

## Chapter 1 : Handfasting Ceremony - Tying the knot

*HISTORY AND ORIGIN OF HANDFASTING CEREMONIES. EXPERTS DISAGREE ON the origin of handfasting. Some Neo-Pagans insist that the handfasting tradition can be proven to date back to ancient Paganism.*

By Samantha Iacia January 25, Incorporating a symbolic ritual or two into your ceremony is a great way to personalize your big day. Check out the history behind some of the most popular options. Smith Studios Photography Incorporating a symbolic ritual or two into your ceremony is a great way to personalize your big day. Here are some of the most popular wedding ceremony rituals and their meanings. New Seasons Photography Jumping the Broom This tradition dates back to the s and is believed to have origins in western Africa and Wiccan communities. The newlyweds jump over a broomstick before the recessional to symbolize sweeping away their old lives and welcoming their new life together. Before the parents from both sides take their seats, they traditionally the mothers each light a taper candle and place it next to a pillar candle that remains unlit throughout the ceremony. After the couple exchanges their vows, they light the pillar candle using the flames from the taper candles, signifying several generations of commitment. Mon Petit Studio Sand Pouring The exact origins of this ritual are fuzzy, but it was popularized in the early s by The Bachelorette star Trista Sutter when she and her husband Ryan performed it during their televised nuptials. For this ritual, the couple pours two separate vases of sand usually in different colors into the same vessel, creating a layered, one-of-a-kind pattern. From that point forward, it will be impossible to ever separate the colors, which symbolizes the blending of two people forever. Many couples personalize this ritual by choosing sand from meaningful locations. Brit Perkins Photography Love Letters This is a newer ritual, but we love the romantic notion behind it. Before the wedding, you and your spouse write love letters to each other and then seal them inside a box during the ceremony. Traditionally, the letters are accompanied by a bottle of your favorite wine or champagne. Each person is asked to briefly hold the rings in their hands while also saying a short, silent prayer for the couple if desired. The rings are returned to the couple with blessings and positive vibes for a long, happy marriage. There are several variations of using wine during a wedding, especially at religious ceremonies, but a common option is to have two small carafes of wine, one white and one red. After exchanging rings, the couple pours the wines into a third carafe, creating a blend. They each take a sip of the mixed wine to represent their individual lives becoming one. In the middle ages, handfasting was used in place of a marriage license before weddings were recognized as legal responsibilities of the government and church. Each colored cord has its own meaning, such as white for purity or red for passion. MeewMeew Studios Breaking Glass At Jewish weddings after the rabbi announces the newlyweds, the groom smashes a wrapped piece of glass with his foot. This is followed by applause and a cheer of "Mazel tov! Tradition says that the couple will remain married for as long as the glass is shattered. Article Topics on WeddingWire.

## Chapter 2 : About Handfastings

*The very word handfasting got its origin in the wedding custom of tying the bride and groom's wrists together. In some versions, this is only done for as long as the ceremony lasts, but in others, the cord is not untied until the marriage is physically consummated.*

This is a draft edition! It is not as complete as I would like it, and not all of the footnotes and references have been included as yet. However, what is included is accurate to the best of my knowledge, and all quotes from sources are accurate to the text of the cited source. Marriage Late Middle Ages to the Reformation In order to understand historical handfasting, one must first understand marriage. Marriage in late medieval Scotland, like marriage just about everywhere else in late medieval Western Christendom that is, anywhere they looked to the Bishop of Rome as head of the Christian church, could be formed two ways: Exchanging consents in the present tense I take you to be my husband, etc. Exchanging consents in the future tense I will take you to be my husband, etc. The logic here was that after a future promise, sex was considered to amount to present tense consent, and present tense consent made marriage. Note that for either method of late medieval marriage, for the marriage to be valid it did not matter if there were any witnesses or not. Witnesses only made it easier to prove. It did not matter if a priest was present or not. It did not matter if the marriage was blessed, or a mass followed, or not. It did not matter if banns had been posted in advance or not. It did not even matter if the marriage was consummated or not. A couple who exchanged consents in the present tense in the back woods with only squirrels for witnesses, against the wishes of their parents, and never had sexual intercourse was just as legally and bindingly married by the law of both church and state as a couple married by the Pope himself with the proud parents looking on and a child nine months later. The "consent made marriage" theory held from somewhere in the decades around onwards until the Reformation, so the law if not the understanding of your peasant in the street was pretty clear by the 14th century. Note that in the late medieval period marriage was primarily regulated by canon law, not civil law, and so was essentially consistent across Roman Catholic Europe Brundage. Another thing to note about this consent and consent alone theory of marriage is that it came from the Roman Catholic church. It was the late medieval Christian church that was telling secular authorities that couples who married in clandestinely against the wishes of their parents were, nevertheless, validly and bindingly married. The above is what made marriage. In Scotland, there was a third type of marriage recognized, marriage "by habit and repute", but this was more evidence of an existing marriage rather than a way to create a new marriage. In a period when couples could marry simply by exchanging consents without any witnesses, having a mechanism to prove such marriages was important. If, in late medieval Scotland or elsewhere in Roman Catholic Europe, a couple were married, they were married for life. Once a couple was validly married, they stayed married till the day one of them died. That means, one or both of them were either too young, too closely related to each other, impotent at the time of their marriage, insane at the time of marriage, or already married or betrothed to someone else at the time of their marriage. It is not until the Reformation which officially occurred in Scotland in August that divorce and remarriage became a possibility. In the case of legal separation, the couple was still considered to be married to one another, and they could not marry other partners. Although all that was necessary was for a valid marriage in the late Middle Ages was for the couple to exchange consents, from the 13th century onwards, usually a normally conducted marriage consisted of: So, while both church and civil law recognized these clandestine marriages as legal and binding, the church also regarded them as a sin. So here you have this situation: For one thing, there was no lack of priests. Anyone who wanted to find a priest for a proper marriage ceremony in face of the church could do so easily. The legality of clandestine marriages did not arise out of practical necessity, but rather out of pure impractical theory. So why did people get married clandestinely? Essentially for the same reasons people modernly run away and get married in Las Vegas or Reno, Nevada, rather than staying home and getting married in a big church wedding. It was easier, especially if there were those who might object to a marriage. And, for the unscrupulous, it was easier to deny later. The Reformation to Then, in the early 16th century, came the Reformation, and some Protestant countries changed their marriage laws, requiring a priest

