

aged the woollen cloth industries in the Low Countries and thereby encouraged the rapid growth of the English cloth industry and trade (see → wool trade).

By the 14th century, expensive, heavy woollen textiles played a major role in European manufacture and international trade.

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### Woolsack

The usual container for transporting wool in the Middle Ages, the woolsack has become enshrined in British political tradition.

The Speaker of the House of Lords, the upper house of the British Parliament, sits on a woolsack. This tradition goes back to King Edward III (1327–77). It was introduced as a tribute to the English wool trade which had brought wealth to the country. Originally stuffed with English wool, but now symbolically stuffed with wool from the countries of the British Commonwealth, this ceremonial seat takes the form of a cushion covered in red material. Until 2006 the Lord Chancellor presided in the upper house and sat on the woolsack, which has throughout history been associated with the chancery.

A larger woolsack, the Judges' Woolsack, is placed in front of the Speaker's woolsack and is occupied by senior judges during the State Opening of Parliament, a memory of the attendance of judges at medieval parliaments.

In the 15th century the weight of a woolsack was standardised to 364 pounds (that is, 26 stones of 14 pounds each), but before that the value of medieval weights varied from place to place and even year to year, see → cloth: dimensions and weights.

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### Worsted

A light, wool cloth.

Worsted was made from coarse, strong, long stapled → wool which retained its natural lanolin. Both warp and weft threads had been combed before spinning to make the fibres lie parallel. It was sometimes woven in a diamond or lozenge twill weave, and, since (unlike → woollens), worsteds were not subjected to heavy → finishing processes that obscured the weave, these patterns remained visible on the cloth and were part of its attractiveness. Worsted had a hard, glossy finish. The techniques which produced it were established from time immemorial and many early medieval cloth fragments, recovered as → archaeological textiles, have this appearance. Probably the textile documented from the 8th century as *pallium Fresonicum* ('Frisian cloth') was of this kind. However, it was in the later Middle Ages, when increase in production and trade of textiles was reflected in a geographic → naming of cloths that the name 'worsted' came to be applied to this fabric. It derives from the place name Worstead, a village near Norwich, in Norfolk, an area where the long wool fleeces of sheep were particularly suited to production of this type of cloth, though manufacture was not confined to that place. The Norfolk medieval worsted trade was established in the 13th century and reached its zenith in the mid-14th century when Norwich was a major port, and one of the largest and most prosperous cities in England. By this time worsted was woven on the one-man horizontal loom, but it continued to be hand → spun in the traditional way with distaff and drop spindle. There were many varieties of weave, together with colour variations which produced, among other effects, 'raies' (striped cloths) and 'chekeres'. Worsteds were light-weight cloths, suitable for relatively thin clothing, and were exported to southern Europe where the climate was warm, as well as being used for furnishings. The name 'worsted' distinguished these cheaper, lighter cloths from 'woollens', the thick, more expensive, soft, → fulled and finished cloths

which became more prominent in manufacturing and trade during the 14th century; and also from the hybrid worsted-woollens called → serges.

The consequences of widespread warfare, from the 1290s, and especially from the 1320s, raised transportation and transaction costs to such a high level that long-distance trade in all cheap textiles from northern Europe to their natural market, in the Mediterranean basin, became unprofitable. All of the northern European worsted or say-type industries experienced dramatic decline from the early 14th century, and the English were about the last to survive, based on north-German markets, until the 1380s.

The worsted export trade experienced some recovery from the mid-15th century, with Norwich's innovative, fine quality double worsteds; but the East Anglian industry experienced its major recovery and expansion with an influx of Flemish Protestant refugee artisans, from the 1570s. The resulting 'New Draperies', were marketed as 'Norfolk stuffs'. However they were rather different from the older Norfolk industry's products, not producing pure worsteds, but textiles with a worsted warp (dry) and a woollen weft (greased).

Worsted continued to be popular for garments into modern times. Indeed, the relatively small amount of wool used in clothing today is worsted.

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## Wrappings

Textile was the only medium for wrapping—for gifts, for the protection of precious or utilitarian objects, and for the dead, until paper, plain or decorated, began to fulfil some of these functions, as late as the 19th century.

Textile wrappings would have been a way of → recycling textiles, both worn examples and probably off-cuts from textiles acquired for use as clothing or furnishings. The use of textiles for wrappings must have been ubiquitous throughout the medieval period, but we can see them most clearly from burials of the pagan and conversion centuries of the Anglo-Saxon period, from pagan Viking Age burials, sometimes from occupation sites and from other deliberate deposits such as hoards, and from burials of ecclesiastics, over a longer period. In these contexts textiles were used as wrappings for a variety of objects, both precious and utilitarian. The textiles used for precious items themselves were sometimes unusual or valuable. Those for more everyday items could be coarser or of more common types. Examples of the former include a copper-alloy ball, possibly a button or amulet (Tattersall Thorpe, Lincolnshire), wrapped in two fine, tabby-woven circles of Z-spun undyed → silk; and drinking vessels, weapons and the helmet from the Sutton Hoo → Ship Burial (Mound 1) were also wrapped in textiles. In the Anglo-Saxon princely burial at Snape, a wooden bowl was covered by a → striped cloth. Hack-silver from the Viking Age hoard from Lewes Castle, Stornoway, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, had been divided into groups by → linen tabby textiles of a common type. The shears found wrapped in cloth and then further enclosed in a maple wood box, in a Viking boat grave in the Orkneys, were presumably valuable to the owner. A shield boss from another Viking boat burial from Kiloran Bay, Colonsay, appears to have been wrapped in a coarse tabby. These examples and variations have suggested that in fact wrapping was a common practice, not confined to burials, as indeed is suggested by finds with textile traces from occupation sites, and that its function in general was for protection—both of the objects themselves and occasionally the user, as with the padding of shield grips and bucket handles. The relative fineness of the textiles used then becomes a mark of wealth and status.

The use of textiles to wrap the dead—either as wrappings for burial urns or as shrouds and