Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Weddings

Tees Valley Museums

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Tees Valley Museums

Welcome to another edition of the Talking Tees Valley Activity Pack

Each month we use objects and photos from our museums in the Tees Valley to take a closer look at the lives and stories from people in our area.

This month we look back at weddings, one of the oldest ceremonies in the world celebrating the marriage of two people. We will see how weddings, including the dress and the cake, have changed over the years.

Preston Park Museum owns a collection of weddings dresses dating back to the 1850s to as late as the 1980s. Some of the dresses featured in this pack are from the Museum.

A brief history of weddings

Marriage is the union of two people very much in love, and often the best day of the couple's lives.

But weddings as we know them today are very different from how they used to be hundreds of years ago. Most weddings as far back as Anglo-Saxon times were organized as unions between two families for safety and financial security.

In the 1800s the Church of England only allowed marriages to take place between 8am and 12 noon. They were quiet occasions with the ceremony taking place with close friends and family. After a small luncheon the bride and groom left to go home – there were very few celebrations afterwards.

In 1886 the times marriages could take place was extended to 3pm, and this brought with it new changes, including a chance for a longer after party. Weddings became more of a full-day event.

The Modern Wedding

The 1900s brought more fashionable changes for weddings – Royal weddings and movies such as 'Father of the Bride' (1991) and 'Four Weddings and a Funeral' (1994) have all played their part in influencing trends. These include the style of the wedding dress, themed weddings, and attitudes to getting married.

Weddings nowadays can be less formal and more fun. Weddings can now take place in parks, stately homes, and museums. More emphasis can be put on the afterparty, and more people are getting married for love, instead of enforcing social standing.

Why do we have groomsmen and bridesmaids?

Old Roman laws required 10 witnesses to be present at the wedding. All 10 had to be male, but the bride was also required to have female attendants to escort her to the ceremony.

The Wedding Dress

In Ancient Rome brides and their bridesmaids used to wear matching dresses. This was so that bridesmaids could act as decoys if a rival suitor tried to kidnap the bride. Dresses came in bold colours to reflect the bride and her family's social status.

In 1840 Queen Victoria wore a white dress for her wedding, which was unusual for the time, but popularized the white wedding dress. Dresses were made with removable sleeves and trimmings so that the dress could be re-worn.

Many weddings during the 1910s and 1920s were more low-key due to the First World War and rationing. This was reflected by a drastic change in the style of the dresses which developed dropped waistlines, short hems, and long veils.

The 1950s saw a revival of 'traditional' dresses with long skirts, wasp-waists, and 'sweetheart' necklines. But fabrics like silk were being rationed during this time and it was difficult to have a dress made. It was fortunate then that around this time wedding dress hire services were introduced.

Princess Diana's wedding in 1981 inspired larger wedding dresses and it became fashionable to get married in a 'meringue' dress which had larger skirts and puffy sleeves.

Here's a fun fact!

Horseshoes were seen as bringing good luck and were given to the bride usually by her mother on the big day. Princess Diana also had a horseshoe sewn into her dress – although hers was a bit fancier, as it was 18 carat gold and studded with diamonds!

The Wedding Cake

Wedding cakes have been a part of marriage ceremonies since medieval times and have a long history of changing in both size and ingredients.

The first cakes were wedding pies and it was believed that eating the pie guaranteed a long and happy life for the married couple – but these pies were filled with strange foods which were supposed to be aphrodisiacs, including rooster combs and lamb's testicles! Yuck!

From the 17th century cakes made from mixed fruit and spices and glazed with white sugar icing were introduced. These cakes also started to get bigger. Once again this had been inspired by Queen Victoria's wedding cake, which was over a foot tall and weighed 300 lbs.!

Here's a fun fact!

An even older wedding tradition from Roman times involved breaking a small loaf of bread over the bride's head during the ceremony. It was also an accepted part of the tradition that the guests would take some of the breadcrumbs for good fortune.

When the bride and groom first cut the cake, it is often the first task they do together as a married couple. Feeding each other a slice was also a symbol of their dedication to one another.

Some cakes came in all shapes and sizes!

This one is shaped like a picnic basket!

Can you solve these anagrams of wedding cake ingredients?

Gegs

Garus

Demix Lepe

Zarpmani

Scolve

Minnanoc

Sasirin

Tunalass

Dice Game – Draw a Wedding Cake

All you need to play this game is a pen or pencil, a piece of paper and a die. You can play this game with a friend or as part of a group.

Together you take it in turns to roll the die and draw the part of the wedding cake that corresponds to the number.

For example: If the die rolls on the number 1, then draw the first tier of the cake.

1 = Tier 1
2 = Tier 2
3 = Tier 3
4 = Icing
5 = The happy couple
6 = Decorations

Below we have included a drawing of a cake and a selection of couples and decorations for you to copy. Or you could draw your own!

Answers to anagrams on Page 5

Gegs = Eggs
Garus = Sugar
Demix Lepe = Mixed Peel
Zarpmani = Marzipan
Scolve = Cloves
Minnanoc = Cinnamon
Sasirin = Raisins
Tunalass = Sultanas

All images used in this pack are courtesy of Preston Park Museum and Grounds.

You can find all our Talking Tees Valley packs through the Tees Valley Museums website under ‘Latest News’ or here: https://teesvalleymuseums.org/news/

If you would like to share your stories or contact us about the packs please e-mail teesvalleymuseums@stockton.gov.uk