

## HANDBASTING

Contributed by: Christine Boulding  
The Upper Cumberland Researcher  
Vol. XX, No. 4, Winter 1995, pg. 23



Some early marriage records have “HF” or “H/F” annotated beside the names of the couple. This abbreviation stands for “Handfast”.

Handfasting was a form of announcing the intention of a couple to marry without the formal blessing of a preacher. A couple would stand before a group of their peers, clasp their hands together over their heads and state their intentions. Handfasting was good for a year and a day or until the preacher came to perform the marriage rites. Any child born of handfasting was legitimate and would inherit. Borrowed from the VA-NC Piedmont Genealogical Society, Danville, VA.

## HANDBASTING

<http://www.worldwidewords.org/weirdwords/ww-han1.htm>

Betrothal by joining of hands.

At one time, betrothal—the solemn exchange of vows of intention to marry—was as important a step as marriage itself. Some of the ceremony once common in betrothal—such as exchanging rings or a formal kiss—later became part of the marriage service as that progressively became more important. We don’t know a lot about the rules in Anglo-Saxon England before the Norman Conquest, but the betrothal ceremony seems to have been marked by the happy couple joining hands. This was the *handfast*—the holding fast of hands. It seems that in Northern England and Scotland, handfasting marked a first stage of marriage, a temporary contract that lasted a year and a day. If at the end of that time no child had been born and the couple didn’t want to continue, the betrothal lapsed. The ceremony’s name has become known again in recent decades because it has been adopted by modern Pagans such as Wiccans. The culmination of the modern ceremony often takes the form of a couple jumping together over a broom, another borrowing from ancient custom. For today’s Pagans, however, the ceremony is marriage, not betrothal. Some have a complementary divorce rite called *handparting*.

<http://www.ajlambert.com>