or minister and the proper form for valid marriage, while some did not. Divorce gets thrown in here, too. Then, in , came the Council of Trent, which changed Roman Catholic canon law to require a priest and the proper form for a valid marriage. In Catholic countries, a simple exchange of present tense consents and an exchange of future consents followed by sexual intercourse were no longer valid ways to get married. But in civil law, the basic marriage laws remained the same until when the act reforming marriage law took effect.

**Betrothal** In the Middle Ages and first part of the Early Modern period a betrothal was a much more serious and binding thing than a modern engagement. In fact, in the late Middle Ages one impediment that could prevent a person from validly marrying was an existing prior betrothal to someone else. Ending a betrothal in a such a way as to leave one free to marry elsewhere required more than just one party changing their mind and moving on. In a normally conducted betrothal and marriage, the betrothal was not the point at which the couple or their parents or guardians first decided they would get married. Rather, it was a formal ceremony where the couple exchanged promises preferably in front of witnesses, often including a priest to marry in the future plighted their troth and where the marriage contracts were finally agreed upon. The origins of this usage are explained by Anton Among the people who came to inhabit Northumbria and the Lothians, as well as among other Germanic peoples, the nuptials were completed in two distinct phases. There was first the betrothal ceremony and later the giving-away of the wife to the husband. The parties plighted their troth and the contract was sealed, like any other contract, by a hand-shake. In each it means a pledge by the giving of the hand. The joining of the hands became a feature of betrothals in Scotland and in England during the medieval period. In fact, the ceremony of joining hands became so closely associated with betrothals in medieval times that in Scotland, and apparently the north of England, the ordinary term for a betrothal was a handfasting. The use of the term in this sense persisted in Elgin as late as Also, in the quotes above "spousit" means "betrothed" see the CSD s. The Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue DOST gives several examples that illustrate that handfasting in late medieval and early modern Scotland referred to betrothal s. So in the quote above, the betrothed couples who "continewis in manifest fornicatioun" are actually legally married, but the church leaders are insisting that they get married again, this time properly in church. Though the civil law remained essentially the same, the cultural customs surrounding marriage did change over the nearly four centuries between the Scottish Reformation and Of relevance to the issue of handfasting, in regularly formed marriages formal betrothal ceremonies handfastings faded away; it would appear that by the late 17th century, they were no longer practiced, or at the very least hand changed in nature and terminology such that they were no longer called "handfasting" Leneman , c. It is also worth noting that the verb "handfast" and verbal noun "handfasting" in Scotland in the late 17th century were used to mean "to enter into an engagement of service" and "the joining of hands in engaging an employee", respectively DOST , s. Mythical Handfasting Well after formal betrothals called "handfastings" had ceased to be actually practiced in Scotland, a curious myth arose in the late 18th century that "handfasting" referred a trial marriage of a year and a day after which the partners could either marry permanently or part freely and that this kind of "handfasting" had been practiced in former times but not currently. In the upper part of Eskdale The unmarried looked out for mates, made their engagements by joining hands, or by handfisting, went off in pairs, cohabited until the next annual return of the fair, appeared there again and then were at liberty to declare their approbation or dislike of each other. If each party continued constant, the handfisting was renewed for life Further, Pennant seems unaware that a clergyman was completely unnecessary for legal marriage in Scotland before the Reformation just as one was unnecessary after the Reformation. This is the first association of "handfasting" with supposed trial marriages of a year and a day, and even it is described as being "now obsolete" and "in use about a century past" and only occurring in one small place in the border regions. Compare this second hand rumour about practices a century earlier recorded by a man "who was not very studious of the facts when he wanted embellishment" to the facts that are known about historical handfasting and marriage in the Middle Ages and first part of the Early Modern period as discussed above. The next reference to "handfasting" as trial marriage is in The [Old] Statistical Account of Scotland , v. In mentioning remarkable things in this parish, it would be wrong to pass over in silence, that piece of ground at the meeting of the Black and White Esks, which was remarkable in former times for an annual fair that had been held there time out of mind, but which is now entirely laid aside.

