five separate marriage suites.<sup>63</sup> Simply by offering a more lavish venue for its civil weddings, Glasgow City Council had, virtually overnight, upturned the denominational profile of marriage in the city.

As we shall see in chapter six, wedding culture had entered something of a new era by the time 22 Park Circus was brought into the wedding business. However, as the appearance of white civil weddings and the fortunes of Bearsden and Giffnock registration offices suggest, new dynamics of civil wedding culture were clearly emergent from at least the late 1970s. These developments, moreover, were taking place against a backdrop of wider changes in the culture of consumption surrounding weddings in general. One key indicator of this was a shift in the ideal customer envisaged by wedding industry advertisers. In one advertising feature in the *Press and Journal* in 1963, adverts for wedding dresses, photographers and stationery were placed alongside those offering crockery and other homeware, all arranged under the headline ‘Give Newly-Weds a Flying Start in Setting up House’ (a detail is shown in figure 5.3).<sup>64</sup> Suppliers were thus addressing themselves to wedding guests as much as to

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<sup>63</sup> ‘I do – 26,000 times’, Lost Glasgow. <<https://www.lostglasgow.scot/posts/i-do---26000-times-282/>> [accessed 11 September 2019].

<sup>64</sup> ‘For the Perfect Wedding’, *Press and Journal*, 1 March 1963.

engaged couples, drawing on the kinship function of gift-giving identified by Purbrick as much as on specific wedding-day consumption in order to make sales. By the 1970s, however, guests were less prominent among advertisers' targets; now the focus was more exclusively on the bride. Seen as the focal point for a large-scale exercise in consumption, the bride was commonly addressed in full- or multi-

Figure 5.3: Detail of wedding advertising feature, 1963. Aberdeen Press and Journal, 1 March 1963. ©D.C. Thomson & Co, digitised by Findmypast Newspaper Archive.

page advertising features that combined articles on fashion and etiquette with advertisements for local retailers and service-providers. Gifts were still advertised, but they were overshadowed in these features by the sheer range of different purchases that went into creating the experience of the wedding day itself. An advertisement for a wedding fair in 1978 summed up in its headline the scale of consumption and planning now expected from brides: 'Exhibition in Aberdeen to Ease that Big Plan of Action – a Wedding.' But the domestic ideal was slow to die. The same wedding fair advertisement addressed itself to guests as well as brides, offering a range of domestic wares to purchase as wedding gifts. Strikingly, it also included a cooking demonstration, because 'Even in these liberated days the bride is expected to cook'.<sup>65</sup> In this, it straddled a boundary between the mid-century cult of domesticity and an emerging culture of outright conspicuous consumption and festivity in marriage ritual.

Another advertisement emblematic of the transitional period of the 1970s was a feature article on 'mini' versus 'maxi' weddings. This framed the choice between a big or small wedding as entirely dependent on whether or not the couple were still saving for a house.<sup>66</sup> Despite this domestic ethos in consumption, the most crucial decision for a bride from the

<sup>65</sup> 'Exhibition in Aberdeen to Ease that Big Plan of Action – a Wedding', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 14 February 1978.

<sup>66</sup> 'According to Means or Whim, a Mini or a Maxi Wedding', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 25 February 1970.

perspective of such adverts was her choice of attire, another sign that the emphasis in advertising was shifting decisively onto the wedding day itself. The tendency here was towards increasing the already considerable homogeneity of material wedding culture. Consumption was stimulated by framing the choice of wedding dress within a fashion cycle, and yet there was a consistent emphasis on ‘tradition’.<sup>67</sup> Perhaps the most striking illustration of this shift comes when we compare advertisers’ and commentators’ handling of contexts of national financial hardship. While wartime and post-war austerity had produced socially acceptable contexts for minimal consumption (see chapter two), inflation and recession in the 1970s led the columnist Rosalie King to comment:

My guess is that it will take much more than a 25% inflation rate to stop brides turning up at the altar in white. The high cost of virtually everything that can be bought has undoubtedly had its effect in curbing the more extravagant. But, when it comes to penny-pinching, weddings seem to suffer less than most other occasions.<sup>68</sup>

The very possibility that brides might cut back on wedding expenditure seemed inconceivable. The poem that my grandfather wrote about my financing my mother’s wedding while unemployed reflects this logic on a more intimate scale (see introduction). That King’s article was part of an advertising feature underlines the extent to which commercialisation framed popular perceptions of wedding custom. More than ever, expenditure was a vital part of ritual.

By the 1980s, this emphasis on consumption had become more decisively uncoupled from domesticity. The focus in advertising was resolutely on the day itself. A 1983 advertising feature in *Hawick News* was presented under the headline ‘Everything for that special day’ and promoted standard features of wedding-day consumption in the form of wedding dresses, photography, catering, and floristry, as well as the more recent additions of limousine hire and videography. Guests were not addressed at all. There was, however, one concession to the normative domesticity still underlying wedding culture. The spread included an advert placed by a local fabric retailer for curtains, bedspreads and wallpaper under the heading ‘It’s your home! Make it beautiful!’.<sup>69</sup> The ‘setting up house’ once so prominent in wedding consumption was not only marginalised, but also privatised, the onus placed on the bride and groom themselves rather than on their kin. This reflected an

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<sup>67</sup> A typical formulation is found in an advertising feature, the thrust of which can be guessed from its title: ‘Most Weddings Are Still Formal’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 24 August 1979. Charsley noted the same dynamic in 1980s advertising. *Rites of Marrying*, p. 69.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Here Comes the Bride’, *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 3 February 1976.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Everything for that special day’, *Hawick News*, 29 April 1983.



overwhelming focus on the core ritual, which was to be made as elaborate as possible and exhaustively recorded in photographs and, increasingly, on video. Indeed, there was a growing sense in wedding advertising that this lasting visual record of the wedding was part of the very logic of ritual. In another advertising feature article, the bridalwear firm Pronuptia (a frequent sponsor of such features) promoted a veil and headdress combination as ‘the final adornment [which] will ensure a captivating picture to be treasured for all time.’<sup>70</sup> The overall trajectory of wedding culture in the 1980s was thus towards a greater emphasis on the expressive function of ritual; on the consumer choices that framed the day rather than the moralised lifecycle norms that held sway in earlier decades.

In this context, it appeared that the wishes of individual couples were winning out against conventions imposed on them by family and society at large. However, there was also much in 1980s wedding culture to suggest the continued influence of social pressures beneath the surface-level culture discussed above. The ‘show of presents’, which enacted intergenerational obligations in remarkably literal fashion, persisted throughout the decade, its ritualised transfer of the material means of household formation reflecting the continued relevance of the mid-century lifecycle for many Scottish couples in this period. Pre-martial cohabitation may have been on the rise, but for many couples – including my parents, married in 1985 – it remained unthinkable. In this context, the primacy of ritual for its own sake, uncoupled from its demographic and ‘moral’ bases, was not something achieved in a flourish of individualism, but rather negotiated with often resilient structures of convention and obligation.

## Conclusion

Back in our ‘other’ 1968, as the streets of Paris were convulsed with workers and students in revolt, Diana Leonard observed a rather quieter moment of revolution:

At one marriage preparation class I attended the curate said: 'It's a fad of mine; that it's better to come in to the first hymn rather than to "Here Comes the Bride", to which we can all put other [lewd] words! [...] What do you feel?' His audience were of one accord – the big, formal entrance to 'Here Comes the Bride' was essential: 'part of getting married'.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “Romance for Spring Brides”, *Hawick News*, 21 March 1986. Leonard and Charsley both note that wedding photographers exerted an authority over the events of the wedding day second only to the celebrant, though this seemed to be only an emerging practice in Leonard’s 1968. *Rites of Marrying*, pp. 142-25; *Sex and Generation*, p. 174.

<sup>71</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, pp. 162-3

The young couples gathered in that Swansea church were happy to be guided into married life by the representative of a religious institution, but they would not accept wholesale his criteria for correct ritual. Ritual authority was thus shared and negotiated between the institutional orthodoxy of those with the power to create marriages, and the popular orthopraxy of those entering into them. The history of weddings in the decades that followed suggest that this small assertion of orthopraxy against institutional orthodoxy comes closer to capturing the nature of this transitional period in average experience, beyond the flashpoints of the vanguard. The generations coming of age in the 1960s, 70s and 80s were far from abandoning marriage, but they increasingly embraced it as a project of self-fulfilment rather than social duty.

Within this culture, the position of the churches in relation to the social institution to which they facilitated access was becoming increasingly subordinate. Ambivalence regarding religious belief is evident in many of the remarks of survey respondents married in religious ceremonies, but perhaps the most powerful indicator of this phenomenon is the radical shift in the material culture of civil marriage that was underway by the end of the 1970s. The spread of white wedding consumption to registration office ceremonies confirmed that marriage as a normative part of the modern lifecycle, in combination with the imperatives of mass consumption, was too powerful a force to be contained by the churches. As religious affiliation declined and the taboos surrounding illegitimacy and pre-marital cohabitation were weakened, the fundamental logic of the material segregation of weddings into two parallel consumption regimes began to break down.<sup>72</sup> A consequence of this evolution was that the churches lost a great deal of authority as ritual experts in wedding provision. For the first time, large numbers of Scots were able to marry in fulfilment of norms of conspicuous consumption without recourse to religious institutions.

If the transition period outlined here was characterised by the declining influence of religious authorities in ritual culture, it was not entirely free from pressures on marrying couples. As we have seen, direct pressure from family members as well as more diffuse social and cultural imperatives continued to shape ritual consumption. Perhaps most powerful, however, was the centrality of consumption *per se*. Civil marriage had carved out a niche for itself in the 1960s and 70s, offering a means of marriage formation that not only had more forgiving 'moral' criteria for access, but was also relatively shielded from the culture of conspicuous consumption so tightly linked to religious marriage. When the 'church'

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<sup>72</sup> See Rebecca Probert, 'From This Day Forward?', in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al.

element of the white church wedding began to become optional from the mid-1970s, that specialisation was threatened. With its five marriage suites catering for 20 to 55 guests, and one private ceremony room housed in a former Turkish bath, 22 Park Circus was a rather different proposition to the registration offices of the mid-twentieth century, and even to the comparatively modest marriage suites emerging in the 1970s. As the soaring civil marriage rate in Glasgow that accompanied its opening suggests, this was clearly a welcome development for many couples. However, we also recall that the number of weddings in Glasgow remained at an historic low even after this watershed. Indeed, the growing opportunities for conspicuous consumption discussed in this chapter coincided with the beginning of long-term decline in Scotland's marriage rate. As census data suggest, it was in the 1980s that marriage began to lose the position in the lifecycle of both men and women that it had taken on in the mid-twentieth century. Though nuptiality remained relatively high and marriage ages relatively low, the second demographic transition was well underway by the time 'traditionally' attired brides began forsaking Martha Street for Giffnock and Bearsden. If the normative power of marriage in the lifecycle aided in the hegemony of white weddings, that hegemony was so complete by the 1990s as to outlast the very social conditions that had secured it. As this chapter has shown, the radical changes that would lead to the decline of marriage worked themselves out in the first instance *within* a culture still dominated by that institution and its rituals.

## Chapter 6: From Kirk to Kilt: Wedding Culture after Modernity, c.1990-2018

### Introduction

The visual culture of weddings saturates the media in the twenty-first century. If the local public cultures of ritual explored in chapter three have virtually disappeared, they have been amply replaced as far as the sheer visibility of weddings is concerned. The wedding photographs of kin, acquaintances, and celebrities litter our social media feeds, and any number of reality television programmes centre on the challenges of having the perfect day or, indeed, the unedifying spectacle of one deemed imperfect. Even royal weddings seemingly retain something of the paternalist power I have ascribed to employers' weddings in mid-century Scotland, albeit exercised on a much larger scale and so at much greater distance. And yet, as was shown in chapter four, fewer and fewer of us are actually getting married.

It is easy to conceive of this development squarely in terms of a triumphant liberal individualism. Undoubtedly, marriage has been largely uncoupled from the lifecycle, its function rendered more purely expressive. It is no longer synonymous with adulthood and emancipation from the parental home. Nor is it a prerequisite to cohabitation or childrearing. The legal protections it offers certainly remain an important structural incentive, but as recent debates over 'common law' marriage demonstrate, these are little understood and so do not factor easily into the culture of marriage formation.<sup>1</sup> These also tend to come into play primarily at the moment of a marriage's dissolution rather than its formation, and have been emptied of their implications for the personal rights and behaviours of spouses *within* marriage.<sup>2</sup> Since the 1990s, cohabitants have been treated in the same way as married couples in means-testing for income-related benefits,<sup>3</sup> and illegitimacy has been abolished as a legal concept.<sup>4</sup> In the immigration context, moreover, increasingly punitive measures surrounding income thresholds for spousal migration mean that for many working-class couples the legal certainties of a valid marriage are rendered functionally irrelevant.<sup>5</sup> All of

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<sup>1</sup> See Barlow et al, *Cohabitation, Marriage and the Law*, chapter 3. Most recently, this has been presented in commentary as part of the rationale for extending civil partnerships to opposite-sex couples. See Clive Coleman, 'Analysis', BBC News, 31 December 2019. <<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-50953410>> [accessed 8 February 2020].

<sup>2</sup> Jane Mair, 'A Modern Marriage?', *The Edinburgh Law Review* 10 (2006), 333-351 (p. 333).

<sup>3</sup> Clive, *The Law of Husband and Wife in Scotland*, p. 340.

<sup>4</sup> By the Law Reform (Parent and Child) (Scotland) Act 1986. Clive, *The Law of Husband and Wife in Scotland*, p. 151.

<sup>5</sup> In 2015, 'close to 40%' of UK employees did not meet the income threshold (introduced in 2012) for bringing a non-EEA spouse to live with them. See 'The Minimum Income Requirement for Non-EEA Family Members

this means that marriage presents a less decisive transition from the legal perspective. The small number of weddings in relation to their outsize cultural weight could therefore be read as a function of choice: only those who really wish to do so now get married, and as a consequence of this greater specialisation, the argument would go, the cultural form has become refined to an apex.<sup>6</sup>

This narrative is not without foundation, but we must always be cautious of accepting uncritically the role of personal choice as an agent in historical change. As I have argued elsewhere, there has been a tendency to conceive of choice in marriage ritual only in terms of ever-increasing opportunities for elaboration. But if the choice is between a range of expensive options, for many people it is no choice at all.<sup>7</sup> More than this, however, it is clear that the individualisation of weddings takes place within a deeply conventional culture. Jon Lawrence identifies as one of the key shifts in the nature of community in recent history ‘a perceptible diminution in the claims that custom is allowed to make on personal conduct.’<sup>8</sup> While the role of individualism is perhaps overstated in Lawrence’s work, it is undeniable that the range of lifestyles available to the average person in twenty-first century Scotland and the rest of the UK vastly surpasses that imaginable in the 1950s. However, as we shall see, weddings produce a great deal of conspicuously conventional behaviour. They routinely see self-aware, modern adults expend vast sums to engage in rituals that seem to ape the etiquette and conformity of a bygone era. A recent sociological study of marrying couples termed this phenomenon ‘individualized conformity’; when planning a wedding, many couples are compelled by conflicting imperatives to create ritual that is individual to them while also fulfilling the highly standardised and commercialised criteria of a ‘proper’ wedding.<sup>9</sup> In Scotland, this phenomenon is combined with the peculiar development by which weddings, as they have become more personalised and privatised, have also taken on a more explicitly national character. The personalisation of a wedding by the choice of a family – or in some other way specific – tartan for the groom’s kilt neatly encapsulates the rigid standardisation of choice that has occurred in a ritual culture which, rhetorically at least, valorises individualism; the options are myriad, but within tightly codified limits. All

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in the UK’ <<https://migrationobservatory.ox.ac.uk/resources/reports/the-minimum-income-requirement-for-non-eea-family-members-in-the-uk-2/>> [accessed 8 February 2020].

