

From Fleece to Fabric

The Cottage Industry

The Woollen Mill

Wool comes from sheep.



Sheep are sheared for their wool. The wool is then called fleece.

Shearing with Hand Shears
These were originally like large scissors.

Shearing with an Electric Shears
This process is like shaving with an electric razor.



After shearing the wool needs sorting. The best wool comes from the sheep's shoulders or its loins.

The wool needs to be willowed to open up the wool and loosen the fibres a little before it can be carded.



Willowing by hand

Willowing using the Willower
This is a large rotating metal drum with big teeth.



The process of carding gets all the knots out of the wool and straightens it ready for spinning.



Carding with Hand Cards
This made one rolag of wool at a time, ready for spinning.

Carding using the Carding Engine
This machine can make endless rolags or wool ready for spinning.



Spinning turns the woollen rolag into strong yarn.



Spinning using the Great Wheel
This only creates one yarn at a time.

Spinning on the Spinning Mule
This machine spins up to 400 yarns at the same time.



Weaving turns yarn into cloth or fabric.



Weaving on a Hand Loom
The loom lifts the warp as the weaver pushes a foot pedal, but the weft must be passed through the warp by hand each time.

Weaving on the 'Dobcross' Loom
This machine raises the warp and passes the weft through by itself.



The woven cloth needs to be washed and dried. There are also a number of processes to choose from that give the cloth a special finish, depending on what it will be used for.



Washing in the Fulling Mill
Some cloth was pounded as it was washed in order to shrink it. The cloth would be dried on a Tenter Frame.

Washing using the mill's industrial washing machine
The cloth would be dried on the mill's industrial Tenter Machine. One example of giving the cloth a special finish would be to make it fluffy using the Teasle Gig or the Moser Raiser.



You can create patterns if you weave with different coloured wool that has been dyed as fleece or yarn. Otherwise, dyeing the finished cloth would give you just one colour.

Dyeing using plants and vegetables to make the colours.

Dyeing using chemical dyes.