At that fair, it was the custom for the unmarried persons of both sexes to choose a companion, according to their liking, with whom they were to live till that time next year. This was called hand-fasting, or hand in fist. If they were pleased with each other at that time, then they continued together for life; if not, they separated, and were free to make another choice as at the first. The fruit of their connexion if there were any was always attached to the disaffected person. May not the fair have been first instituted when the Romans resided there? Perhaps, when Christianity was introduced, this form of marriage may have been looked upon as imperfect, without confirmation by a priest, and, therefore, one may have been sent from time to time for this purpose. Regarding the fanciful speculation about connections to Roman law, Anton notes "Unfortunately for this theory, usus was obsolete in Roman law by the time the Romans came to Scotland. But as with Tennant, this custom is described as "now entirely laid aside" and also associated with the Roman Catholic era of Scottish history. Sir Walter Scott is the next to promote the idea that "handfasting" was a form of trial marriage. When we are handfasted, as we term it, we are man and wife for a year and a day: So when Scott has his character talking about supposed "handfasting" as a trial marriage for a year and a day, he too is at most claiming it was something that happened long, long ago and making no claim that it was practiced in his own day. Like earlier sources for the myth, Scott had no personal knowledge of such a practice. Later writers, both novelists and historians, take up the myth, some adding new elements to it. For example, the 19th century historian W. Note also that Skene has moved "handfasting" as trial marriage from the Borders to the Highlands. John Cameron in Celtic Law expands on this, claiming "handfasting to be one of the few Celtic customs surviving in Scots law. Neopagan Handfasting So by the mid-to-late 20th century, the myth of "handfasting" as an ancient pagan Celtic practice of trial marriage for a year and a day after which, if there are no children, the couple may choose to part freely or else marry permanently, was a well established and well known idea. At this stage, in the late 20th century, or perhaps somewhat earlier, there was a new permutation. Followers of various Neopagan religions, believing the myth to be an actual pre-Christian practice, adopted the form of the myth into their own modern religious practices and ceremonies. Over time, various Neopagan religious groups altered and added to the details. In some modern traditions the length of time became variable rather than a year and a day. In some the temporary union became renewable multiple times rather than a one time choice of marry or part. At some stage, some groups began to use "handfasting" as a synonym for legal marriage rather than for religiously recognized but legally unrecognized temporary sexual unions. And in recent years, some groups, coming almost full circle, started to use "handfasting" to mean a formal engagement to be married in the future though this may be simply a variation on the temporary sexual union that may lead to marriage theme. I have not yet tracked down the earliest evidence for modern Neopagan handfasting, nor the earliest evidence for each alteration and addition to the new traditions. I would welcome references to published books or articles that contain such evidence, especially the first published work that refers to each Neopagan handfasting development. I would also be interested in first hand witness accounts from those who observed or participated in early Neopagan handfastings from before at least ; oral history may prove more informative if published references occurred significantly later the start of the practices. Thus Neopagan handfastings, though very real and legitimate modern religious practices, are still quite different than historical handfasting as practiced in the late Middle Ages, which was Christian betrothal. Summary There are three distinct meanings, and three different eras, for "handfasting":

## Chapter 3 : Celtic Culture - The Tradition Of Handfasting | Celtic Jewelry

*Typically, a Pagan handfasting was meant to be a secret ceremony, held only in front of your coven or study group. As Wicca and Paganism become more mainstream, however, more and more couples are finding ways to work their Pagan and Wiccan spirituality into their marriage ceremony.*

News Handfasting Wedding Ceremony Traditionally, a Handfasting was performed by a priest or priestess, who would invoke the energies of the four elements to create a sacred circle in which the couple could be joined as embodiments of god and goddess. One of lovely symbols about Handfasting is that it is also a declaration of intent, where the bride and groom clearly state that they are marrying of their own free will, as well as stating their vows. As you seek to enter this state of matrimony you should strive to make real the ideals that to you, give meaning this ceremony and to the institution of marriage. With full awareness, know that within this circle you are not only declaring your intent to be hand fasted before your friends and family, but you speak that intent also to your creative higher powers. Do you still seek to enter this ceremony? Invoking The Four Directions optional In many cultures it is believed that the human soul shares characteristics with all things divine. It is this belief which assigned virtues to the four cardinal directions; East, South, West and North. It is according to this belief that we align ourselves with these elements. Each of these blessings from the four cardinal directions emphasizes those things which will help you build a happy and successful union. From the east you receive the gift of a new beginning with the rising of each Sun, and the understanding that each day is a new opportunity for growth. Blessed be this union with the gifts of the South and the element of fire, for energy, passion, creativity and the warmth of a loving home. From the fire within you generate light, which you will share with one another in even the darkest of times. Blessed be this union with the gifts of the West, the element of water, for your capacity to feel emotion. In marriage you offer absolute trust to one another, and vow to keep your hearts open in sorrow as well as joy. Blessed be this union with the gifts of the North, the element of earth, which provides sustenance, fertility and security. The earth will feed and enrich you, and help you to build a stable home to which you may always return. Will you honor and respect one another, and seek to never break that honor? We will [Second cord is draped over the hands] And so the binding is made Will you share the burdens of each so that your spirits may grow in this union? Above you are the stars and below you is the earth. Like the stars you love should be a constant source of light, and like the earth, a firm foundation from which to grow. Contact Patricia Painter today for a consultation!