<sup>6</sup> An alternative reading is that posited by the anthropologist Ronald L. Grimes, who suggests that the elaboration of wedding culture in the twenty-first century has in part been a response to the declining stability of marriage in a context of high divorce rates. Ronald L. Grimes, *Deeply into the Bone: Re-inventing Rites of Passage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> McLean, ‘Beyond Belief’, p. 252.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence, *Me, Me, Me?*, p. 12.

<sup>9</sup> Carter and Duncan, ‘Wedding Paradoxes’, p. 18.

of this suggests that, far from enabling the most heightened expressions of individual identity, weddings exert a kind of power over those who submit to them, trammelling individual expression into certain standardised parameters.

Weddings and their place in the life of the average Scot have thus undoubtedly been profoundly transformed over the past three or four decades. But their power has not diminished; it too has transformed. This chapter traces that transformation from the decline of church – but not religious – weddings in the mid-1990s to the rapid and highly visible rise of Humanist ceremonies in the past decade. The latter development emerges as the belated formal recognition of an evolution in the relationship between ritual and the established legal and theological category of ‘denomination’. As we shall see, Humanism, in tandem with other ritual options, offered space for a popular conception of proper marriage ritual to take precedence over institutionally defined ceremonies. This was the triumph of orthopraxy, and its development in relation to the law and wedding industry is explored below. Also crucial to this history is the gradual ‘nationalisation’ of weddings that spans this period, as expressions of Scottish national identity became increasingly prominent in wedding culture. The aim of the chapter is to bring these strands together, charting the evolution of weddings ‘after modernity’. In doing so, it challenges the assumption that contemporary wedding culture derives simply from the emancipation of individual choice, and argues that orthopraxy offers a better way of conceptualising contemporary ritual.

### ‘Trusted Suppliers’: Venue, Denomination and Orthopraxy

One of the most significant developments in the Scots law of marriage formation in the twenty-first century has been the emergence of legally recognised Humanist weddings. It was the paradox of HSS’s recognition as a religious organisation by the Registrar General that paved the way for the addition of ‘or belief’ to the category of ‘religious’ marriage by the 2014 Act. By resolving the paradox in this way, legislators recognised Humanism as a belief system according to whose tenets couples could legitimately ritualise their marriage: a denomination. Most importantly, it opened the door to the recognition of celebrants representing other belief systems. In other words, the logic of religious equality underpinning the reform of celebrant registration in the 1977 Act was opened up to non-religious organisations. While a number of new belief organisations did indeed register celebrants in the wake of the 2014 Act, the result was not a further diversification of the

belief systems available to marrying couples. Instead, the new organisations were, without exception, Humanist.<sup>10</sup>

As I have argued elsewhere, this raises fundamental questions about the nature of denomination as a legal and administrative category.<sup>11</sup> It is also highly suggestive of the culture underlying the engagement of individual couples with the denomination system as it currently exists. In theory, the choice between a Church of Scotland or Roman Catholic wedding is at least nominally doctrinal. Other factors are clearly at play, but couples marrying in one church or the other could be expected to have a reason for doing so that had at least some passing connection to religion. The same applies to the choice between Protestant denominations. In contrast, this logic clearly cannot be applied to the choice between HSS and, say, the Scottish Humanists. In her study of Humanist weddings in Scotland, Kasselstrand found that while couples were required to join HSS in order to be married by them, they generally did this solely to procure ritual services rather than out of any active commitment to the organisation, or even to specifically Humanist values,<sup>12</sup> a dynamic that is also reflected in survey responses.<sup>13</sup> To this extent, the function of legal Humanist weddings is rather different to that of those carried out before 2005. The small number of couples turning to HSS before 2005 were actively seeking out a purely ritualistic celebration of their relationship in line with the organisation's stated values. A recent study of Humanist wedding provision in Canada identified the 'ad hoc strategies' applied by non-religious couples to existing wedding provision in the absence of Humanist providers.<sup>14</sup> It is not clear, however, that legal Humanist weddings are any less 'ad hoc'. Before 2005, about one hundred couples each year actively sought out the legally meaningless (but personally meaningful) rituals offered by HSS. Within a few years of legal recognition these numbers skyrocketed.<sup>15</sup> While part of this may have been a genuine surge in interest in active membership of HSS due to its increased visibility, it seems more likely that Humanism simply became an added option in the 'ad hoc' elaboration of ritual.

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<sup>10</sup> As of 2018, the Humanist denominations were: Humanist Fellowship Scotland; Independent Humanist Ceremonies; Fuze Foundation; The Scottish Humanists; Caledonian Humanist Association; Humanism in Scotland; Humanist Association Scotland; and Humanist Society Scotland.

<sup>11</sup> McLean, 'Beyond Belief', pp. 247-48.

<sup>12</sup> Kasselstrand, 'We Still Wanted That Sense of Occasion', p. 278.

<sup>13</sup> McLean, 'Beyond Belief', p. 247.

<sup>14</sup> Robertson, 'Secular Weddings in Canada', pp. 1; 7.

<sup>15</sup> Callum Brown, 'The People of No Religion: The Demographics of Secularisation in the English-speaking World since c.1900', *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte*, 51 (2011), 37-61 (p. 44).

In recognising Humanist ceremonies, then, Scots law was meeting a ritual rather than a denominational need. One survey response was particularly illuminating on this point:

We have no religion and felt this was the most appropriate option for us and our families. [...] The significance of our wedding was the location. [...] When my sister got married in 2001 she had a ceremony in an hotel but she was forced to have a Minister perform the actual marriage, even though both she and her husband are non-religious. Thankfully, that rule no longer applies and a civil celebrant, in our case a Humanist, did the “deed”. We wrote our own words, guests were able to make their own declaration, there was absolutely no rush with the ceremony. At some weddings we have attended, especially those at a register office, the ceremony is rushed.<sup>16</sup>

This response is fascinating for several reasons, but most remarkable is the way it lays bare the demand to which Humanism has responded. The needs of the respondent’s sister, forced to trade the unwanted presence of religion against the desired venue, would have been met by the liberalisation of civil venues in 2002, or the recognition of Humanist ceremonies in 2005, but the compromise she made demonstrates that the desire for control over elements of ritual such as venue was already a powerful factor in the choice of denomination. To this extent, the advent of Humanist weddings represents not so much a cultural shift in itself as the official recognition of a dynamic already well underway. Kasselstrand found that a majority of her respondents opted for a Humanist over a civil wedding because they ‘believed that the civil option lacked flexibility and the ability to create a personalised ceremony.’<sup>17</sup> Strictly speaking, this is not entirely accurate, as civil ceremonies now offer a high degree of personalisation. An indication of this is given by the title of the leaflet created by the Association of Registrars of Scotland, aimed at couples considering a civil ceremony: ‘Your Day, Your Way’.<sup>18</sup> There are also local authorities that go so far as to suggest ritual practices that couples may wish to incorporate into their ceremony. For example, East Dunbartonshire Council offers a ‘Ceremony Enhancements Brochure’ which lists an array of Scottish and other wedding ‘traditions’.<sup>19</sup> However, in the public imagination, civil ceremonies retain some of that exemption or exclusion from ritual culture that characterised them in middle decades of the twentieth century. In referring to his Humanist ‘civil celebrant’, the respondent underlines the extent to which Humanist weddings perform the function that elaborate civil weddings do for couples less swayed by their historical

<sup>16</sup> Survey response (male physicist aged 29 at time of wedding in 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Kasselstrand, ‘We Still Wanted That Sense of Occasion’, p. 285.

<sup>18</sup> ‘Your Day, Your Way’, National Records of Scotland. <<https://www.nrscotland.gov.uk/registration/getting-married-in-scotland/marriage-ceremonies-in-scotland>> [accessed 2 February 2020].

<sup>19</sup> ‘Ceremony Enhancements Brochure’, East Dunbartonshire Council registration services. <<https://www.eastdunbarton.gov.uk/residents/registration-services/marriages>> [accessed 2 February 2020].



connotations: offering non-religious ritual, but permitting the ritual elaboration traditionally associated with religion.

As we saw in chapter five, this desire for ritual without subordination to religious authority was already a powerful factor in Scottish wedding culture by the late 1970s. Humanism perhaps embodies the apotheosis of that tendency, but religious marriage itself is not exempt from this shift. Early signs of an evolving role for religious institutions in religious marriage can be identified, as the above survey response suggests, in couples' venue choices. In chapter two we saw how, during the Second World War and the years that followed, religious weddings became confined to churches, fulfilling the wishes of many churchmen, but seemingly independently of their direct influence. Half a century later, venue choice among Scottish couples underwent another, equally spontaneous transformation. With no change in the law, nor apparently in the attitude of the churches, couples marrying in the mid- to late 1990s began exercising their apparently long-forgotten right to be married by religious celebrants outwith church premises. This is apparent in newspaper evidence though, unfortunately, wedding announcements – once the most reliable source of information on venues – had become too rare to be of much use by this stage (see chapter three). In the fullest sample of published wedding photographs (taken from *Hawick News* and *Hawick Express*), however, it is possible to discern a fairly rapid growth in this trend during the 1990s (see Appendix 2). In 1992, 6 percent of wedding photographs related to ceremonies taking place in a hotel or other commercial venue, the first sample year since 1941 in which such weddings were to be found in any significant proportion. By 1995, the figure was 20 percent, rising to 37 percent in 1998. Figures from other local newspapers suggest the trend was widespread, though not as pronounced elsewhere as it was in Hawick. In the *Stornoway Gazette*, no commercial venue weddings were pictured in 1975, but in 1995 they accounted for 4 percent of the total. In the case of the *Cumbernauld and Kilsyth Chronicle*, the rise over the same period was from zero to 7 percent. The *Lothian Courier* shows the most pronounced trend of these smaller samples: 10 percent of weddings pictured in 1995 took place in commercial venues, compared to 2 percent in 1985 and 1 percent in 1975. These samples show only the beginnings of what the Hawick evidence suggests would be a growing trend. However, it is difficult to discern national trends on the basis of the local press because, as noted in chapter three, the publication of weddings photographs was in sharp decline by the end of the century. Indeed, in the years in which Hawick weddings were showing a pronounced turn towards commercial venues, the overall number of photographs published was on the cusp of terminal decline. In 1992 there were 87 photographs, while in

the final sample year, 2007, there were just 36. Of the latter, almost half (48 percent) featured commercial venues. By this point, however, it is impossible to say whether this reflected the liberalisation of civil venues (see chapter four) or a continued trend towards religious marriage in commercial venues, as the nature of the ceremony was rarely specified in picture captions. Moreover, the decline in reporting raises the question of whether the trend towards commercial venues in the 1990s was a case of actual growth or of a bias towards such ceremonies among couples still invested in publication.

Survey responses shed more light on this dynamic. The similarity of the drop-down options on religious marriage in church premises or in another venue appears to have misled respondents, some of whom selected one option but made statements in their written answers that suggest the other would have been accurate. The precise venue choices of respondents cannot therefore be quantified in the way certain responses have been in other chapters, but some did make clear that they had a religious ceremony outwith church premises. For one respondent, married in 1989, this was a means of finding a compromise between personal and family preferences: '[I] Didn't want a religious cerem[ony] but parents wished me to be married in the eyes of God so we compromised by asking the minister to marry us but not in a church'.<sup>20</sup> The most commonly cited reason for this kind of ceremony, however, was that shared by the sister of the groom quoted above. Indeed, one respondent recalled an almost identical situation at her wedding in 1999, recalling that 'The Minister was prepared to overlook [m]y non religious beliefs and was able to marry us in a hotel'.<sup>21</sup> A significant number of other respondents did not specify the venue of their religious wedding, but gave a lack of alternative options or even an explicit antipathy towards registration office ceremonies as the reason for involving a minister. A woman married in 1999 spoke for many others when she wrote that there 'weren't many options available at the time and [I] didn't want to get married at [the] registry office'.<sup>22</sup> For some, then, religious marriage, whether in a church or not, was simply an option that allowed something closer to the desired ritual, even if it did not match one's personal beliefs.

There is some indication that, by the late 1990s, the drift away from religious venues was perceived as a widespread phenomenon. In 1996, the *Aberdeen Evening Express* reported that civil weddings were on the decline in the North East as hotels began offering 'wedding

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<sup>20</sup> Survey response (female speech therapist aged 25 at time of wedding in 1989).

<sup>21</sup> Survey response (female research assistant aged 29 at time of wedding in 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Survey response (female receptionist aged 21 at time of wedding in 1999).

packages' involving religious ceremonies performed on commercial premises. The article included the conflicting views of local clergy, including one minister who claimed that 'This year, alone, I will marry more than 100 couples. Of those, only five will be married in church.'<sup>23</sup> Indeed, statistics do show a slight decline in civil marriage in the late 1990s, though this was much less pronounced among resident couples than the total figures would suggest (see figure 4.2). Between 1996 and 2002, the civil rate for Scotland as a whole fell from 46.2 to 38.4 percent. Among residents, the fall was from 42.9 to 39.8 percent. While this suggests that much of the shift was due to wedding tourism, it also confirms a certain renewal of interest in religious weddings on the eve of civil venue liberalisation. Given the immediate and pronounced swing to civil marriage after that reform, the turn to religion in the late 1990s must be assumed to have hinged to a large degree on the flexibility of venue choice.

Taken together, then, the evidence suggests a shift – significant though not overwhelming – away from church venues in the mid- to late 1990s. Because venue choice in religious marriages leaves no trace in civil registration, it is impossible to quantify this development satisfactorily. However, if we consider the figures for denomination in this period, it becomes clear that what was happening with venues was part of a wider evolution of the relationship between marriage formation and the religious institutions that underwrote it. As I have written elsewhere, the clearest statistical indicator of this was, counterintuitively, Gretna. Figures for denomination show clearly that the – mainly English-resident – couples marrying there suddenly abandoned the registration office in favour of a variety of local churches in the mid-1990s.<sup>24</sup> From 98.6 percent in 1994, the rate of civil marriage at Gretna fell to 65.7 percent in 1997, and by the time of venue liberalisation in 2002 it had collapsed to 37.4 percent. The context for what may be read as an improbable religious revival was in fact decidedly worldly. The Marriage Act 1994 allowed civil weddings in England and Wales to be held in commercial venues. Couples travelling for a civil wedding in a romantic destination were now therefore giving up the possibility of a more appealing venue for the sake of the destination. In this context, with their expectations altered by the new possibilities at home, marriage tourists discovered *en masse* the flexibility of Scottish religious weddings.

