

## THE PROPOSAL

In the past when the marriage proposal was a more formal procedure, the prospective groom sent his friends or members of his family to represent his interests to the prospective bride and her family. If they saw a blind man, a monk or a pregnant woman during their journey it was thought that the marriage would be doomed if they continued their journey as these sights were thought to be bad omens.

If, however, they saw nanny goats, pigeons or wolves these were good omens which would bring good fortune to the marriage.

During Medieval times in Brittany the man proposed by leaving a hawthorn branch at the door of his beloved on the first of May. By leaving the branch at the door she accepted his proposal. She made known her refusal by replacing the hawthorn branch with a cauliflower.

## SURNAMES

It was thought unlucky for a woman to marry a man whose surname began with the same letter as hers. The sentiment was summarised in the following rhyme:

*To change the name and not the letter*

*Is to change for the worst and not the better*

The bride should not practice writing her new name before the wedding. This is thought to bring bad luck by tempting fate.

## CHOOSING THE DAY

Although most weddings now take place on a Saturday it was considered unlucky in the past. Fridays were also considered unlucky particularly Friday the 13th. The famous old rhyme advises a wedding in the first half of the week:

*Monday for wealth*

*Tuesday for health*

*Wednesday the best day of all*

*Thursday for losses*

*Friday for crosses*

*Saturday for no luck at all*

Advice on which month to marry in is given by the following rhyme:

*Married when the year is new, he'll be loving, kind and true.*

*When February birds do mate, You wed nor dread your fate.*

*If you wed when March winds blow, joy and sorrow both you'll know.*

*Marry in April when you can, Joy for Maiden and for Man.*

*Marry in the month of May, and you'll surely rue the day.*

*Marry when June roses grow, over land and sea you'll go.*

*Those who in July do wed, must labour for their daily bred.*

*Whoever wed in August be, many a change is sure to see*

*Marry in September's shrine, your living will be rich and fine.*

*If in October you do marry, love will come but riches tarry.*

*If you wed in bleak November, only joys will come, remember.*

*When December snows fall fast, marry and true love will last.*

*Marry in May and you'll live to rue the day*

May has been considered an unlucky month to marry in for a number of reasons. In Pagan times the start of summer was when the festival of Beltane was celebrated with outdoor orgies. This was therefore thought to be an unsuitable time to start married life. In Roman times the Feast of the Dead and the festival of the goddess of chastity both occurred in May. The advice was taken more seriously in Victorian times than it is today. In most Churches the end of April was a busy time for weddings as couples wanted to avoid being married in May. Queen Victoria is thought to have forbidden her children from marrying in May.

*Marry in Lent, live to repent*

Lent was thought an inappropriate time for a wedding as this was a time of abstinence. June was considered to be a lucky month to marry in because it is named after Juno, the Roman goddess of love and marriage.

The Summer as a whole was considered a good time to marry and this is partly to do with the sun's association with fertility. In Scotland one popular custom was for the bride to "walk with the sun" to bring her good. She would walk from east to west on the south side of the church and then continue walking around the church three times.

## SOMETHING OLD, SOMETHING NEW ...

*Something old, something new  
Something borrowed, something blue  
And a silver sixpence in your shoe*

The rhyme originated in Victorian times although some of the customs referred to in it are much older.

The "something old" represents the couple's friends who will hopefully remain close during the marriage. Traditionally this was an old garter which was given to the bride by a happily married woman in the hope that her happiness in marriage would be passed on to the new bride.

"Something new" symbolises the newlyweds' happy and prosperous future.

The "something borrowed" is often lent by the bride's family and is an item much valued by the family. The bride must return the item to ensure good luck.

The custom of the bride wearing "something blue" originated in ancient Israel where the bride wore a blue ribbon in her hair to represent fidelity.

The placing of a silver sixpence in the bride's shoe was to ensure wealth in the couple's married life. Today some brides substitute a penny in their shoe during the ceremony as silver sixpences are less common.