## Chapter 4 : Historical Handfasting

*Handfasting is a rural folkloric and neopagan custom, initially found in western European countries, in which a couple hold a commitment ceremony. The commitment may be seen as temporary and secular, or of a longer, spiritual variety, depending on the context.*

In those times, the couple themselves performed the Handfasting before witnesses. It was also used in Scotland for the engagement period of a year and a day before a wedding was proved. In some versions, this is only done for as long as the ceremony lasts, but in others, the cord is not untied until the marriage is physically consummated. Handfasting is the marriage rite used today by many Heathens, neo-Pagans and Wiccans. The term itself comes from the custom of shaking hands over a contract. It is a custom steeped in old tradition. In most Pagan traditions today it may mean a non-state registered wedding or one in which a marriage license is filed. For some it is a year and a day, renewable "so long as love shall last" and for others a commitment to be together through many lives. There are probably as many rituals for this as there are people who have joined themselves together. The hands are generally bound with a cord as part of the ritual. One custom is that while facing each other, the couple placed their right hands together and then their left hands together to form an infinity symbol while a cord is tied around their hands in a knot. Another custom is that the man and woman place their right hands only together while a cord is used to tie a knot around their wrists. The ritual itself might have been led by a respected non-church affiliate such as a Chieftain, Leader, Priest, Priestess, Shaman, or Elder of the community while the couple took turns reciting their vows of promise to be engaged for a year and a day in front of witnesses. A cord is tied in a knot around their hand while the ritual takes place. In day of old, records were not kept who got engaged, married, had kids, and died. Today the Sacraments of the church has the responsibility of taking care of these things. Before the church took over these duties, these things were overseen by the whole community and therefore were set in law by their witnessing what happened between the couple making the promise. If a handfasting was performed with the two left hands together without the tying of the knot, as was the custom of rich and influential German nobility, it meant that the woman was a mistress and would not be able to claim the name, inheritance, property, etc. Two-handed Handfasting still constituted a fully legal marriage throughout Europe whether the blessing of the church was sought or not. Clergymen, of course, recommended that newlyweds attend church as soon as possible after the signing of the contract and the Handfasting. Marriage is now one the Seven Sacraments that had been ignored by the church for centuries. Only the very wealthy and affluent could afford church marriages. Handfastings were under the jurisdiction of common law rather than canon law. In the 16th century in Switzerland, if couples were seen in public drinking together they could be considered married.

## Chapter 5 : handfasting ceremonies – Witches Of The Craft®

*The Tradition Of Handfasting Marc Choyt 03/28/ These days, contemporary Celts, neo-pagans and others interested in alternative marriage ceremonies have adopted the tradition of handfasting, which involves binding the hands of the couple with ribbon or cord in a public to symbolize marriage vows.*

**Mission Statement** The mission of Handfastings. We seek to offer a wide range of information about handfastings and Goddess- and Nature-inspired wedding ceremonies. What is a Handfasting? A handfasting is an old Pagan custom, dating back to the time of the ancient Celts. A handfasting was originally more like an engagement period, where two people would declare a binding union between themselves for a year and a day. The original handfasting was a trial marriage. It gave the couple the chance to see if they could survive marriage to each other. After a year goes by a handfasting was once believed to last a year and a day, the couple could either split as if they had never been married or could decide to enter permanently into marriage. Today, Wiccans and Pagans have embraced handfasting as a part of their wedding ceremony. A handfasting can either be a legal marriage depending on state law, or a commitment for "as long as love shall last. The Handfasting Ceremony There are many variations of the traditional handfasting. After the bride and groom both declare their intent to enter into this union, the hands of the couple are clasped and fastened together with a cord or cords just before, just after, or during their vows are made to one another. The wrapping of the cord forms an infinity symbol. The handfasting knot that is tied is a symbolic representation of oneness between the couple. In a show of unity, they become bound to each other. The Cords Each Wiccan and Pagan path has different decrees concerning the color, length, type and of number of cords used to handfast the couple. One custom may have the couple facing each other, binding both pairs of hands of the bride and groom. Another custom is to have only the right hands, and another one of each right and left. There are many variations of the handfasting rite. The handfasting ritual is a beautiful, magickal rite of passage. Many non-Pagan and non-Wiccan couples are adopting this old custom, much like when couples borrow from other traditions to craft their own ceremony to match their distinctive personalities. Click the banner at the bottom of this page to go to their website. The short answer to this question is: However, the long answer entails a bit of back-story. During the formal betrothal ceremony, in which a couple promises to one another their agreement in future marriage, there was a formal handshake to seal the deal. The betrothals eventually became so formal that it was an event in and of itself, which eventually lead up to the wedding ceremony. And now for the magical part: Fast forward to modern neo-Paganism and their adaptations of sacred ancient and not-so-ancient rituals. Modern day Wiccans and Pagans recognize the power of magic which is essentially focused intent. Magical cord knotting presents an outstanding visual in illustrating intent. The handfasting ritual has been, almost effortlessly, adapted and incorporated into our modern Pagan wedding rituals as the main ceremonial element in addition to – or instead of – the ring exchange. Modern Pagans revived the literal tying of the knot. Is it a legal marriage? The handfasting ritual can be incorporated into any wedding ceremony, just as can the ring exchange. Whether or not a couple chooses to have a handfasting does not make or break the legality of the marriage. Rather, the couple must take the proper steps to ensure that their marriage is recognized by the government if they do so choose. Generally, there may have to be an ordained or legalized officiant in addition to the couple having filled out the proper paperwork. Anyone can become handfasted if that is their intent; rest assured it will be recognized by the Gods. But it may not be recognized by the government – so do your research! Do you have to be Wiccan to have a handfasting? In fact, the term handfasting arose during the early Christian era, when Paganism had already lost much ground. But people from all religious denominations can experience the beautiful handfasting ritual during their wedding ceremony. In practice, Wiccans are taught to place well-thought intention into ritual, and therefore they do so into the knotting of the cords. Because of this, the ritual of the handfasting invites a unique, magical experience between the couple. How do I find someone to perform a handfasting? While the website itself is a work in progress as I suspect in perpetuity, it will always be a direct source for those who seek someone to perform their handfasting ceremony. One can also find a wealth of information on a comprehensive website called Witcvox. There is also a handfastings Yahoo!