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<sup>23</sup> Gwyneth Buchan, 'Hotels Winning the NE Wedding Battle', *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 26 July 1996. The clergy attitudes expressed echo to some extent earlier periods in the Church's relationship to orthopraxy (see chapters 2 and 5): 'Some ministers think that pressure should be on the state rather than the kirk to provide people accredited to marry couples in places such as hotels. Others, including retired Aberdeen Rev Sam Ballantyne, are happy to marry couples in hotels for donation to church charities, and a chance to offer sound spiritual guidance.'

<sup>24</sup> McLean, 'Beyond Belief', pp. 243-46.

Crucially, a religious wedding included the possibility of actually marrying over the anvil in the Gretna Green smithy, according to ‘tradition’, something a registrar could not sanction under the as yet unreformed Scots law of civil weddings. What the statistics show as a turn towards religious marriage was thus in fact a venue revolution. New ritual requirements had led to a change in fortunes for Gretna clergy, to the extent that new religious organisations were able to take root almost exclusively as wedding providers, like the Dumfries-based River of Life Church.<sup>25</sup> The distinction between religious and civil marriage, and between the growing array of religious denominations, both a matter of some delicacy in both legal and cultural terms in the middle decades of the twentieth century, thus became a simple technicality, subordinate to aesthetic concerns, as the century drew to a close. The category of denomination, made extremely flexible by the 1977 Act, came one significant step closer to describing merely a free market of service providers.

This phenomenon is only legible in the national-level statistics because of the sheer number of incomers marrying at Gretna, and the clear and rapid shift in their choice of denomination. However, working with the data at the level of registration districts, we find indications that this new culture of denomination spread beyond the confines of Gretna’s wedding tourism industry. The sheer number of registration districts and denominations makes it impossible to trace these developments at all comprehensively. Indeed, it should be stressed that the most suggestive findings in this regard have been entirely serendipitous. Among these is the case of Ratho. In this small district on the outskirts of Edinburgh we find in the mid-1990s a surprising and short-lived surge in weddings performed by the United Free Church, a tiny denomination accounting for just 0.5 percent of weddings nationally at the time. In a district previously dominated by the Church of Scotland, and where the UFC had previously barely registered, 39.2 percent of weddings in the period from 1995 to 1997 were performed by the latter. As with Gretna, religious revival does not offer a convincing explanation, especially when we consider that in the mid-1970s only around a dozen marriages were registered in Ratho on average each year, compared to over 80 in the mid-1990s.<sup>26</sup> Ratho, moreover, is a village of fewer than 2,000 inhabitants; the upswing in its marriage rate, combined with a dramatic shift in denomination, suggests that the mid-1990s saw an influx of outsiders coming to the village to get married. As we saw in chapter four, there is much to suggest that there has been in the past two or three decades a rise in domestic destination weddings, in

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<sup>25</sup> McLean, ‘Beyond Belief’, p. 245.

<sup>26</sup> These figures include non-resident couples, but their effect is unlikely to have been significant, as around 86% of both brides and grooms married in Ratho in 1995-97 were resident in Scotland.

parallel with the meteoric rise of Gretna. In the case of Ratho, it would appear that the recourse to a particular denomination to facilitate this kind of aesthetic-led ritual has made this dynamic peculiarly visible here. Curiously, there does not in fact appear to be a UFC church in Ratho. It is possible, then, that the entire surge was caused by a nearby UFC minister who was particularly amenable to performing weddings in commercial or otherwise unconventional venues.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, one survey respondent married in Ratho in 1994 explained that she opted for a religious ceremony because she and her groom ‘wanted to be married on [a] barge and Christian was all [that was] available. We weren't religious though.’<sup>28</sup>

Whatever the precise logistics of Ratho’s changed denominational profile, it seems highly likely that it mirrored the opportunistic engagement with religious institutions seen in Gretna. Another crucial element of this, as noted above, was the emergence of new denominations, and this too can be seen elsewhere in the country. At the national level, the role of smaller and emergent denominations is impossible to discern with certainty, due to their sheer number and geographical distribution. However, grouping together all Christian denominations other than the two largest – the Church of Scotland and Roman Catholic Church – makes visible a significant change around the turn of the twenty-first century. From 1974 until the early 1990s, the share of weddings represented by this ‘Other Christian’ group was around 6 percent nationally (excluding Gretna). Significantly, this suggests that the liberalisation of denomination from 1978 did not substantially affect the numbers married by these organisations. However, from around 1992, a gradual rise set in, so that by 2002, 10.9 percent of all Scottish weddings outside of Gretna were ‘Other Christian’. This figure declined thereafter, but slowly, only returning to the previous average in 2018. The precise contours of this emergent culture of ‘Other Christian’ weddings would only emerge from a painstaking study of individual registration districts. Some cases, such as Ratho, suggest that part of the change was a recourse to smaller, traditional denominations in order to facilitate weddings in particular settings. Indeed, the decline in ‘Other Christian’ weddings after their peak tellingly coincided with the liberalisation of civil venues. However, the specific manifestation of this trend in another locality suggests that part of the explanation may lie in a more fundamental reorientation in Scottish society towards the very concept of denomination.

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<sup>27</sup> Interestingly the UFC’s share of all weddings in Scotland jumped from 0.5% to 1.4% between 1995-97 and 1998-2000, suggesting it may also have been amenable to this phenomenon in places other than Ratho.

<sup>28</sup> Survey response (female computer engineer aged 37 at time wedding in 1994).

In the town of Bathgate in West Lothian, the growth of ‘Other Christian’ weddings over the past two decades has coalesced around one particular organisation, rendering it more legible in the statistics (see figure 6.1). This is Bathgate Community Church, which from around 1998 to 2009 performed 10 percent of all weddings registered in Bathgate, rising to over 20 percent the following decade. This new church does not appear to have been centred upon a particular Bathgate congregation. It has found its home not in a church building, but in the Bathgate Partnership Centre (this being the typically euphemistic name for the renovated municipal offices opened in the town several years ago). Moreover, its minister and founder, Rev. Jim Liddle, performs weddings across West Lothian, accounting for a fifth of all ceremonies in the county in 2010-2012. Indeed, in the years 2001 to 2003, Bathgate Community Church performed almost half of wedding registered in the neighbouring district of Whitburn.<sup>29</sup> The ‘community’ served by this church is clearly not strictly limited to that of its name. What, then, is the function of this newly emerged denomination? When we look at the overall denominational profile of Bathgate, we see that the Community Church has an impact not dissimilar to ‘Other Christian’ organisations in Gretna. The first significant share it took of Bathgate weddings was not at the expense of traditional Christian denominations, but of registration office ceremonies, which dropped by almost 12 percent between 1995-1997 and 1998-2000. This would place Bathgate Community Church – whose share rose by over 8 percent in the same period – at the heart of a local manifestation of the turn to new or rediscovered religious options for ritual purposes.

Indeed, as elsewhere, the civil marriage rate in Bathgate recovered after venue liberalisation in 2002. However, in the late 2000s and early 2010s, civil marriage declined even more dramatically, in the face not only of Humanism but also of a resurgent Bathgate Community Church. In this sense, Bathgate presents a rather different trajectory to the national statistics, but one which is nonetheless illustrative of wider trends. At the national level, the story of the past decade or so has been the collapse of the hegemony of Church of Scotland and registration office ceremonies in the face of civil venue liberalisation and the explosion of interest in Humanism. Bathgate Community Church reinserts religion into this story. In a wedding culture that increasingly favours ritual personalisation – albeit along highly standardised lines – it reminds us that some couples still turn to religion as a channel through which to achieve ‘proper’ ritual.<sup>30</sup> The real question raised by Bathgate Community Church,

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<sup>29</sup> 45%, or 81 weddings.

<sup>30</sup> Sherril Horowitz Schuster found this dynamic in the USA around the millennium: ‘Most of the Christian brides in my study and a few Jewish brides were not seeking to stay within the parameters of a specific religion, but were merely interested in having some type of religious ceremony rather than a civil ceremony.’ ‘Princess

then, is why a *new* denomination should fill this role, when the Church of Scotland, the Roman Catholic Church, and the smaller traditional Protestant denominations – such as the Baptists and Methodists – are present in Bathgate. Indeed, it is difficult to ascertain the precise nature of Bathgate Community Church as a denomination in the theological sense of the term; its place within the densely populated ecosystem of Protestant doctrines. The most comprehensive information I have been able to find on the Church comes from the minister’s public LinkedIn profile:

Our church is a family church that reaches out into the community. We are a growing church, and our goal is to advance the cause of our Lord Jesus Christ so that so many other people will come to know Him as Lord and Saviour of their lives.

We regularly officiate at Weddings, Christenings and Funeral services, and we try to meet people at the point of their need [in] such situations.<sup>31</sup>

The same profile notes that Rev. Liddle was, prior to founding Bathgate Community Church in 1993, Assistant Minister at Harthill Pentecostal Church. It is unclear whether Bathgate Community Church views itself as part of the evangelical tradition of Pentecostalism, or indeed whether that very theological position renders affiliation or otherwise irrelevant. The salient point is that, to the uninitiated, what the Church appears to offer is Christianity in the broadest sense, taking little heed of traditional denominational distinctions. This is a curious development for Bathgate. The town is not at first glance ideally positioned to turn a blind eye to distinctions of denomination. Indeed, during the course of this research, the town was the scene of at least one Orange Order march. However, perhaps for that very reason the notion of a Christianity of obscure denominational boundaries has a particular appeal in a place like West Lothian, where sectarianism arguably persists as an unpalatable cultural hangover rather than a vital force in daily life. The denominational ambiguity of Bathgate Community Church – like the River of Life Church in Gretna, and countless other ‘community’ organisations – is perhaps key to its appeal. Even beyond the specific legacy of sectarianism in the Central Belt, it offers a brand of Christianity that demands minimal socialisation. There is no need to have been raised in the faith or to have studied for conversion when the Church, as Liddle puts it, ‘meet[s] people at the point of their need’.

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for a Day: Perpetuating the “White Wedding” as a Traditional Ritual’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2002), p. 202.

<sup>31</sup> ‘Rev. Jim Liddle’, LinkedIn. <<https://uk.linkedin.com/in/revjimliddle>> [accessed 29 August 2019]. The profile links to a website for the church, but this appears to be defunct at the time of writing.

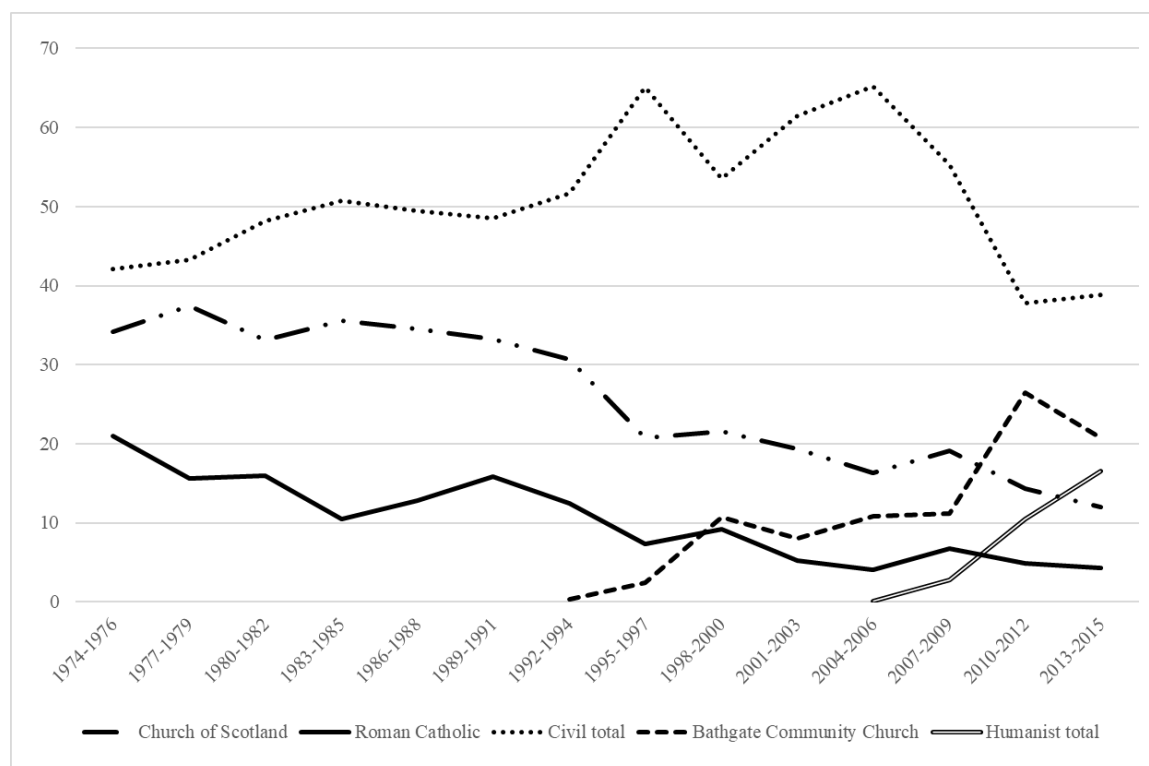


Figure 6.1: Marriages in Bathgate by denomination (percentage of total), 1974-2015 (3-year datasets).

These new denominations may present a salutary ecumenicalism, but they do not exist outwith the more worldly imperatives of the wedding industry. Another facet of Bathgate's wedding history shows this clearly. Within the context of growing domestic wedding tourism, Bathgate does not fit the image of a typical wedding destination. If it has any place at all in the popular imagination it is as a site of post-industrial decline following the collapse of the car manufacturing industry, an image immortalised in the Proclaimers' chant of 'Bathgate no more'.<sup>32</sup> The number of weddings registered there vastly increased over the first years of the twenty-first century, but this was primarily an artefact of boundary alterations which have left Bathgate and Livingston effectively the only registration districts in West Lothian, compared to 13 districts active in the mid-1970s.<sup>33</sup> A genuine influx of wedding tourists does, however, appear to have come to Bathgate – or rather, to the Bathgate Hills, falling curiously within the district of Livingston – in the past decade or so. This is

<sup>32</sup> The Proclaimers, 'Letter from America', <<https://genius.com/The-proclaimers-letter-from-america-lyrics>> [accessed 8 February 2020]. For an account of Bathgate's experience of deindustrialisation, see Catriona L. Macdonald, 'The Shopfloor Experience of Regional Policy: Work and Industrial Relations at the Bathgate Motor Plant, c.1961-1986', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Glasgow, 2013), pp. 25-37.

