

Governor of Edinburgh Castle gets hitched

The Governor of Edinburgh Castle, Major General Alastair Bruce of Crionaich, OBE, was married at St John's Church on Princes Street on 3 July 2021 to his partner of 20 years, Mr Stephen Knott. The wedding ceremony was officiated by the Bishop of Edinburgh assisted by the Reverend Neil Gardner, Minister of Canongate Kirk and the Rev Markus Dunzkofer, Rector of St John's Church.

The General wore his fabulously feathered hat and his frock coat, sported his many medals and the couple's combined standard flew high over the church on the corner of Princes Street and Lothian Road after the wedding. Bruce has revived the old full dress with a bicorn hat covered in swan feathers over red. He explained that the reason for the white feathers on a general's hat was to pick out the person with authority on the battlefield, as the feathers would play in the wind. It is only permissible to use cast feathers, so it can take a while to gather them together, making this an even more impressive chapeau.

The wedding was scaled back to 24 people including those officiating, so Major General Bruce resisted my attempts to call it a society wedding, but said: "We certainly felt that we had the society we wanted, and that we were entirely embraced by Edinburgh, and by the city and the castle." He explained that trying to set a date since May 2020 has been "rather like trying to catch a butterfly with a net", but that it was his fervent wish to marry Stephen in Edinburgh and that they would have this photograph of the two of them standing proudly side by side, he in his uniform.

Major General Bruce is a reservist, having served in the Scots Guards during the Falklands War, and works with Sky and as a historical adviser on films and TV programmes such as The King's Speech and Downton Abbey.

The couple will begin their married life living as much of the time as possible at the Governor's apartment at Edinburgh Castle, although Mr Knott works as Deputy Chief of Staff for the Archbishop of Canterbury, meaning that he also spends time at Lambeth Palace.



Mr Stephen Knott and Major General Alastair Bruce outside St John's Church Edinburgh PHOTO courtesy of Vikki Bruce
Bruce admits that when he joined the army it was a very different landscape as far as same sex relationships went. There was just no room in the military for them, and now he is the highest ranking British Army Officer to have entered a

same sex marriage.

He said: "I'm so happy. Being married was beyond my ken as a young soldier. I had to lie to survive because homosexuality when I joined in 1979 up until 2000 was cause for instant dismissal, with Dishonourable Discharge.

"Quite apart from the joy I have in Stephen, I have been hugely fortunate to be appointed Governor of Edinburgh Castle. I really want to try and bring the role more into the ownership of the Scottish people. Of the four nations in the UK, Scotland's history is the one most intertwined with its martial narrative, which is why being guardian of the fortress means you have to reach into every young Scot's imagination and say, this is about you.

"The speed of the change in the Army has been overwhelming – much of the change had happened before Stephen and I met. I knew it was permitted to be gay in the Army but the fact that something suddenly after a lifetime – well after 22 years being in the army without it being legal – it is difficult to immediately embrace legality and be free and say "here I am" – and I didn't for years.

"I had been brought up in a particular way where you were expected to be heterosexual. I had found myself in the army where it was now accepted, but I was not feeling particularly strong about suddenly coming out. My parents didn't know, my family and friends didn't know so it was not until I had been with Stephen for some time that I decided I could take on the coming out business. I wasn't very courageous about it really, but I had lived for so long quietly and presumed I would continue to do so. But there has been an exponential change in society. It's been also impressive that The Episcopal Church of Scotland made that step too, and when I spoke to the Bishop of Edinburgh who married us, and said how grateful we were to the Episcopal Church of Scotland for marrying same sex couples, he said we don't – I was slightly surprised. He said

we don't – we marry people. I thought that was the loveliest thing that anybody had said.”

The couple were to be married on 1 May 2020 just after Bruce's installation as Governor of Edinburgh Castle was due to take place. In the way of things both events were delayed until 2021. The installation ceremony was conducted on the evening of 24 June which is the anniversary of The Battle of Bannockburn which the new governor's ancestor, Robert The Bruce, famously won.

Major General Bruce is a commentator for Sky News and has covered many important UK events such as the funerals of both The Princess of Wales and HM The Queen Mother. He also provides input to ABC News in the US. A member of the Royal Company of Archers, he was appointed a Herald in the College of Arms.

As he knows about these matters the General helped to design the couple's combined standard, or flag. It combines his own Bruce coat of arms and his mother's family coat of arms, from the Powlett family. Mr Knott's part of the standard shows three garbs of corn representing his three sisters from his mother's first marriage. The two white chevrons show his mother's two marriages (Mr Knott's mother was widowed after her husband a prominent Northern Irish businessman was killed in a tit for tat murder). Stephen, his mother and father are shown as shamrock-shaped knots, as his surname is Knott. Then there is blue for Yorkshire where his father came from and green for Ireland.

The role of Governor of Edinburgh Castle dates from the 11th century and it is usually a senior military officer who is appointed in the role in modern times. It is highly ceremonial involving participation in the Ceremony of the Keys and Royal Gun Salutes, but Bruce is determined to make it more meaningful during his term which is due to end in 2023.

Thanks for flying our flag [@StJohnPrincesSt](#) [@StephenKnott_](#)
pic.twitter.com/xlBgv9GFL0

– Alastair Bruce (@AlastairBruce_) [July 6, 2021](#)