Group operated independently of Handfastings. Otherwise, you are going to have to do what the founder of Handfastings. I searched forever for a Wiccan High Priestess to perform my handfasting. How can I find out if they are legally registered to perform marriage ceremonies? Although there are differences between the requirements in the various states, a marriage between a man and a woman performed in one state must be recognized by every other state under the Full Faith and Credit Clause of the United States Constitution [ U. If you are serious about getting married and you want your marriage to be recognized by your government, you should be just as serious about making sure the person who performs your ceremony is legal. In addition to finding a legal officiant, the couple getting married may also have to apply for a marriage license. Because laws vary greatly from location to location, a good place to begin your research is at U. For other countries please check your local government. For same-sex unions to be recognized, this has been an uphill battle for many. While I personally advocate for the legalization and recognition of same-sex marriage, the current reality is that you may have to settle for a commitment ceremony or civil union ceremony for the time being until the rest of the world comes to its senses. But this does not mean that you cannot have a handfasting. Remember, the Gods do not discriminate – if you take a vow with a loved one to be joined in unity during a handfasting, you most certainly will be married in the eyes of the Gods. Government laws have been slow to catch up. Oh and by the way, none of the above is intended to be used as legal advice. Is there one set ceremony for a handfasting, or are there options to help tailor the ceremony for a particular bride and groom? The most important aspect of the handfasting ritual, after the intent of course, is the cords. Traditionally in much of cord magic including handfastings , cords may be nine feet in length, with each end knotted or bound with thread to prevent fraying. A natural substance such as cotton or silk is ideal. In many initiation ceremonies, cords are measured as per the length height of the persons involved in the rite; however, the numbers 3 and 9 are very magical and can be incorporated simply by using a cord that is 9 feet or 3 meters long, which is totally acceptable. In handfasting cords, traditionally, 3 cords are used, each a different color: For instance, the bride may love the color pink and be using it as one of her wedding colors. Pink would be a lovely color to use in the cords as well. Magically, pink symbolizes love. Or you can incorporate a green cord, which symbolizes fertility and growth. Do a search for color correspondences or go to: My husband and I used a purple cord - I love purple, which symbolizes spiritual strength. Not to mention that it was one of our wedding colors! A great site with an overview on basic cord magic by Estelle Daniels is: The best way to pick out cords is to use your intuition along with your intent. You can never go wrong with that. What would you say is the biggest misconception about handfasting? Considering handfastings are just now experiencing a revival, not many people have had the chance to create false impressions about the ritual. For those who may have heard of handfastings however, there may be a misconception about the original handfasting, or the betrothal, to have lasted a year and a day. This somehow may have been incorporated into the subconscious minds of some Wiccans and Pagan folk, and they may have come to the conclusion that the old betrothals, or the promise to marry, were also exactly a year and a day. But to the best of my knowledge there is no definitive proof of the handfastings of old to be exactly a year and a day. The obscurity of handfastings might invite general misconceptions about Wicca or Paganism itself. After my husband and I were handfasted, one of our wedding guests came up to us during the reception and told us that it was a very interesting ceremony: Any advice for potential brides out there considering a handfasting ceremony? I think that most people are concerned about family acceptance of the ceremony. Most people have a very narrow idea of what a wedding ceremony should be, and what exactly constitutes someone to become husband and wife. Because of this I have received several questions from people about how to talk to their parents and close relatives about having a handfasting, or even more pressing, a Wiccan ceremony. Each family is different so approaches should be dealt with on a case-by-case basis. But one should always have respect for and sensitivity towards all love ones involved. As I said earlier, one can easily incorporate a handfasting ritual into almost any ceremony. The further a bride and groom want to stray from the norm, the more complicated it can get depending on the families and their religions , so a sensitive and understanding approach is always best. And, like in marriage, you may just have to compromise.