<sup>33</sup> The number of weddings registered in Bathgate has collapsed in more recent years to an annual average of 45 in 2016-18 (compared to around 370 per year in 2013-15), around 80% of which are now registration office ceremonies. Without knowing the precise boundaries of the district it is hard to gauge the reason for this development, but it seems probable that it is due in part to a greater variety of venues, including the Vu, available in Livingston district (where only around 8% of weddings were registration office ceremonies in 2016-18). In 2016-18, Livingston registered around 750 weddings per year on average, compared to around 530 per year in 2013-15.



thanks to the opening in the 2000s of a wedding venue in the scenic setting of the hills between Bathgate and Linlithgow: the Vu. This venue offers a range of packages starting at £5,000, which include the hire of a room in which to hold the wedding ceremony, but not the ceremony itself.<sup>34</sup> Couples are, seemingly, entitled to be married at the Vu by a celebrant of their choosing, but they are not left totally without guidance. The venue's website offers a list of 'Trusted Suppliers'.<sup>35</sup> Here, under the heading of 'Officiant' – which, it might be noted by way of context, comes between 'Videography' and 'Florist' – are listed the contact details of HSS, Livingston's District Registrar and, at the top of the list, Rev. Liddle. There is no mention of Bathgate Community Church here. Rather, the Reverend is implicitly presented as the Christian option, alongside the civil and the Humanist alternatives. If weddings in the twenty-first century are a business, then these, it would appear, are the three categories of ceremony that it makes sense to advertise.

This, I believe, is the context in which we must understand the changed culture of venue and denomination in Scottish weddings. It is not a case of simply highlighting (or, indeed, condemning) the naked influence of commercialisation. Rather, what must be understood is the salience of popular conceptions of 'doing it properly' that far outweigh the ability of any institution, religious or otherwise, to define ritual. This is the triumph of orthopraxy. We saw in chapter five how the aesthetic of the white wedding increasingly overflowed the moralistic parameters set for it in the early and mid-twentieth century. Wearing a white dress and having some level of elaborate consumption simply became part of what it took to get married 'properly'. This was an orthopraxy that for some marrying couples, perhaps the majority, was still negotiated with religious institutions that retained the right to impose some degree of *orthodoxy* on marriage ritual. In the 1990s, however, the balance between orthopraxy and orthodoxy shifted more decisively in favour of the former. Not only was the line between civil and religious marriage crossed in the name of securing the right venue or location; as organisations such as Bathgate Community Church show us, the boundaries between religious denominations have themselves become blurred. Christianity remains a facet of orthopraxy, but it is one of several mainstream options, a network of 'trusted suppliers' of ritual whose appeal rests more on the desires of individual couples than on any particular theology or congregation. In this context, the traditional denominations have declined not because of secularisation *per se*, but because they no longer have any kind of natural monopoly over orthopraxy.

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<sup>34</sup> 'Exclusive Use', The Vu. <<https://thevu.co.uk/2019-exclusive-use/>> [accessed 29 August 2019].

<sup>35</sup> 'Suppliers', The Vu. <<https://thevu.co.uk/suppliers/>> [accessed 29 August 2019].

## Scottishness and the New Dynamics of Tradition

White wedding orthopraxy has become a highly international phenomenon, producing a certain degree of homogeneity in global wedding culture.<sup>36</sup> While Scotland is certainly part of that culture, there is one respect in which Scottish weddings stand out. Expressions of national identity are not completely novel in this context, but the past four decades have seen the proliferation practices that couples deem to constitute the ‘Scottishness’ of a wedding that might otherwise have been largely indistinguishable from an English (or US, or Irish, etc.) ceremony. Most prominent among these is the adoption of the kilt as groomswear, which has become so common as to be almost orthopraxic, but other practices, such as handfasting, have also emerged to distinguish Scottish ceremonies from those performed elsewhere. As with the ceremonial elaborations relating to venue choice, these rituals of Scottishness achieve a degree of ‘individualized conformity’, allowing couples to customise their ceremony while also fitting into a commonly accepted standard of ‘traditional’ ritual practice. Indeed, the kilt might be the perfect metaphor for this, allowing virtually infinite variations in the choice of tartan but obligatorily fulfilling some criteria of ‘kilt-ness’. However, the new orthopraxy of Scottishness stands out as being particularly disconnected from actual historical precedent, while simultaneously relying on the perception of such a connection. Focussing on the Scottishness of Scottish weddings therefore allows this paradox of innovative traditionalism to be explored, revealing the changed dynamics of cultural transmission ‘after modernity’.

Much of the evidence here is drawn from survey responses to the following question: ‘Would you say there was anything particularly ‘Scottish’ about your wedding? If so, what?’ This open-ended question produced a broad range of responses, the most common of which are treated qualitatively below. However, it also allows quantitative analysis. Those who answered ‘yes’ to the first part of the question and/or gave an account of the Scottishness of their wedding were taken as a percentage of all responses, divided into subsets based on the five-year period in which the wedding occurred. The results show that the subjective assessment of the Scottishness of weddings has grown substantially over time, with the major leap occurring around the beginning of the 1990s (see figure 6.2). Thus, whatever the outwards signs of Scottishness, it appears that those marrying in Scotland have become substantially more likely to see nationality as a significant or even defining element of the

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<sup>36</sup> See Otnes and Pleck, *Cinderella Dreams*, chapter 8.

ritual. As we shall see, this increased subjective Scottishness has coincided not simply with the spread of existing practices of Scottishness, but with a significant shift in how the latter is defined in the ritual context.

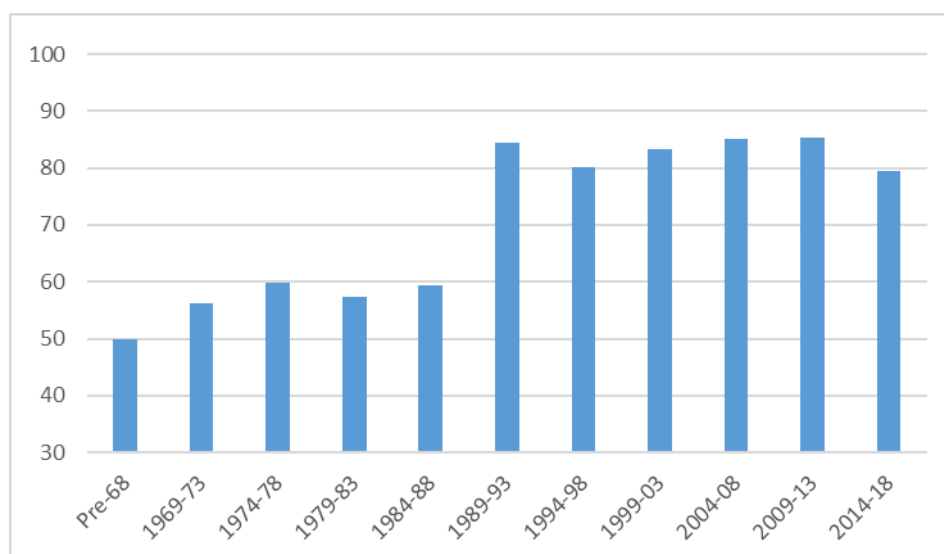


Figure 6.2: Percentage of survey respondents who saw their wedding as 'Scottish', by year group.

Survey respondents were not asked about specific customs or ritual practices. However, clearly identifiable trends emerged in the practices that were mentioned in relation to Scottishness. By far the most commonly cited practice was that variously referred to as a 'poor oot', 'scatter', or 'scramble', mentioned in 38 responses. This typically involved a quantity of loose change being thrown from a vehicle for local children – generally not guests at the wedding – to pick up, and would take place either as the bride left her home for the wedding venue, or upon leaving the venue itself (see chapter three). These were largely concentrated in the earlier part of the period covered in the survey responses, with only 10 concerning weddings after 1990, and only two after the millennium. The 'show of presents' was also mentioned by six respondents, though it is likely that it was underreported as a ritual generally taking place some time before the wedding, in contrast to the 'poor oot'. This is too small a sample to meaningfully chart over time. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the last such reference concerned a wedding in 1998, potentially placing it in the same timeframe as the 'poor oot'. Indeed, this respondent also reported having a 'scramble'. As the poor oot and show of presents disappeared from survey responses, a new practice came into view: handfasting. This is the (supposedly ancient) practice of binding the marrying couple at the hands with a length of material to symbolise their enduring connection. 15 respondents reported using this custom in their weddings, the earliest such ceremony taking place in 2002. Thus, during a period when a much higher proportion of weddings were

perceived to be in some way Scottish, the specific customs through which that Scottishness was enacted underwent a fundamental reordering.

What, then, accounts for this shift? When we examine respondents' accounts of different customs more closely it becomes clear that, while poor oots and handfastings have both been considered signs of Scottishness, the dynamics of that Scottishness have not been constant across the two practices. The most obvious difference is the place held by each custom in relation to the marriage ceremony itself. The poor oot was a pre- or post-ceremony custom. Handfasting, in contrast, is a constitutive element of the ceremony itself; it embodies the legal and social bond between the parties to the marriage in a physical act with an associated artefact. Significantly, this means that it is the couples themselves, along with the celebrant, who enact the custom of Scottishness. This stands in contrast to the poor oot. When the protagonist of this custom was identified in survey responses – that is to say, the person who scattered the coins – it was generally the father of the bride who had taken charge.<sup>37</sup> In other words, the primary locus of Scottishness in custom shifted from the periphery of the wedding ceremony to its very centre.<sup>38</sup>

This shift is indicative of a broader change in the sources of wedding tradition. Crucially, although the poor oot was mentioned in response to the question of Scottishness, several respondents expressed doubt as to whether it was a specifically Scottish custom. It was initiated by a member of the couple's parents' generation, and so appears to have happened as a matter of course, dependent less on the national than the familial context for its legitimacy. No such doubts were expressed about handfasting. This practice was presented as unambiguously Scottish, and several respondents explicitly characterised it as 'traditional'. The apparent absence of handfasting before the turn of the century makes it highly unlikely that any of the couples involved had inherited the practice from their parents or any member of the older generation. Indeed, it is fairly clear that handfasting is a recent innovation. It was occasionally discussed in the local press and in letters to the *Scotsman* in the 1930s, but the focus of these discussions was always decidedly antiquarian and at no

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<sup>37</sup> I recall a 'scatter' in Bathgate in the early 2000s, in which it was the bride who scattered the coins. As noted, survey data would indicate that this was a dying practice by this point, and the transfer of the responsibility from bride's father to bride suggests it may also have been affected by the shift of distinctly Scottish ritual from periphery to centre.

<sup>38</sup> Telfer, Steph, 'The Meaning behind Handfasting', Scottish Wedding Directory, 6 January 2016. <<https://www.scottishweddingdirectory.co.uk/the-meaning-behind-handfasting/>> [accessed 5 September 2018]. See also: 'Tying the knot: handfasting through the ages', *BBC*, 26 April 2011. <[http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/history/tying\\_the\\_knot\\_handfasting\\_through\\_the\\_ages.shtml](http://www.bbc.co.uk/scotland/history/tying_the_knot_handfasting_through_the_ages.shtml)> [accessed September 2018].

point was any reference made to its contemporary survival.<sup>39</sup> Likewise, a 1958 article in *The Scottish Historical Review* placed the practice in the seventeenth century at the latest, and framed contemporary attention in terms of the dispute as to whether it constituted a betrothal or marriage ritual, rather than its place in contemporary Scottish ritual.<sup>40</sup> Despite the lack of inheritance, in the twenty-first century the practice has been confidently claimed as heritage. This, more than anything else, neatly encapsulates the paradox of the Scottish question in wedding culture; radical departures in practice were enacted in the idiom of nationhood, thus taking on that timeless quality that so often proves crucial to the authority of ritual.<sup>41</sup> In these customs, the idea of a national culture became the vector of tradition, where once intergenerational transmission was the dominant factor.

The adoption of handfasting is thus highly suggestive as to the underlying mechanics of innovation in Scottish marriage ritual, but there is scant basis on which to argue that it has become a universal or even widespread feature of weddings. In contrast, the practice of kilt-wearing among grooms in Scotland merits particular attention for the scale of its adoption alone. It also lends itself more readily to quantification than do other practices because of the visual record left in local newspapers. In addition, survey respondents were asked directly to detail what they wore for their wedding and why. In the kilt, then, we have a manifestation of national identity in life cycle ritual that can be isolated for more focussed analysis in both quantitative and qualitative terms, giving a fuller sense of the nature and extent of the ‘nationalisation’ of wedding culture.

Kilt-wearing was a fairly marginal practice among Scottish grooms before the 1970s and, as we shall see below, was confined to specific sectors of the population. Among the general populace, the practice grew steadily from the 1970s, becoming extremely common in the 1990s. In 1975, just 5 percent of grooms photographed in the *Lothian Courier* wore kilts; a decade later the figure was just over a quarter (26 percent), and in 1995 it had reached 83 percent.<sup>42</sup> In the *Stornoway Gazette* and *Cumbernauld News* the figures rose from 4 to 84 and 7 to 81 per cent respectively over the same period. It is worth noting as well that, in contrast to the rise in non-church venues, the growth in kilt-wearing became visible before

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<sup>39</sup> E.g.: ‘The Rite of Handfast’, *Scotsman*, 4 February 1933; ‘Eskdalemuir’s History’, *Southern Reporter*, 24 April 1930.

<sup>40</sup> A. E. Anton, ‘Handfasting’ in Scotland’, *The Scottish Historical Review*, 37:124 (1958), 89-102.

<sup>41</sup> Howard identifies this as key to US wedding industry, *Brides, Inc.*, passim. See also Eric Hobsbawm, ‘Introduction: Inventing Traditions’ in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Eric Hobsbawm and Terrence Ranger (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>42</sup> The figures for 1995 in fact represent a discontinuous 12-month period from late 1994 to early 1996 due to missing back issues.

the decline of wedding photograph publication entered its terminal phase. In all three newspapers sampled, the number of grooms photographed in 1995 was substantially higher than in 1975.<sup>43</sup> This was not, then, simply a case of only the most elaborate weddings surviving in the visual record. Survey responses, grouped together in ten-year periods, add greater detail to the chronology suggested by the local press, albeit on the basis of a much smaller sample size. Of male respondents referring to weddings taking place before 1968, only 15.4 percent (2) said they had worn a kilt for the occasion; for the period 1969 to 1978, this figure rises slightly to 20 percent (6), and more sharply for the following decade to 46.7 (14). For the two decades between 1989 and 2008, the figure is just over 70 percent (17 and 18 respectively), falling back to 63.6 percent (21) for the decade ending in 2018. A final, more detailed newspaper sample confirms this chronology: the proportion of grooms photographed in kilts in *Hawick News* grew from under 5 percent in the 1970s to over 25 percent by the end of the 1980s, rising sharply to 70 percent by the mid-1990s (see Appendix 2).

Prior to the period of growth and hegemony sketched out above, the presence of the kilt in Scottish wedding culture differed not only in terms of prevalence, but also in the contexts in which it was worn. The most obvious difference is that it was in this period largely confined to children in the wedding party.<sup>44</sup> Due to the tendency to publish photographs of the newlyweds alone or with the best man and maid, it is hard to gauge just how common this practice was, but where a male child attendant was pictured he was often dressed in a kilt. Similarly, couples were frequently pictured leaving the church to the accompaniment of a piper in highland dress, and a number of survey respondents cited this practice as contributing to the Scottishness of weddings throughout the period. In earlier years, for which visual evidence alone is relied on, all of these kilted attendants, whether piper or usher, were found at ‘white’ weddings. In this context it may be seen as an element of elaboration in ceremonies in which greater conspicuous consumption was invested in; a Scottish accent to the standardised mid-century wedding aesthetic. However, in weddings where the kilt took a more central position – as grooms’ attire – its presence was predicated on criteria that concerned more than nationality alone. In Hawick, the kilted grooms photographed in the

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<sup>43</sup> In the *Lothian Courier*, 86 grooms were pictured in 1975, 297 in 1985, and 163 in 1995; in *Cumbernauld News*, 28 were pictured in 1975, and 132 in 1995; in the *Stornoway Gazette* the corresponding numbers were 67 and 106.