## THE WEDDING DRESS

It is thought unlucky for the bride to make her own wedding dress.

It is also unlucky for the groom to see the bride in her wedding dress before she arrives at the ceremony.

The bride should not wear her entire outfit before the wedding day. Some brides leave a

final stitch on the dress undone until it is time to leave for the ceremony when the outfit is completed.

## WEDDING DRESS COLOUR

Most brides today marry in white which symbolises maidenhood. This tradition started by the rich in sixteenth century. The tradition was given a boost by Queen Victoria who chose to marry in white instead of silver which was the traditional colour of Royal brides. Before the white dress brides wore their best dress. The colour was a matter of preference. The following is a traditional rhyme offering advice on dress colour:

*Married in White, you have chosen right,  
Married in Blue, your love will always be true,  
Married in Pearl, you will live in a whirl,  
Married in Brown, you will live in town,  
Married in Red, you will wish yourself dead,  
Married in Yellow, ashamed of your fellow,  
Married in Green, ashamed to be seen,  
Married in Pink, your spirit will sink,  
Married in Grey, you will go far away,  
Married in Black, you will wish yourself back.*

A green dress is thought to be unlucky unless the bride is Irish. The old expression that a woman has a 'green gown' was used to imply promiscuity, the green staining being due to rolling in grassy fields.

## THE VEIL

Traditionally, brides have been thought to be particularly vulnerable to evil spirits and many of the customs and traditions associated with weddings are to provide protection. The veil was originally worn by Roman brides. It was thought that it would disguise the bride and therefore outwit malevolent spirits.

The veil became popular in Britain in the eighteenth century. In this country it is associated with modesty and chastity.

In some Eastern ceremonies the bride is veiled and the groom is not allowed to see the bride's face until after the wedding ceremony.

In some Jewish weddings there is a ritual where the groom ensures that the bride is his intended before placing the veil over her face.

## FLOWERS

Flowers have always been used for decoration at weddings.

Some people choose the flowers at the wedding on the basis of their symbolic meaning. For example orange blossom has always been associated with weddings because it signifies purity and chastity.

Peonies are avoided by some as they represent shame; azaleas represent temperance; roses symbolise love and snowdrops represent hope.

A combination of red and white flowers is avoided by the superstitious because they stand for blood and bandages.

However, people from different regions may attach other meanings to the same flower.

For example lilies symbolise majesty to some but are thought unlucky by others because of their association with death.

The groom often chooses a flower for his buttonhole which also occurs in the bride's bouquet. This is a vestige of the time when a Knight would wear his Lady's colours to display his love.

## **ON THE WAY TO THE WEDDING**

When the bride is ready to leave the house for the wedding ceremony a last look in the mirror will bring her good luck. However returning to the mirror once she has began her journey will result in bad luck.

Seeing a chimney sweep on the way to a wedding is thought to bring good luck and it is still possible to hire one to attend wedding ceremonies. Other good luck omens when seen on the way to the ceremony include lambs, toads, spiders, black cats and rainbows. Seeing an open grave, a pig, a lizard, or hearing a cockerel crow after dawn are all thought to be omens of bad luck. Monks and nuns are also a bad omen. This may be because they are associated with poverty and chastity. They are also thought to signal a dependence on charity by the newlyweds.

Bad weather on the way to the wedding is thought to be an omen of an unhappy marriage, although in some cultures rain is considered a good omen. Cloudy skies and wind are believed to cause stormy marriages. Snow on the other hand is associated with fertility and wealth.

## **BRIDESMAIDS**

Bridesmaids were dressed in a similar way to the bride for the same reason as the origin of veil. The bridesmaids were thought to act as decoys to confuse evil spirits and thus protect the bride.

## **HONEYMOON**

In Ireland a laying hen was tied to the bed on the first honeymoon night in the hope that some of its fertility would be passed on to the couple. Eating a double yolked egg was also thought to bring fertility.