## Chapter 6 : The History of Handfasting

*Handfasting is an old tradition performed at weddings and commitment ceremonies dating back to the origins of Pagan and Wiccan religious beliefs, around pre-Reformation Celtic times.*

Handfasting may be an unfamiliar term, although it is an ancient custom. Scotland, Ireland and other Celtic lands formerly recognized handfasting as a marriage just as binding as one performed in a church. You may have heard handfasting called "Celtic Marriage" or "hand-wrapping". During the Middle Ages, to be seen in public holding hands was a sign that the couple was exclusive to one another. Rings were usually for the rich; a cord worked just as well for everyone else. In modern usage, and of special interest here, handfasting can be part of the wedding ceremony to join two partners in a legal relationship. In order to be considered legal in Connecticut, a marriage license must be obtained and the ceremony must be conducted by an authorized officiant. Authorized officiants include Justices of the Peace and ordained clergy. I would be happy to legally join you by handfasting, as long as you have obtained the required marriage license please see the FAQs Page for information about getting your marriage license in Connecticut. If you would like a purely symbolic handfasting that is, a union that is not legally binding, I would be happy to do that as well! You can see the traditional Belarus wedding towel in the picture of Bernadette and Kirill. Your family traditions can be incorporated into your ceremony just as easily! No matter what handfasting material you decide to use, it should be about a yard long, or a little less. Most people prefer to have colored ribbons or cords, with the colors having symbolic meaning. For example, Gold, symbolic of wealth; White, symbolic of clean beginnings; red, symbolic of fire. There are no rules about the number of cords or ribbons that you can have or must have for your handfasting. People sometimes think of the Bible quotation "A three-fold cord is not easily broken. Handfasting Cords For a three-cord handfasting colored cords are often braided: White for purity, blue for fidelity, and red for passion, for instance. You may choose to use other colors; for example, green for fertility and growth, purple for spiritual strength, and gold for wisdom. The "right colors" are the colors that are right for you. If you plan on using braided handfasting cords the material can be either natural or synthetic. In general, you should avoid waxed cord. Choose a size that let each color stand out and be seen from twenty feet away. JoAnn Fabrics and most other stores sell cord in two very different diameters. If you would like to weave beads or other objects into your handfasting, you might want to use a smaller diameter cord. Some people have used Celtic knots, elephants, shells, flowers, and Chinese double happiness charms. Rachel and Josam had an especially symbolic handfasting cord. Rachel makes beautiful jewelry with beads, hemp twine, and other material. Together they braided hemp twine with a section of parachute cord and decorated the result with beads. If you would like to dye your handfasting cords to match your wedding theme colors, natural cotton cord takes dye best. Be sure to get cord that is just cotton, not cotton blended with a synthetic. Handfasting Ribbons Ribbons probably provide the widest range of handfasting colors. Would you rather have solid colors or ribbons with patterns? How about a handfasting ribbon with hearts? Or would you rather have all of your ribbons the same color? What about all white handfasting ribbons? If you would like your guests to tie your handfasting ribbons, you can either provide the ribbons and have your guests choose among them or ask each guest to bring a ribbon of their choice. Please ask your guests to bring ribbons about a yard long. You may decide to use ribbons which match the colors you have already planned for your wedding theme. See also [Involving People in Your Ceremony](#), below. In addition to the suggestions below, an Internet search for "color symbolism" plus the name of a specific color should provide much food for thought. Weaving Wishes into Your Handfasting Some couples choose to braid the ribbons or cords to be used in their handfasting. While the cords or ribbons are being braided, each person can speak aloud her or his desires for the marriage. Some couples use this as a form of meditation or prayer. Typically the braiding would be done by the couple in private, perhaps a day or two before the ceremony. Other people could also take part, or the braiding could be done immediately before the ceremony so that everyone could see the whole sequence. If other people join in the braiding, each speaks his or her best wishes for the couple. Some couples chose a three-cord handfasting, sometimes called a Cord of Three Strands Ceremony. Based on the verse from Ecclesiastes