<sup>44</sup> According to Jonathan Faiers, tartan was a well-established element of Victorian children’s clothing, part of a wider fashion for military uniforms in civilian dress. See Jonathan Faiers, *Tartan* (Oxford: Berg, 2008), pp. 116. On the broader history and political implications of tartan’s adoption after 1745, see Matthew P. Dziennik, ‘Whig Tartan: Material Culture And Its Use in the Scottish Highlands, 1746–1815’, *Past & Present*, 217 (2012), 117-47.

immediate post-war decades wore the garment as part of a military uniform, and this applies equally to the various wartime local newspapers examined in chapter two. The exception to this rule concerns weddings of less exclusively local interest. It was not uncommon to see a kilted groom in a ‘society’ wedding, reported as much for its celebrity appeal as for its local connections (see figure 6.3). In such cases, however, the kilt featured as an emblem of Highland aristocracy. Kilt-wearing of this kind had more in common with the elite taxonomies of eighteenth and nineteenth century antiquarianism than with the popular tartantry of contemporary Scottish weddings.<sup>45</sup>



Figure 6.3: Modern wedding tartantry, 1950. ‘One of the loveliest weddings of the year took place at Aboyne yesterday. Bride was the Hon. Margaret Coats and the bridegroom the Hon. James Bruce. Headed by Piper, John Burgess, Aberdeen, they walk to the reception at Glentanar House.’ Source: Sunday Post, 30 July 1950. ©D.C. Thomson and Co., image created courtesy of British Library.

The rapid rise of kilt-wearing in the late-twentieth century thus represented the loss of part of the existing structural basis for the practice; a membership requirement, so to speak. This dynamic was identified, at least in part, by the ethnologist Ian Maitland Hume, who established a useful distinction between ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ kilt wearers. The former wore the kilt as a sign of the status they personally enjoyed as soldiers or Highland

<sup>45</sup> Murray Pittock argues that the concept of ‘family tartan’ was not a novelty of this period, but notes nonetheless that it underwent a definite process of codification and commercialisation. See Murray Pittock, ‘Plaiding the Invention of Scotland’, in *From Tartan to Tartantry: Scottish Culture, History and Myth*, ed. by Ian Brown (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010) pp. 41-42.

gentlemen, while the latter have adopted the kilt as a signifier of Scottishness in the abstract.<sup>46</sup> Hume's study is, however, marred by some unfortunate disciplinary assumptions.

He explains that,

From an ethnologist's point of view the information supplied by those who have customarily worn the kilt since their childhood provides the benchmark against which the views of others, who by definition do not have any family 'tradition' of wearing the kilt, can be compared.<sup>47</sup>

In other words, it is not 'kilt-wearing' as a socially situated practice that is under investigation, but rather 'kilt wearers' as distinct social groups with different relationships to some assumed notion of authenticity. Indeed, despite the novelty Hume attributes to the 'new' wearers, all but one of the interviewees cited in his article were either resident in the Highlands, worked in the dress-hire industry, or came to kilt-wearing through military connections. This is a study that leaves little room for the consideration of kilt-wearing as a relatively unreflexive, majority practice. This is a crucial oversight. Many grooms of the late twentieth century wore kilts, but they did not need to consider themselves 'kilt wearers' in order to do so. It had become an almost entirely unquestioned aspect of marrying in Scotland. Indeed, though several survey respondents referred to wearing a family tartan, or wearing a kilt to symbolise family heritage, only one articulated a specific family connection to kilt-wearing *per se*.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority gave as their reason for wearing a kilt that it was 'traditional' to do so, or simply that they were Scottish, the implication being that this was sufficient explanation for the choice in itself. As one respondent, married in 1998, put it: 'what else should a Scottish guy wear on his wedding[?]'<sup>49</sup> The reasons given for marrying in a suit were, on the other hand, more diverse, and included things like considerations of cost, pressure from family, and the desire to be fashionable. Interestingly, however, 'tradition' was also given as a reason by a sizeable minority of grooms married in suits. There is little evidence, then, that the choice between suit and kilt was particularly fraught or loaded for the individual grooms faced with it; either could be worn as a matter of course, even as the 'Scottish' option became the more prevalent.

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<sup>46</sup> Ian Maitland Hume, 'Tartanry into Tartan: Heritage, Tourism and Material Culture', in *From Tartan to Tartanry*, ed. by Ian Brown, pp. 86-7; 'Tartan and the Wearing of the Kilt as a Mark of Changing Concepts of Identity in Contemporary Scotland', *Review of Scottish Culture*, 12 (1999/2000), 59-68 (p. 59).

<sup>47</sup> Hume, 'Tartan and the Wearing of the Kilt', p. 61.

<sup>48</sup> 'My father was a soldier in a Highland regiment and he was also Treasurer of West Lothian Highland Games committee so it followed I wore the kilt at my wedding'. Survey response (male IT analyst aged 27 at time of wedding in 1988).

<sup>49</sup> Survey response (male cleaner aged 21 at time of wedding in 1998).



Another discontinuity between kilt-wearing in its ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ phases is the prevalence of hired kilts among contemporary grooms. Adverts for kilt-hire services were virtually non-existent in the press before the 1990s. Indeed, Highland dress itself as a consumer good is conspicuous by its absence among the sources. An early exception underscores the extent to which the widespread adoption of the kilt relied on popular receptiveness. In 1954, the Aberdeen firm A&J Scott placed an advert in the *Aberdeen Evening Express* claiming that ‘For weddings – indeed, for every formal occasion – HIGHLAND DRESS is correct, distinctive and always fashionable.’<sup>50</sup> Here, a Highland dress specialist was making a concerted effort to extend beyond its usual clientele. However, as Vicki Howard has shown for attempts to introduce male engagement rings in the USA in the 1940s, it takes more than the assurance of a retailer to convince people to adopt innovations in ritual culture.<sup>51</sup> Nonetheless, the commercial context is not without significance. A&J Scott did not offer a kilt hire service, meaning that prospective grooms would have to commit to buying a full Highland outfit outright. The same advertisement mentioned the firm’s hire service for morning suits and related accessories, perhaps undercutting the appeal to adopt Highland dress.<sup>52</sup> Over a decade later, it was still morning suits that dominated the wedding hire market. In October 1965, the *Express* published an article on the same firm, interviewing the director about the menswear industry:

“90% of men at weddings and funerals these days are in hired outfits.” [...] It seems strange that here in the heart of Scotland a man can hire evening wear and other clothes for that special occasion, but NOT a kilt outfit. Says Mr Daly, “We don’t hire kilt outfits and I don’t know of anywhere else in the district that does. You would have to send to London if you wanted that.” It’s a strange world when you’ve got to send to a “foreign” country for your own national dress!<sup>53</sup>

The journalist’s comments hint at an assumption that Scottish men would have some inclination to marry in their ‘national dress’, an inclination evidently thwarted by the lack of hire services on offer. It may be the case, then, that the early adopters of the kilt were those who could afford to own a full kilt outfit for use on a variety of special occasions. However, it must be underlined that the initial growth in kilt wearing coincided not with the general rise in consumer spending from the early 1950s, as was the case with white wedding dresses, but later. This is not the story of a well-established ideal finally accessible to the average

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<sup>50</sup> *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 11 March 1954.

<sup>51</sup> Howard, ‘A "Real Man's Ring"’.

<sup>52</sup> Tellingly, the advert included the prices for suit hire but not for the purchase of highland dress. *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 11 March 1954.

<sup>53</sup> ‘Scott’s New Shop’, *Aberdeen Evening Express*, 13 October 1965.

consumer. Something more fundamental than the affordability of emulation had to change for the kilted groom to become a widespread phenomenon.

If kilts were largely restricted in the mid-twentieth century to ‘traditional’ kilt wearers, their wholesale adoption by the wedding industry had to await the breakdown of this social group’s monopoly over it. Indeed, it is not insignificant that once kilt-hire advertising took off in earnest – by which time kilt-wearing was already on the rise – tartans were rarely advertised in the local press on the basis of clan or regimental affiliations. In the 1990s they were promoted under the names of sports teams among other things, and in a 1998 advert in *Hawick News* the varieties “Teviotdale, Hawick, Flower of Scotland and Braveheart” were to the fore.<sup>54</sup> Popular tartantry in the late twentieth century was thus removed from the exclusive antiquarianism of the clan societies.<sup>55</sup> The history of the kilt as groomswear thus highlights the extent of the divergence between the Scottishness of wedding culture before and after the early 1990s, in character as much as in scale. In the expansion of kilt-hire we see the confirmation of what is suggested by the smaller-scale adoption of handfasting. Contemporary rituals of Scottishness present a radical departure from established practice while nonetheless seeking the authority of tradition. In both cases, individual preference released from intergenerational expectations nonetheless seeks out expressions of collective identity.

How, then, are we to understand this expansion and transformation of Scottishness in wedding culture? In order to understand the phenomenon more fully, a brief foray into the contested history of Scottish national identity in popular culture is necessary. The rising ‘Scottishness’ of weddings places them within – and indeed, makes them perhaps the most common contemporary site of – the cultural phenomenon that has come to be known as ‘tartantry’. Indeed, the period of increased Scottishness in weddings roughly coincides with the most sustained critical discussion of expressions of nationhood in Scottish popular culture. Anxieties over the authenticity and political (im)potency of popular Scottishness are probably at least as old as the embrace of Highland cultural symbols that followed 1745, but the late twentieth century saw tartantry established as a key site of tension over the meanings and experience of Scottishness. These critiques can be divided into a modernist and a postmodernist phase. In the former, popular Scottishness was pathologized as a symptom of

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<sup>54</sup> Advertising feature, *Hawick News*, 30 January 1998.

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, when my parents married in 1985, my father hired a red tartan kilt because my mother liked the colour and felt it was ‘more Scottish’, rather than because it denoted any clan affiliation. Ann McLean, interview with author, residence, Bathgate, 18 February 2018.

Scotland's unequal position within the Union and the thwarted development of a 'true' national culture. In the work of Tom Nairn and Colin McArthur, this paradigm framed sophisticated materialist and cultural analysis, but at root it shared unhelpful assumptions about agency and authenticity with Hugh Trevor-Roper's misguided debunking exercise in *The Invention of Tradition*.<sup>56</sup> Much recent scholarship on tartanry has, in contrast, taken a decidedly postmodernist slant. Rightly dismissive of Trevor-Roper's faith in the possibility of cultural authenticity, recent works have sought to democratise the meanings of tartanry, pointing to creative and subversive uses of the form in order to place agency firmly on the side of the consumer, in line with much recent work in cultural history and material culture studies. While this shift has been vital in highlighting the fluidity in the meanings of tartan, it has also served to dehistoricise the concrete cultural practices of tartanry, employing the artistic licence of the semiotician to treat tartan as a cultural text to be read in splendid isolation. There has concomitantly been a lack of empirical grounding, particularly in studies of tartan in the decades since the Second World War.<sup>57</sup> Sally Tuckett's recent intervention, insisting on the banal, material qualities of tartan in the period of its adoption outwith the Highlands, is exceptional and serves to underline the extent to which histories of tartanry have been polarised by politics, whether national or disciplinary.<sup>58</sup>

What unites the work of all these scholars, with the exception of Tuckett, is a tendency to treat tartanry only within the Scottish context, implicitly framing the relationship between national identity and popular culture that it represents as a uniquely Scottish phenomenon. Scotland is not, however, alone in seeing a resurgence of popular expressions of ethnicity and national identity within the ritual life of a supposedly individualist age. American historians and sociologists have addressed this issue, but their explanations are similarly rooted in the specificities of their national context. Studies of the African-American rediscovery of 'broomstick weddings' and analogous revivals of 'white ethnicity' among descendants of Europeans immigrants in the United States have focused on the generational

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<sup>56</sup> See Tom Nairn, *The Break-Up of Britain: Crisis and Neonationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1977); Colin McArthur, *Scotch Reels: Scotland in Cinema and Television* (London: BFI Publishing, 1982); Hugh Trevor-Roper, 'The Invention of Tradition: The Highland Tradition of Scotland', in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by Hobsbawm and Ranger.

<sup>57</sup> See for example: Richard Butt, 'Looking at Tartan in Film: History, Identity and Spectacle'; Paul Maloney, 'Wha's Like Us?: Ethnic Representation in Music Hall and Popular Theatre and the Remaking of Urban Scottish Society'; and David Goldie, 'Don't Take the High Road: Tartanry and its Critics', in *From Tartan to Tartanry*, ed. by Brown. Other contributors to this volume attempted to beat Trevor-Roper at his own game, establishing continuities in – particularly Lowland – tartanry: see Ian Brown, 'Tartan, Tartanry and Hybridity', in *ibid.*, pp. 1-2; Hugh Cheape, 'Gheibhte breacain charnaid ("Scarlet Tartans Would be Got ..."): the Re-invention of Tradition', in *ibid.*

<sup>58</sup> Sally Tuckett, 'Reassessing the Romance: Tartan as a Popular Commodity, c. 1770–1830', *The Scottish Historical Review*, 95:2 (2016), 182–202.

dynamics of integration and differentiation, as well as, in the latter case, more sinister undercurrents of backlash against the gains of the civil rights movement.<sup>59</sup> The latter argument has been developed most fully in Matthew Frye Jacobson's *Roots Too*, which posits white America's rediscovery of ethnicity – the 'nation of immigrants' narrative – as an active erasure of the nation's foundations in settler colonialism and the slave trade.<sup>60</sup> These explanations do not transfer easily to the Scottish context. Here, ethnicity has apparently been 'rediscovered' at the heart of lifecycle ritual not among an immigrant community, but in the 'native' population of a country where the politics of race and immigration – though far from absent – have tended to be fairly muted in public life.<sup>61</sup> White ethnicity among the Scottish and other diasporas is certainly part of the story here, but it cannot stand in for an assessment of parallel developments 'at home'.

Diaspora can, however, offer a framework for connecting these two sites of ethnic revival. For Paul Basu, in his study of Scottish diaspora tourism, it is the malaise of (post)modernity that sends Americans across the Atlantic in search of their roots.<sup>62</sup> Though this reading does not take into account the dynamics of Scottishness in the 'old country', its focus on the connection between modernity and ethnic identity converses productively with some of the most nuanced recent scholarship on the former, namely Andrew Blaikie's work on the Scottish imagination. Blaikie approaches the question of popular Scottishness, but addresses tartanry less directly than the works discussed above, placing it instead within a wider account of the dynamics of memory and nationhood in modern Scotland. Perhaps for this reason, his account does not fit neatly into the established camps in the tartanry debate, though it tends towards the kind of humanist optimism that characterises the postmodernists. For Blaikie, there is genuine egalitarian potential in the 'parochialism' that haunts both schools of thought on tartanry. Indeed, the parish is a recurrent presence – or rather, absence – in his account of the Scottish imagination. It features both as a lost reality of community belonging and an intellectual legacy offering a utopian vision of a restructured Scottish

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<sup>59</sup> Tyler D. Parry, 'The Holy Land of Matrimony: The Complex Legacy of the Broomstick Wedding in American History', *American Studies*, 55:1 (2016), 81-106; Pleck, *Celebrating the Family*, pp. 64-66; Waters, *Ethnic Options*.

<sup>60</sup> Frye Jacobson, *Roots Too*.

<sup>61</sup> On the politics of race in Scotland, see *No Problem Here: Understanding Racism in Scotland*, ed. by Neil Davidson, Minna Liinpää, Maureen McBride and Satnam Virdee (Edinburgh: Luath, 2018). To a remarkable extent, the kilt has proved useful as a symbol of integration rather than of an exclusive Scottish ethnicity. Examples of this dynamic abound; a recent, particularly visible one was the image of Humza Yousaf MSP being sworn into the Scottish Parliament in English and Urdu, wearing a kilt with a jacket cut and detailed in a South Asian style. Tharoor, Ishaan, 'Watch: Muslim politician in a kilt swears oath in Urdu to British queen', *Washington Post*, 13 May 2016. <<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2016/05/13/watch-muslim-politician-in-a-kilt-swears-oath-in-urdu-to-british-queen/>> [accessed 9 February 2020].

<sup>62</sup> Basu, *Highland Homecomings*, chapter 10.

polity. For Blaikie, modernity itself is crucial to understanding modern Scottish culture; our highly mediated, image-laden relationship to the past, and therefore to the nation, is a dynamic arising both from modernity's technologies and from its undoing of the spatial dynamics of community, embodied in the idea of the village or parish.<sup>63</sup> Taking Basu's and Blaikie's work together, it becomes clear that the felt absence of authentic community sits at the heart of a resurgent culture of symbolic belonging. Heritage tourists' connection to and cultural memory of their ethnic origins may be more obviously mediated and alienated than those of resident Scots, but the history of Scottishness in weddings reveals a similar seeking among the descendants of those who stayed. Andrea Peach's work the 'commodification of national identity' in the Scottish craft and souvenir industry in the 1970s offers a concrete, commercial manifestation of this transnational development.<sup>64</sup> The 'Braveheart' tartan marketed by a kilt-hire firm in 1990s Hawick neatly sums up the new semiotic regime: blockbuster commercialism and mass culture infused with a romantic, marketable notion of Scottish ethnic authenticity. It is perhaps not insignificant that the 1995 film of that name depicted a handfasting ceremony, a practice that would feature prominently in the rituals of Scottishness within a decade of its release. Scottish national identity and wedding culture cannot, of course, be reduced to imitations of Hollywood spectacle. But if, as Blaikie argues, old photographs and footage constitute the media of modern memory, fictional representations of the past must also be given their place in that regime of memory.

Popular practice cannot be traced definitively to specific influential images. Nonetheless, the mediation of tradition represents a common logic to the different threads of Scottishness that have come to characterise Scottish weddings. The disappearance of the 'poor oot' and 'show of presents' and the rise of the handfasting represent not a simple change in ritual fashions, but rather an altered dynamic of cultural transmission, from the social to the individual. The show of presents in particular put weddings at the heart of a complex web of social relations and obligations with a decidedly intergenerational bent. Its decline is, to that extent, extremely significant. It should be stressed, nonetheless, that handfasting is far from being a universal practice, and we should be wary of presenting it as such. However, the kilt has assumed, if not a universal, then something approaching a default position among ritual options, and it displays the same altered dynamic of transmission. Not only is this demonstrably not an inherited practice, situated in the authority of the parental generation

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<sup>63</sup> Blaikie, *The Scots Imagination*.

<sup>64</sup> Andrea Peach, 'Craft, Souvenirs and the Commodification of National Identity in 1970s' Scotland', *Journal of Design History* 20:3 (2007), 243-257. See also David McCrone, Angela Morris and Richard Kiely, *Scotland - the Brand: The Making of Scottish Heritage* (Edinburgh: Polygon, 1995).

which was so vital to ritual choice in the mid-twentieth century; it is one radically uncoupled from its previous social base. This signals a fundamental rupture, a shift in the sources of ritual authority in Scottish lifecycle ritual. This rupture is not unique to Scotland, but instead seems to permeate white wedding culture as a global phenomenon. Writing of Canada, Dawn Currie noted that ‘Even though wedding traditions appealed to [marrying couples] because they symbolize generational ties, [they] did not rely on the knowledge of mothers or other relatives who had been married’, but instead on bridal magazines and other mediated sources of tradition.<sup>65</sup> This is not, however, a conscious disavowal of parental authority. As the survey responses in particular reveal, there is little evidence of active subversion or conscious innovation in these new forms of Scottishness in weddings. Instead, couples have by and large acted in ways they saw as traditional, conforming to rather than subverting an established order of Scottishness. The influence of previous generations was thus displaced not by youthful rebellion, but by the (post)modern regime of memory itself.

The question remains: why the nation? What function does Scottishness fulfil at this historical juncture? Once again, the case of the kilt is particularly instructive. Diana Leonard noted that the dress choice of grooms carried weighty connotations of class.<sup>66</sup> In Scotland, as the kilt was emptied of its specific military and genealogical content, the need for a loaded choice between lounge suit and morning suit was obviated by the option of declaring classless nationality instead.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, though kilt-wearing was not his focus, Charsley found in 1980s Glasgow that couples were keen to frame local ritual culture as ‘Scottish’ rather than Glaswegian, thereby avoiding the negative class connotations of identifying with a locality that was still ‘*No Mean City*’ rather than ‘City of Culture’.<sup>68</sup> We recall from the discussion of community in chapter three that the period of growth in kilt-wearing coincided roughly with the decline of the structures of community that framed weddings in the mid-twentieth century. In the newspapers full of pictures of kilted grooms, there were no longer pictures of work outings; no factory weddings in full highland regalia. If the local press provided infrastructure for an imagined *local* community, its decline perhaps paved the way for a fuller adoption of the *national* community as a primary locus of identity and belonging. Anthony Cohen has argued that nationalism and individualism are not mutually exclusive,

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<sup>65</sup> Currie, “‘Here Comes the Bride’”, pp. 410-11.

<sup>66</sup> Leonard, *Sex and Generation*, pp. 135-37.

<sup>67</sup> Indeed, it was in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that identification with Scottish more than or instead of British national identity grew most significantly, and this was related to changing class structures under deindustrialisation, with support for political nationalism also closely linked to class, particularly among young, upwardly mobile Scots. See Robin Mann and Steve Fenton, *Nation, Class and Resentment: The Politics of National Identity in England, Scotland and Wales* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), chapter 5.

<sup>68</sup> Simon R. Charsley, “Glasgow’s Miles Better”, in *Symbolising Boundaries*, ed. by Cohen, pp. 178-81.

but that, on the contrary, ‘the nation is one of the resources on which individuals draw to formulate their sense of selfhood.’<sup>69</sup> It is perhaps not surprising, then, that as more local structures of identity formation and ritual transmission receded, a mediated Scottishness was able to take their place.

## Conclusion

In 2018, the Church of Scotland performed just 11 percent of weddings among resident Scottish couples. This meant that, for the second year running, HSS alone solemnised more of these marriages than the ‘national’ church. This is perhaps an unremarkable development if we take for granted the upward trajectory of secularisation in the modern age, but it is far from an inevitable outcome. A comparison with another highly secularised northern European nation serves to underline this. Kasselstrand has identified in Swedes’ relationship to the Church of Sweden the inverse of Grace Davie’s influential model of ‘believing without belonging’. That is to say that, in Sweden, many people maintain formal membership of the national church without necessarily subscribing to its belief system, or indeed any belief system. In this context, membership of the Church becomes a channel for identifying with the imagined community of the nation, and rites of passage form an important component of sustained contact with the institution.<sup>70</sup> Placed alongside the Swedish experience, the history of weddings in Scotland presented in this chapter represents a rather different model of secularisation. The Church of Scotland, rather than becoming a bulwark of national cohesion in matters of ritual, has seen its share of weddings among resident couples plummet since the opening up of alternative ritual options from 2002 onwards, culminating in the marginal position in which we find it today. The really remarkable feature of this development is that it has taken place against the backdrop of a heavily ‘nationalised’ wedding culture, not to mention an increasingly visible and mainstream culture of civic nationalism. For over two centuries, the Church of Scotland was perhaps the closest thing to a Scottish state that existed, at least from the everyday perspective of life under the ‘parish state’. And yet as the demand for full statehood has become more plausible, and expressions of national identity more routine, the national church appears less able than ever before to serve any project of nationhood, whether personal or political.

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<sup>69</sup> Anthony P. Cohen, ‘Personal Nationalism: A Scottish View of Some Rites, Rights, and Wrongs’, *American Ethnologist* 23:4 (1996), 802-815 (p. 803).

<sup>70</sup> Isabella Kasselstrand, ‘Nonbelievers in the Church: A Study of Cultural Religion in Sweden’, *Sociology of Religion*, 76:3 (2015), 275-294 (p. 279).

For Kasselstrand, it is the close relationship of church and state in Sweden that provides the key to the former's success in retaining popular allegiance even after secularisation.<sup>71</sup> It seems likely, then, that the explanation for the Scottish case lies partly in the Church of Scotland's earlier disestablishment (see chapter one) and its relatively thorough removal from marriage law (see chapter four). However, the wedding culture explored in this chapter suggest that a broader shift in cultural life has also been crucial to the ways these different legal-religious contexts have played out in popular practice. Scottish couples have not, as we have seen, abandoned Christian weddings wholesale, but have instead adopted a more idiosyncratic and denomination-blind approach to choosing celebrants. In doing so, they are perhaps not behaving so differently from the prospective brides we encountered in chapter five, defending their preferred music choices to the vicar leading their marriage preparation class; seeking the desired ritual in negotiation with the institutions populating the legal ritual landscape of the day. However, the hand of institutional religion is much weaker than in that class in 1968, and doctrinal differences that had some purchase within the popular culture of Christianity in mid-century Scotland no longer figure in the decision making of the majority of couples. As the list of celebrants offered as 'trusted suppliers' by the Vu in Bathgate would suggest, 'Christian' now exists more as a vague category of wedding than as the complex ecosystem of divergent meanings and practices that would have been recognisable to couples marrying in the 1950s. Indeed, we might think of Scottishness as having undergone a similar transition. The earlier generations of 'kilt-wearers' represented a kind of 'denomination' of Scottishness. They expressed their belonging to the nation through material practices rooted in certain 'objective' criteria of geography, family or profession. Since the 1980s, however, those practices have been subsumed into a universalised 'non-denominational' Scottishness, their only barrier to entry the same economic factors that determine all conspicuous consumption. In other words, Scotland's 'Generation X' and 'Millennials' inherited some of their parents' and grandparents' Christianity, but rather less of their Presbyterianism; their Scottishness, but not the nuances of its sumptuary codes. They inherited tradition as an abstract goal but not as a specific set of practices. The 'modern' bases of ritual – the rationalised taxonomies of denomination; the 'objective' social criteria for divergent cultural expressions – thus receded, and the cultural 'texts' they once underwrote were democratised or, rather, placed on the open market. Within this dynamic of cultural transmission, the Church of Scotland's denominational specificity and claims to national status have become irrelevant.

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., pp. 281-83.



The same process of abstraction seen in the separation of denomination and formal dress from their structural bases is writ large in the very persistence of weddings themselves as a prominent part of ritual culture. The homogenisation and hegemony of wedding culture in the middle decades of the twentieth century did, after all, mirror a comparable crystallisation of the 'modern' lifecycle. Weddings, in that context, marked a very real transition experienced by hundreds of thousands of Scots, who donned a suit or a white dress and went to church – or to a registration office in less elaborate finery – and more or less as a direct result were able to obtain a council house, have children without fear of censure, as well as finding themselves subject to a clearly differentiated set of legal rights and responsibilities. By the 1990s, weddings for many people achieved none of these things, but took on an increasingly elaborate life of their own, as cultural artefacts in their own right. In other words, their function within Scottish society has become less about passage, and more about expression. The rite has become almost an end in itself. This is culture after modernity: the spectacle of lifecycle ritual is maintained and elaborated, even as its material basis in everyday life recedes.

## **Conclusion: Rites without Passage**

### Ritual Change

At the outset of this investigation, I argued that the history of weddings in Scotland since the 1930s could be distilled into two broad moments: a moment of modernity, and a moment after modernity. By way of conclusion, it will be useful to place these two moments side by side. Doing so throws into sharp relief the surface changes that have taken place in ritual practice, and so allows us to reflect upon the deeper forces underlying these. Let us imagine, then, two archetypal weddings. The first takes place in the 1950s, and we read about it in a local newspaper. The ceremony is conducted in a church by a minister; the bride wears a white wedding dress and the groom a dark-coloured lounge suit. This is our modern wedding. The second takes place in the 2010s. The venue is a hotel, and this bride also wears a white wedding dress, while her groom is dressed in a kilt. The celebrant is a registrar, or perhaps a Humanist; we can't tell from the photograph on Facebook. This is our wedding after modernity.

These two weddings have a lot in common. They are both what might commonly be agreed to be 'proper' weddings. Throughout the period under study, marrying couples have sought to 'do it properly', and to varying degrees have invoked some notion of tradition to inform and justify their decisions. However, in doing so, they have paradoxically acted in ways thoroughly shaped by contemporary circumstances. Though guided by a common logic, which I have termed orthopraxy, our archetypal weddings both represent a subtle but significant break with earlier practice. The evolution that we can see taking place between these two weddings is not, however, merely a fashion cycle. Both the content of these weddings and the sources on which they draw throw into sharp relief the material and cultural differences between two historical periods. In the 1940s and 50s, the majority of weddings began to conform to a model already well-established in elite taste-making. Through the standardising forces of mass media and consumer culture, and in the context of a strong welfare state and 'national' church, this established ideal became a widespread reality. The modern wedding thus represented an innovation in its very conformity, the evolution embodied in the 'Roosevelt dress' discussed in chapter two. In the 1990s and up to the present, however, ritual innovation has been both more spontaneous and more genuinely novel. The main indicator of this was the rise in kilt-wearing among grooms discussed in chapter six. This began unaided by either structural incentives or a pre-

existing norm, and disrupted the established sumptuary conventions surrounding tartan. In both periods, then, many couples had weddings that bore little resemblance to those of their parents, but only the modern wedding would have been recognisably aspirational for the previous generation.