"Though one may prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken. Usually either the couple braids the cords themselves while the officiant explains the significance of the three cords, or the couple speaks their handfasting vows while braiding the cords. Involving People in Your Handfasting Ceremony Handfasting gives you an opportunity to involve more people in your ceremony. People could read aloud a passage that is especially important to you, sing a special song, or play musical instruments while the ribbons or cords were being fastened. These are just a few examples of how to include guests in handfasting. Would you like to have several people join in your ceremony by tying the ribbons or cords? Would you like to have a happily-married couple bestow good wishes on you by wrapping your clasped hands? Your parents could bring the handfasting ribbons or cords to you. Your parents could tie the handfasting knots if that is what you would like. Younger children could feel important and involved in your special day if they helped in your ceremony by presenting the ribbons or cords, and older children could help fasten them. This might be especially helpful if you are blending families: After people took pictures, Jamie and John slipped off the ribbons and put them over their Unity Candle, which they then lit. If you would like each of your guests to tie a ribbon for your handfasting, you might want to have music playing gently in the background. You can find it on iTunes, YouTube, and elsewhere. Sample Handfasting Vows Most couples like to have vows during their handfasting. Your handfasting vows can either replace your wedding vows or be in addition to them. The following sample handfasting vows are just one of many possible styles. Together we will create your unique handfasting vows, using your choice of colors. If you are looking for examples of handfasting wording, please remember that each couple is unique and your handfasting unity ceremony will be yours alone. All four cords are tied together. Usually the ribbons or cords are tied in such a way that you can keep them tied and carefully slip them off. If it is not possible to slip them off, then the knots are left tied and the ribbons or cords are cut on the opposite side from the knots. For display purposes and symbolically, the bonds are still firmly tied. Most couples put the bonds in a place of honor, such as on a mantle. Some people drape the ribbons around their Unity Candle as Jamie and John did. Other people save their cake topper and place it in the center of their cords as seen above. Bernadette and Kirill had both a Handfasting and a Sand Ceremony as parts of their wedding. After their wedding, the cords were wrapped around the base of their sand container and put on their head table at their reception. Notice the table-top water fountain with small rocks, lighted candles, and glass pebbles, again echoing the Four Elements. More information about sand ceremonies is available on the Sand Ceremony Page. One couple had had a handfasting as part of their ceremony and their daughter was fascinated by the cords. In order to have peace in the family van, they let their daughter play with the cords. Sure enough, when they got home they found that she had untied the cords. The couple is still happily married. They even developed a tradition of having their daughter untie the cords on each anniversary, then they tie the knot again. Handfasting with Symbolic Objects You may decide that you would like to be handfasted with something other than ribbons or cords. For example, if you wear a crown of blossoms in your hair, you might like to be handfasted with a garland of the same blossoms. The grapes of today become the wine of tomorrow, but only through the pressure placed upon them. May your love, like exceptional wine, evolve and mature with each passing year. Your colors are your choices. The following are just suggestions. You will probably want to choose from one to six colors, each of which has special significance to you. The same color will mean different things to different people. As with all of the ceremony suggestions on this Site, please feel free to modify the wording to suit your desires! Likewise, you could replace "union" with "marriage" or some word more appropriate to your personalities.

**Chapter 7 : History & Origins of Handfasting Ceremonies – Witches Of The Craft®**

*In fact, the ceremony of joining hands became so closely associated with betrothals in medieval times that in Scotland, and apparently the north of England, the ordinary term for a betrothal was a handfasting.*

Some Neo-Pagans insist that the handfasting tradition can be proven to date back to ancient Paganism. Others say that handfasting can be traced back to pre-biblical times, but that there is no solid evidence suggesting that it was a Pagan tradition at all. One thing is certain: Understanding handfasting requires that we understand the concept of marriage in Scotland starting from pre-biblical times. It was necessary then for anyone who was to marry to have the consent of their parents. More importantly, the marriage was not considered binding until it was consummated. Often young children would declare their love for one another, or be betrothed by their parents, with an agreement to marry in the future. This was considered a legal contract between the two and would prevent either of them from marrying anyone else. This vow of future commitment can be compared to that of the modern day engagement ring, which is a conditional gift. It is not legal in the United States for a woman to keep her engagement ring today unless she makes good on the promise to marry. If the marriage ends in divorce, it is acceptable that the ex-wife keeps her ring under the grounds that she fulfilled her commitment to marry. It was common in Scotland and England to be married on the porch of the church being married inside the church was only for the affluent. Of course, there were many couples that did not want to be married the traditional way, for many of the same reasons that couples elope today. The most important factor that bound two people in marriage was mutual consent. Often, they chose this option because they could avoid uncomfortable conflict if someone did not approve of the marriage, because it was a cheaper option than a church wedding, or because it could be performed on a whim. Also, unlike today, if a couple were married in the late Middle Ages they were considered married for life in Roman Catholic Europe. The only thing that could break a binding marriage was death. In the late Middle Ages in Scotland and Northern England, the term handfasting was used to describe the mutual commitment ceremonies discussed above, and also commonly referred to agreements to marry in the future. These agreements bound the two people together in the eyes of the church and the state, and prevented them from handfasting or marrying another. The interesting fact here is that the handfasting was used more as a promise between two people, often minors, to declare their love for one another and a promise to marry at some point in the future. These declarations were considered completely binding by both the church and the state. By the late s in Europe, handfasting ceremonies were no longer practiced as a common form of engagement. Instead, in Ireland from the s through the early s, there are several documented cases of handfasting being used as a trial marriage. Men would choose their wives on a trial basis by engaging in handfasting rituals. The couple would live together, engage in sex, and act as a married couple for a trial period of a year and a day. When that time was finished, if the couple had no children, they could choose to part ways, free to find new partners. Or they could call for a priest to marry them permanently. The hands were bound with a cloth or specially designed cord as part of the ceremony or ritual. In some ceremonies, the cord was not untied until the marriage was physically consummated. The term itself comes from the Anglo-Saxon word handfaestung, which was a custom of shaking hands over a contract. This was the origin of the modern word wedding. The Irish maintained an ancient tradition until the nineteenth century in which men and women would gather on opposite sides of a high wall, men on the North side and women on the South. The women would put their hands through holes in the wall and the men would pick one of the hands. The pairs thus formed would then live together for a year and a day. After that period of time they would decide whether or not they wanted to enter into permanent marriage. Interestingly enough, this festival took place on Lughnassad, a Sabbat celebrated on August 2nd by Neo-Pagans. By the late s, this concept of handfasting as an ancient Celtic practice became well established and accepted. Several Neo-Pagan faiths have adapted the concept of ancient handfasting, and added their own beliefs and practices to the ritual. Some examples of ancient and new traditions used in modern handfasting ceremonies are: One cannot prove that it was primarily a Pagan practice, nor trace its precise roots. Today handfasting is clearly a Pagan practice, and especially Wiccan.