In a very real sense, then, the break with precedent is greater in contemporary wedding culture than before. If we think in terms of orthopraxy and orthodoxy, it is clear that both had a strong influence over the modern wedding. Most modern couples married according to a popular notion of correct ritual, but they also invited – or were at least largely tolerant of – the influence of religious institutions. After modernity, however, orthodoxy is the exception rather than the rule. This is not to say that mid-century couples were genuinely religious whereas contemporary couples are without belief. Rather, it points to a significant shift in the role of institutional authority in the *practices* of religion or belief. The ritual options crystallised by modernity denoted different social realities of marriage; different lived identities. In that ritual regime, religious celebrants were gatekeepers of a social and cultural good to which couples sought access through negotiation, compromising between popular culture and the doctrinal priorities of the institution in question. After modernity, the balance of power has shifted. Couples are more apt to shop around, so that even established organisations are placed in direct competition with one another and with new ritual options. Denominations have thus been emptied to a large extent of doctrinal specificity. In theory, a Muslim marriage before 1978, or a Humanist marriage before 2005, was one lived according to the principles of the belief system in question, regardless of the ceremony that had made it a legal reality. After successive reforms, the ceremony now creates a legal and statistical reality of religion- or belief-based marriage, regardless of the actual married life that follows. In part, this is a reflection of the altered nature of religion after modernity, with ‘the boundaries between religion and non-religion [becoming] bewilderingly fuzzy’ as new religions emerge and established organisations and definitions lose purchase.<sup>1</sup> However, weddings show that this is not just a matter of how new religions are formed, but also of how religious groups new and old benefit from that very definitional fuzziness to capitalise on a demand for ritual that overflows any denominational boundaries. In most cases, it would

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<sup>1</sup> M. Hamilton, *The Sociology of Religion: Theoretical and Comparative Perspectives*, cited in Russell Sandberg, ‘Clarifying the Definition of Religion Under English Law: The Need for a Universal Definition’, *Ecclesiastical Law Journal*, 20 (2018), 132-157 (p. 152). Steve Bruce confirms this dynamic, presenting it as a feature of secularisation. *Scottish Gods*, p. 153.

seem, the specific nature of the religious institution has become secondary to the ritual it provides.<sup>2</sup>

As I argued in chapter six, this new relationship between weddings and the denominations under which they are registered has a parallel in their relationship to nationhood. In both cases, it is the relationship between individual and community that has evolved with – or, rather, outgrown – modernity. The fundamental conclusion to be drawn from the fortunes of many denominations is that they have to a large extent ceased to be communities, at least from the perspective of marriage formation. When Bathgate Community Church conducts a wedding at the Vu, or when the United Free Church does so on a barge at Ratho, they are not generally meeting the needs of a cohesive congregation, but rather those of consumers. The latter may have a sincere desire for religious ceremonial, but it is as part of a ritual aesthetic emerging from popular wedding culture rather than from a lifecycle embedded in a religious community. Likewise, the vast majority of kilts worn in weddings now do not denote belonging to a particular regiment as was once the case, and if a clan tartan is chosen it is unlikely to reflect an established tradition of kilt-wearing within that person's immediate family. Rather, it is an abstract Scottishness that is expressed; a belonging oriented to an imagined rather than a lived community. Clan, nation, and denomination are categories born of modernity and its predilection for taxonomy, but their relationship to wedding culture has, in the developments outlined here, taken a turn towards the postmodern.

It is not, I believe, a coincidence that the national community has become increasingly visible in ritual in tandem with a decline in religious community. In both cases, the spatial dynamics of social life are crucial. We recall the link that Blaikie established between the decline of the parish and the powerful visual culture of national memory. Likewise, in Anderson's classic account, it is the very scale of life under modernity and the communications media that develop in these conditions that allow identification with the nation state to flourish. The 'parish state' was dissolved in 1929 but, as we saw in chapter three, welfarist modernity created its own strong local communities, arranged around industry and social housing, but with some religious life too. Many of these communities were subsequently hollowed out by deindustrialisation and Right to Buy. In the absence of such immediate, place-based belonging, wedding culture has come to be shaped by more

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<sup>2</sup> Haskey notes that the Church of England now advertises how *few* requirements couples must fulfil in order to be married in one of their churches. 'Marriage Rites', in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al, pp. 51-2.

diffuse cultural identities. One survey respondent gave a particularly suggestive account of how this development has played out in her family:

My first wedding [1974] was very straightforward and was celebrated in our local church with a reception in the local hotel. My daughters [married in 2015 and 2017 respectively] chose “venues”. Outside by a river in Perthshire and in a ruin by the sea in East Lothian. The ceremonies were conducted by registrars and everything was themed. Apart from funding, we were not hugely involved and in contrast to my wedding, my husband and I were given 3 couple invites for friends. Those blackface sheep breeders would be shocked! I agree that the invites should be their choice, however I prefer traditional weddings where locals would join in with the ceremony in the church and there was a “pour out” for the kids. Something has been lost. That sense of belonging to your community and being supported by it. Those little gifts of pillow cases and tea towels from neighbours just don’t happen now. Yes my daughters are very successful, but they are not cradled in a community.<sup>3</sup>

This testimony brings out strongly the relationship between ritual, place and community. The simple spatial proximity of the respondent’s wedding to where she lived meant that it was embedded in a set of other small rituals and gestures that reaffirmed her sense of local belonging. She personally had little control over the main event, but the overbearing influence of family and community clearly had its corollary in the strength of support and belonging offered by these. Her daughters, in contrast, were able to control their own weddings, and this self-determination is implicitly linked to the absence of a wider network, indicated by the choice of wedding venues that represented not the local default but some manner of destination. As the respective chronologies of destination weddings, kilt-wearing and denominational ‘fuzziness’ suggest, the decline of the local and the rise of more elaborate forms of self-expression in wedding ritual are not independent developments, but part of the same erosion of community as the basis for ritual.

It may be tempting to see this development in terms of a straightforward removal of external constraints on personal choice. However, framing consumption in terms of community challenges us to place choice in context. Did the respondent’s daughters choose to defy community convention in planning their weddings, and so forego community support, or did those things simply no longer exist to influence them? As is clear from the foregoing discussion, I tend towards the latter explanation. It is the structural contexts of ritual consumption rather than the underlying desires it expresses that have changed over time. The question remains, then, how have those structures changed?

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<sup>3</sup> Survey response (female civil servant aged 24 at time of wedding in 1974).

## Structural Change

The most fundamental change to the social structures underlying wedding culture concerns the legal and social meaning of marriage itself. This is the ‘passage’ to which the wedding is the corresponding rite, and in modern weddings it entailed a far greater degree of change in the objective material conditions of life than it would after modernity. While women’s legal and social circumstances were altered most dramatically upon marriage, the place of marriage within the welfare state in Scotland meant that its implications were also profound for men and, as we have seen, it remained intimately connected with adulthood itself well into the late twentieth century. Gradually, however, the social and legal regime underpinning this passage was removed. Marriage became uncoupled from adulthood and family formation, and in practice its legal effects became largely confined to the arrangements necessary upon its dissolution. If marriage was transformed under modernity from institution to relationship, wedding culture after modernity embodied and entrenched that transformation. By and large, it was now the development of an individual couple’s relationship rather than their altered legal and social status that was ritualised.

As argued above, social democratic welfarism was a major factor in mid-century wedding culture, with the welfare state underwriting much of the ‘passage’ that occurred upon marriage. Conceptualising the direct impact of neoliberalism is more challenging, because at its core neoliberalism concerns itself with removing – or, more to the point, mystifying – the influence of the state over the life of the individual. Dardot and Laval conceive of this in terms of ‘neoliberal governmentality’, arguing that deregulation and marketisation are not simply a removal of state influence, but rather a means of directing behaviours at both the individual and societal levels in ways conducive to a particular kind of economic activity.<sup>4</sup> One implication of this dynamic is that those sectors of state provision that remain now invite substantial private financial involvement and behave themselves as markets.<sup>5</sup> With respect to wedding history, we see this most clearly in the fortunes of denomination after modernity, particularly in the case of Humanism. While HSS and the other Humanist providers may not exist to extract profit from marrying couples, it is hard to argue that they do not operate within a market. There is simply no other justification for the existence of competing ‘denominations’ of Humanism. The 2014 Act may not have been intended to create such competition, but such has been its outcome. What’s more, in providing non-religious

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<sup>4</sup> Dardot and Laval, *The New Way of the World*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> See McCafferty and Mooney, ‘Resisting the Neoliberal “Modernisation” of Public Services in Contemporary Scotland’, in *Neoliberal Scotland*, ed. by Davidson, McCafferty and Miller.

ceremonies allowing for personalisation, the new Humanist denominations fulfil a function that registrars could easily carry out. Since they do not actually increase the range of beliefs catered to, there is a case for seeing this as the outsourcing and marketisation of a public service.<sup>6</sup> The Humanist denominations do not, however, only compete with each other. To some extent, the entire range of denominations present a marketplace, with Christian and other organisations also competing to be seen as ‘trusted providers’ (see chapter six).

The logic behind this diversity of provision may be described as egalitarian, insofar as it intends to make legal provision for virtually all permutations of religious or other beliefs within the parameters of marriage law. How, then, do we square this with the competition it fosters in reality? We may think of this in terms of what Nancy Fraser calls ‘progressive neoliberalism’. This is the combination of the regressive economics of neoliberalism with progressive social attitudes. Fraser argues that, in Gramscian terms, progressive neoliberalism secures popular consent for a profoundly unequal distribution of wealth by investing in a ‘politics of recognition’. This involves the adoption of a superficial commitment to racial, sexual, and gender equality, which ‘did not aim to abolish social hierarchy but to “diversify” it’.<sup>7</sup> Equality, in short, was to be achieved at the level of surface rather than structure. The relevance of this ethos to marriage formation becomes clear when we compare the legal interventions that bookend this study, namely the introduction of civil marriage in 1940 and of belief marriage in 2014. The former was an unambiguously welfarist measure. It sought to regularise the vast majority of marriages formed in Scotland at a time when marriage was foundational to the property and welfare arrangements of the bulk of households that constituted the population. It was not conceived in recognition of an atheist minority, nor of a popular right to self-determination in matters of ritual. Belief marriage, on the other hand, was introduced precisely to address such matters of recognition and ritual preference. Like civil marriage, it came at a time when a significant number of people were living in legally unrecognised partnerships, but it did nothing to extend legal protections to these couples.<sup>8</sup> Nor is there any indication that it has proved emancipatory for any previously marginalised belief group, as could reasonably be

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<sup>6</sup> Indeed, Sandberg sees the ‘exclusion of secular belief systems’ from marriage formation in England and Wales as justified by the availability of Approved Premises for civil marriage. ‘Clarifying the Definition of Religion Under English Law’, p. 149.

<sup>7</sup> Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born: From Progressive Neoliberalism to Trump and Beyond* (London: Verso, 2019), 7-15 (p. 13).

<sup>8</sup> It should be noted, however, that Scots law does now offer some minimal protections, following the Family Law (Scotland) Act 2006. For a critical assessment of this reform, see Elaine E. Sutherland, ‘From ‘Bidie-In’ to ‘Cohabitant’ in Scotland: The Perils of Legislative Compromise’, *International Journal of Law, Policy and the Family*, 27:2 (2013), 143-175.

argued for the 1977 Act. Its sole practical effect has been to break HSS's monopoly over Humanist weddings. In other words, where civil marriage represented a structural intervention, belief marriage has operated purely at the surface.

Beyond this politics of recognition, there is a more directly material manifestation of the relationship between neoliberalism and wedding culture. We recall that Christophers identified privatisation as the defining novelty of neoliberalism. In *Whiteness, Weddings, and Tourism*, Wilkes notes how previously public spaces in the Caribbean have been privatised in the process of constructing a lucrative industry targeting affluent – predominantly white European – wedding tourists.<sup>9</sup> These dynamics are more extreme in the Caribbean, but similar 'enclosures', to use Christophers's term, are taking place in Scotland. Symbolically enough, the former principal registration offices in both Edinburgh and Glasgow – the India Buildings and Martha Street, names that had some meaning in 1960s and 70s wedding culture – have both been sold to private developers.<sup>10</sup> In Edinburgh's case, this involved the legally dubious sale of common good land for the construction of a Virgin hotel.<sup>11</sup> Beyond these instances, there is a broader marketisation of civil marriage provision. As we saw in chapter five, there was a period in the 1970s and 1980s when local authorities met the popular desire for white civil weddings by investing in marriage suites. While this development may have contaminated the minimalist culture of civil weddings with the imperatives of conspicuous consumption, it did so in a genuine ethos of public luxury, as when these facilities were introduced couples were not charged extra for using them. In the early 1990s, however, charges were introduced. Though it would be another decade before the introduction of civil marriage outwith the registration office, the Thatcherite ethos that framed that reform in England and Wales was thus enacted in less dramatic fashion at the local level in Scotland.

We return once again, then, to the question of place. As elsewhere, Scotland has seen a significant erosion the very fabric of the local state under neoliberalism. Structures fluctuated between the major reforms of 1929 and 1973 but, to take one significant year as an example,

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<sup>9</sup> Wilkes, *Whiteness, Weddings and Tourism in the Caribbean*, p. 215.

<sup>10</sup> Vivienne Nicoll, 'Glasgow registry office to be demolished to make way for student flats', *Herald*, 26 May 2015. <<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/13215355.glasgow-registry-office-to-be-demolished-to-make-way-for-student-flats/>> [accessed 24 January 2020]. 'Edinburgh man spends 24 hours up a tree to protest new hotel', *Edinburgh Evening News*, 28 February 2017. <<https://www.edinburghnews.scotsman.com/news/edinburgh-man-spends-24-hours-tree-protest-new-hotel-603902>> [accessed 24 January 2020].

<sup>11</sup> Alistair Grant, 'Firm registered in tax haven snaps up Edinburgh land earmarked for five star Virgin hotel', *Herald*, 30 March 2018. <<https://www.heraldscotland.com/news/16127733.firm-registered-in-tax-haven-snaps-up-edinburgh-land-earmarked-for-five-star-virgin-hotel/>> [accessed 24 January 2020].



in 1968 they comprised a patchwork of 432 councils with different remits based on the demographics of the area covered.<sup>12</sup> At the time of writing, there are 32 unitary authorities, the largest in Europe.<sup>13</sup> Localities across Scotland have thus been emptied of political and administrative meaning. With the parallel decline of the local press, there are more and more places devoid of the infrastructure necessary to foster solidarities based on simple proximity; more and more unimaginable communities. Blaikie suggests looking past the familiar myths of Scottishness to ‘the real, physical’ communities of the nation, noting that in ‘Stenhousemuir, in East Kilbride, in Shotts, in Dundee, Kelso and Fort William, in Stornoway, Aberfeldy and Whithorn, there are populations, institutions, families; kirks and ceremonies; schools and songs; farms and factories.’<sup>14</sup> In most of the places he lists, however, there are rather fewer of those things than there were 50 years ago, and certainly far fewer weddings. And there is moreover little in the way of poor oots or shows of presents to ensure that what weddings do occur perform any integrative function for the wider community. The great geographical dispersal of marriage formation that followed the introduction of civil weddings is now being reversed, but the movement is not from the scrutiny of the parish state to the anonymity of the cities. Rather, it is from the spaces of everyday, community life to the places of wedding spectacle.

This new geography of weddings mirrors the basic structural evolution underlying wedding culture after modernity. Just as they are less and less rooted in the places where they are performed, weddings bear an increasingly abstract relationship to the very lifecycle that provides their logic. They do not emerge organically from either community culture, nor social or legal structure, but instead stand alone as rituals for their own sake. They are rites without passage.