## Chapter 8 : Handfasting (Neopaganism) - Wikipedia

*Incorporating a symbolic ritual (or two) into your ceremony is a great way to personalize your big day. Check out the history behind some of the most popular options. Incorporating a symbolic ritual (or two) into your ceremony is a great way to personalize your big day. Even if you're familiar with.*

Apart from the love element, the ceremony became especially important for helping to forge alliances between the fierce warrior clans of the Gael. In ancient times they could be warriors and traders. These fighting men were highly prized as mercenary troops, huge of body, clad in chain mail and armed with two handed swords and sparth axes. Her dowry was eight score one hundred and sixty of these warriors led by Alan MacSorley. It was the biggest realm in Britain after the kingdoms of Scotland and England. His very presence, on foot or on horseback, was considered a court of law. The brieve made judgements on all legal matters and also conducted legal ceremonies, which would have included handfastings. According to the old Gaelic Brehon Laws of Ireland and Scotland, handfastings in early times took various grades. The first kind was a marriage between a man and woman of equal standing and property. The second kind was between a woman with lesser means and a man of greater who supported her. The third kind was between a woman of greater means and a man of lesser, who would then take on the work of her cattle and fields. Another form of handfasting included the man and woman being married yet living in separate houses. And yet another that involved stealing the wife of an enemy beaten in battle. The latter gives some idea of the colourful lives our ancestors lived. He also wore a twenty inch biodag which was a dirk or dagger and a sgian dubh, the small knife that slipped into the sock or boot top. Later, after the invention of firearms, a brace of heavy pistols was added to this ensemble. Today such armament is purely ceremonial, usually taking the form of the sgian dubh and occasionally the dirk in honour of old warrior custom. The dirk can be given to the bride to cut the cake. If after this period there was no child, the couple were free to part and move on. In the event that a child was born the couple would remain together and the infant would legally become the inheritor of the estate. This is referred to by the famous Scottish historian W. Today of course those couples being married in a handfasting do so on a permanent basis from the outset. A piper would play a celebratory tune at her arrival and at her departure and receive a dram of whisky for his playing. The handfasting ribbons or cords were often three, which was a number of good fortune to the Celts. Couples with Gaelic roots can plait thin strips of their two tartans together, symbolic of their union. Others can simply use colours of special significance to them.

## Chapter 9 : The Art of Handfasting | The Celebrant Directory

*Tying the Knot. Despite its primeval origins, the knot tying ceremony continues to be a central part of weddings, especially among Scottish, Greek Orthodox, Wiccan and, most recently, same-sex couples since the versatility of the ritual is easily adaptable to ceremonies of any faith.*

The tradition itself, however, is to believe to be ancient, deriving from Celtic tribes that were widespread in Europe before Christianity. Since that time, handfasting has been practiced over generations, with many variations. The term, handfasting, is from late medieval times, deriving from Old Norse: Similarly, handfasting, represents a commitment in context to a more intimate partnership for a limited time or for a lifetime. The practice was well known in Scotland, and we find early documentation from the middle ages to the early 17th century. Back then, handfasting was used for marriage by mutual consent, without the church. Couples merely needed to exchange vows. Witnesses were not absolutely necessary, though they made it easier to prove the marriage. There was also the practice of marriage by habit without formal vows. People simply lived together and became a couple. The church did not like marriages that took place outside of their institutional structures. They encouraged such couples to be married again in the church. Back then, as in today, friction existed around the issue of marriage. The Marriage act of Scotland abolished the formal legitimacy of handfasting, though people continued to use the tradition in marriage ceremonies. It was kind of like getting an engagement ring, without the ring. The promise to be married was in some respects as good as getting married, because the couple would then be permitted in the eyes of society to have legitimate sex. A handfasting ceremony came to mean that the couple would commit to a marriage for a year and a day. Scot was said to find this information about handfasting in an obscure text that modern scholars have not been able to locate. Since that time, among some people, handfasting has been utilized as a kind of short term commitment, a time in which you can try on marriage and shack up together. Finally, tradition of handfasting may be more widespread through cultures than many people assume. A few years back I witnessed a wedding which took place in a circle conducted by a Native American Medicine woman who used handfasting. She said it was part of her own tradition. The ceremony took place in nature. Many people prefer to do handfasting commitments in the warmer times of year, particularly spring and summer, when the ceremony can be held in nature. Today, the place of handfasting in a ceremony depends a lot upon the couple and who officiates the marriage. What is most appealing to many is that the tradition is simple, beautiful and counter culturalâ€”with a rich tradition outside of religious institutions.