### Morbid Symptoms

The phenomenon of ‘rites without passage’ appears to describe a postmodern configuration of appearance and reality. However, in important respects it is profoundly embedded in modernity. It was state regulation of marriage formation in Scotland that insisted – and still insists – on ritual. If, as I argue, the state is central to modernity, then we still live in a modern world. Postmodernity is a useful concept for understanding the strange relationship between

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<sup>12</sup> *Local Government in Scotland* (Edinburgh: HMSO, 1958), insert, ‘Notes on the 1968 reprint’.

<sup>13</sup> John Bryden, Eberhard Bort and Karen Refsgaard, ‘The Evolution of Local Government and Governance in Scotland and Norway’, in *Northern Neighbours: Scotland and Norway since 1800*, ed. by John Bryden, Ottar Brox and Lesley Riddoch (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2015), p. 108.

<sup>14</sup> Blaikie, *The Scots Imagination*, p. 231.

appearance and reality, but fundamentally we are living with the legacy of what modernity built. In the retention of denomination as a key administrative feature of marriage formation, we see the clearest example in wedding culture of the fossilisation of modernity's forms under altered social conditions. Indeed, in the very survival of weddings as perhaps *the* ritual in a society in which marriage is on the decline, we see this fossilisation writ large. If the old modernity is dying, the new evidently cannot yet be born, and marriage formation represents an array of morbid symptoms arising in the meantime.<sup>15</sup>

In this sense, weddings serve as a case study in the dynamics of modernity's ageing process. They show how culture is reified, perpetuated, and ultimately challenged on its own superficial terms. I do not say this to condemn contemporary ritual culture, to claim that it is somehow inauthentic, or has become riven with vacuous individualism. The freedom of choice that couples have acquired in the display of identities, the choice of celebrant, or the use of a 'destination' is not in itself a bad thing. It is good and proper that people should be empowered to create meaningful ritual for themselves and those they love. But these choices are not made in a vacuum. They are built on precedents of convention and tradition, and they marshal often significant investments of money, affect and identity. As with the couples having 'irregular weddings' in the late 1930s, or marrying in church during the Second World War, or in hotels in the 1990s, these decisions quietly and unconsciously create cultural forms that have profound implications beyond the individual rituals involved. Under modernity, the implication was a standardised practice which coalesced around civil and religious marriage, offering inconspicuous and conspicuous alternatives. After modernity, it has been to reify conspicuousness.

From this perspective, it becomes clear that people have not become more individualistic. The structures within which individualism play out have simply been loosened, rather than replaced with more ethical alternatives. The modern universalism of high nuptiality, of marriage as institution, has receded and left in its place only a cultural ideal. It was brutal and exclusionary in its very universalism, but it provided a standard framework for a welfare state that at least had aspirations to be worthy of the name. It has been replaced not by an improved, more flexible model, but by an echo of itself, an ideal that is increasingly out of step with actual social relations. As I have argued before, there has been an increasing tendency to conflate weddings with the legal and social institution they represent. This is most neatly summed up in the relative visibility of campaigning around equal civil

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<sup>15</sup> I borrow this famous line of Gramsci's via Nancy Fraser, *The Old is Dying*, p. 29.

partnerships compared to cohabitation reform; the altering of legal categories of ritual has garnered far greater attention than the materially far more pressing concerns of cohabitants. We have, in short, removed the social institution and been left only with the ritual to argue over.

This may seem an oddly dismissive attitude towards ritual in the context of a social history of the same. Indeed, it puts me at odds with a now well-established tendency within cultural history to emphasise the humane qualities of consumption as an exercise in creativity and self-fashioning.<sup>16</sup> I do not wish to discount or deride these aspects of popular culture. I would, however, plead that we must recognise the extent to which consumption can be a palliative to alienation, rather than pure self-expression in itself. The logic of progressive neoliberalism makes it almost impossible to conceive of how the welfare or community-building work once performed by marriage might be recreated on more inclusive terms, not least because its offer of representation within the parameters of a fossilised culture creates a plausible imitation of movement in the right direction. It would hardly matter what happened to wedding culture after modernity if it was not for this wider context. It is clear that the positive elements of marriage, if they are to survive, will have to be inherited by other organs of the state and society. Not because marriage or its rituals are inherently patriarchal or otherwise oppressive, but because the relationship between family, property and welfare that prevailed during their formation is no longer sustainable, let alone ethical.

If the history of weddings in modern Scotland can offer one lesson as we attempt to address this, let it be that of the marriage suite. The introduction of these facilities in the 1960s and 1970s represents a brief moment when ritual was (at least partially) uncoupled both from the moral strictures of modernity and from the market forces that were already beginning to shape what came after. By providing a suitable setting for ‘white’ civil weddings at no extra charge at a time when marriage was still a crucial component of the average lifecycle, the local state took a small but significant step towards democratising ritual consumption. It did so, moreover, through a registration infrastructure that was vast and robust enough to be truly local. This intervention was short-lived, and social conditions have since evolved to the extent that democratising weddings would likely have only a marginal impact. What the example of marriage suites offers, however, is an alternative vision of life after modernity.

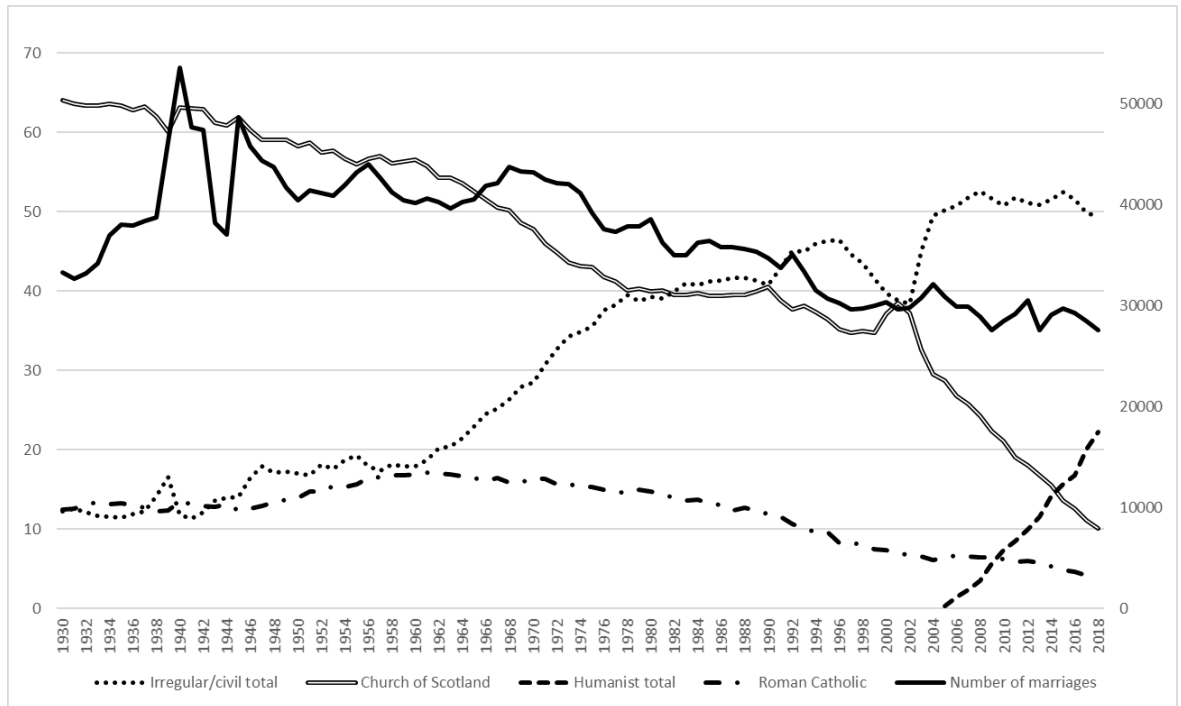
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<sup>16</sup> In wedding studies, this has tended towards portraying the extension of white wedding culture to previously excluded minorities as inherently radical or emancipatory. See Karen M. Dunak, ‘Ceremony and Citizenship’; and Elizabeth Peel, ‘Civil Partnership Ceremonies’, in *Marriage Rites and Rights*, ed. by Miles et al.

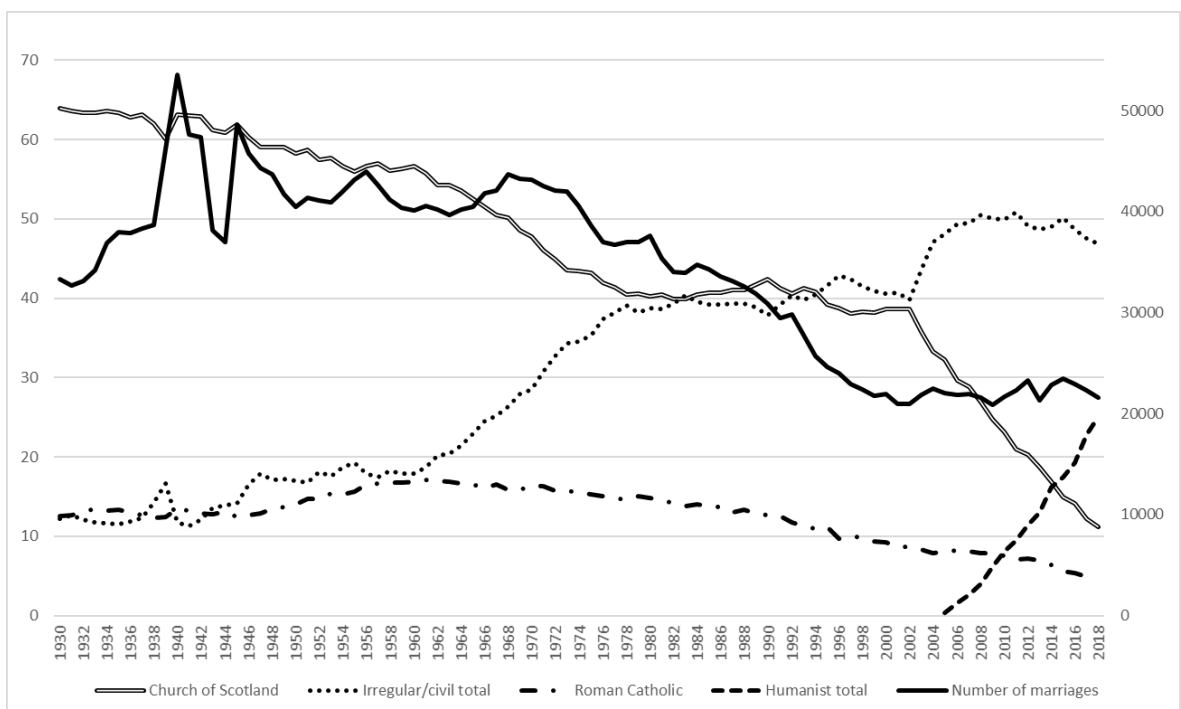
It demonstrates how the state could begin to meet diversifying family relationships and a continued desire for ritual head on, rather than throwing these upon the mercy of the market. To that extent, it is an example worth following.

## Appendix 1: Comparative figures on major denominations and number of marriages, 1930-2018

All marriages registered in Scotland, by denomination (percentage of total), and number of marriages (secondary axis), 1930-2018:

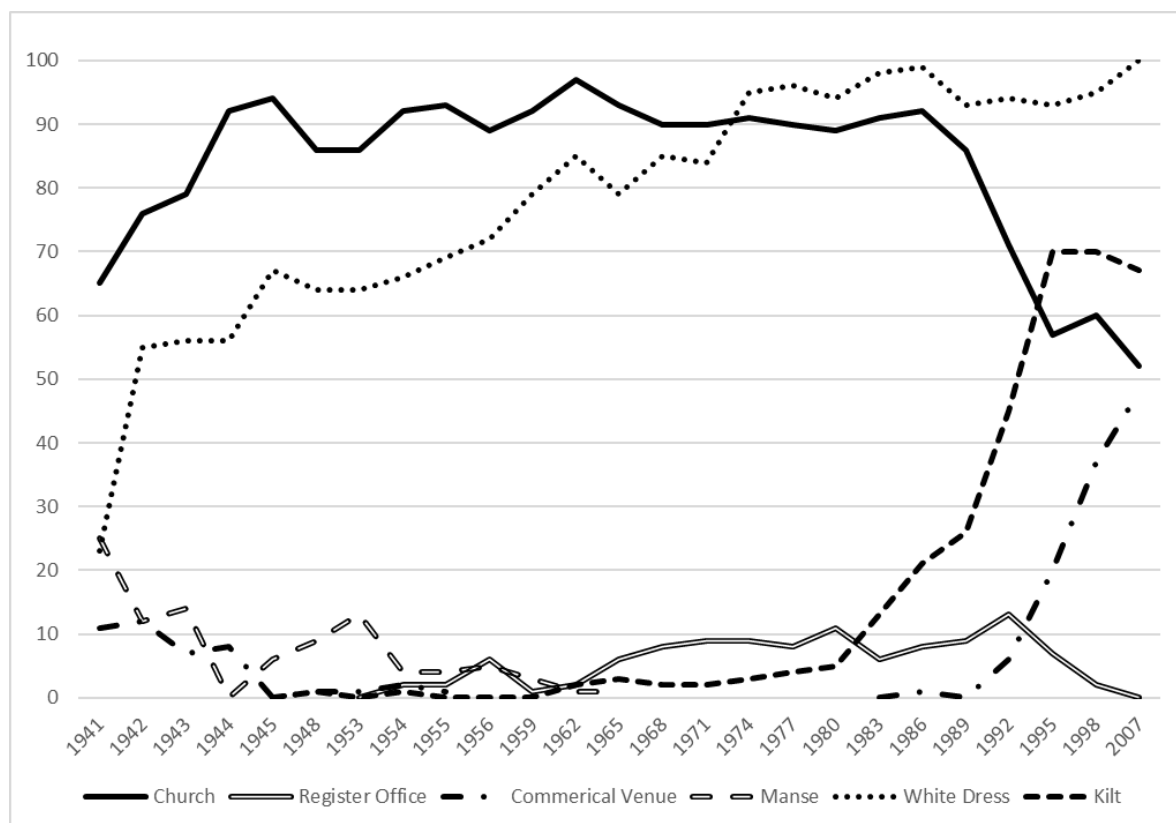


Marriages registered in Scotland (excluding those in which neither party was resident in Scotland, 1974-2018), by denomination (percentage of total), and number of marriages (secondary axis), 1930-2018:



## Appendix 2: Wedding venues and attire photographed in the local press in Hawick, 1941-2007

Figures represent the percentage of all photographs in which the relevant feature was identifiable. Intervals between data points are not consistent, because the available war years were sampled in full and fewer years were sampled towards the end of the period, when wedding reporting was dwindling. Due to patchy archival holdings and differing frequency of wedding reporting, figures are taken from *Hawick Express* for the years 1941-1965, and from *Hawick News* for the years 1968-2007.



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*Stanley L. Russell's Wedding*, dir. unknown (1950)  
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