On Tenterhooks
A compendium of textile words, terms and expressions
compiled by Eugene Nicholson
formerly Keeper of Industrial Technology, Bradford Industrial Museum
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Illustrations specially drawn by Ken Ellison
This book is dedicated to the loving memory of my mother for the

Encouragement offered in the Past

and her

Belief in success expressed for the Future
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Without the co-operation of many colleagues and friends in particular Mark Williams, a work of such minor proportions could neither have been commenced nor completed. All their help is gratefully acknowledged. The author accepts responsibility for any errors or omissions.

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The English language is remarkable in its ability to absorb words and phrases from various sports and pastimes, and in particular, various sectors of industry.

With textiles being one of the world's oldest industries with fragments of fabrics from Mesopotamia having been dated over 3,000 years B.C., there has been a significant opportunity for textile terms to move out of their specialized contexts into general usage.

When the British textile industry led the world and the mills of Lancashire and Yorkshire, to a large extent, clothed the world, a wide variety of textile words and phrases were in general use as far as ordinary conversation was concerned in most of the Northern cities and Scottish borders. However, with the general decline in the UK of the textile industry and its relocation to other parts of the world, many of these words and phrases are not heard as much now as they used to be, and it is a great credit to the author that he has taken the time and trouble to make this record which defines not only our textile heritage but will help many interested in the etymology of words, possibly more familiar in their childhood, to clarify the derivation.

The book will be equally of value to the general public as it is to those who were once involved in the British textile industry. Some of the words in the dictionary will live on much longer than others but I am sure that the title chosen for the dictionary 'On Tenterhooks' is one that will survive much longer than many of the other words contained.

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April 2009
INTRODUCTION

Language is not an abstract construction of the learned, or of dictionary-makers, but is something arising out of the work, needs, ties, joys, affections, tastes, of long generations of humanity, and has its bases broad and low, close to the ground.

Walt Whitman

Slang in America, 1892

Robert Burchfield, the eminent chief editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, has noted that languages have a preponderance to fragment or to evolve. It is with this in mind that we discover the English language has been infiltrated by words or phrases from languages such as Latin, French, German, Italian as well as many other foreign linguistic contributions.

A large number of words and phrases that were absorbed into the English language were originally used in places of work such as farms, factories and foundries. This book is mainly confined to those associated with different kinds of textiles or textile processes. Some had their origins in my home city of Bradford which for a large part of the 20th century bought and processed two-fifths of all the wool grown in the world and, as a result, became known as 'Worstedopolis', the capital of the world's worsted industry, which sadly is no longer the case today.

It is surprising that few key works exist on this subject. One of the best known attempts at recording words, which have been absorbed into the English language, was attempted by F. W. Moody. It was in December 1950 when he wrote one of the first articles on this subject, "Some Textile Terms from Addingham in the West Riding" in the Transactions of the Yorkshire Dialect Society.

Words passed down from Anglo-Saxon times include "loom", "heald", "reed" and "shuttle", but, Mr. Moody pointed out, "many of the less essential parts have names taken from the vocabulary of farming and open-air life in general".

Weavers seeking names for new pieces of mechanism compared them with familiar objects. Finger-like pieces of metal between which the loom's tappet rods were held were called "rats' tails". A mechanism for suddenly
stopping the loom was called a "frog". The piece of metal holding the reed in position was a "duck bill", while the term "dobby" was another name for "dobbin", a patient old farm-horse.

The word "harness", Mr. Moody observed was being used to describe tackle and gear long before it was used to describe the trappings of a horse. "When Macbeth expressed his intention of dying with harness on his back, he had no thought of equipping himself like a carthorse," Mr. Moody remarked.

All these observations were recorded well over fifty years ago. No doubt, from that date to now, many authors have delved into and written about all aspects of the English language from catchphrases, idiomatic words, and dialect to proverbial expressions and slang terms. It became clear in the course of my research that nobody had documented words and phrases whose origins were rooted firmly within a textile context.

In the Spring of 2007, I set out to collect as many words and phrases as possible. Over the last two years I have amassed a comprehensive collection of intriguing textile words and expressions, some of which are still in regular use, while others have fallen regrettably out of favour.

This modest compilation is by no means exhaustive and has been written for the general reader and the student of English who enjoys delving into the highways and byways of the English language. I hope these textile words and expressions, some with controversial meanings and some new, will give the reader as much pleasure as they have given me and those who were once in the industry.

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March 2009
Eugene Nicholson

ACT, THE WOOLLEN: One of the most curious episodes in British Parliamentary history was enacted during the reign of Charles II (1660-85). In 1666, an Act was passed which laid down that the dead should be buried in sheeting bound by woollen ligatures together with woollen quilting around the inside of the coffin. Twelve years later the Act was amended, and any violation would be severely dealt with. The Act of 1678 read:

"No corpse of any person (except those who shall die of the plague) shall be buried in any shift, sheet or shroud or anything whatsoever made or mingled with flax, hemp, silk, hair, gold or silver, or any stuff or thing, other than what is made of sheep's wool only...or to be put in any coffin lined or faced with, any other material but sheep's wool only..."

The Act was finally repealed in 1814.

AFLOAT, BUCKET OR BUCKET AND FLOAT: This rhyming slang expression was used in the 19th century to denote a coat.

AFLOAT, I'M: In 19th-century rhyming slang this expression meant "a coat".

ANGORA, TO ACT THE: An Australian phrase which actually means to play or act in a foolish manner. The word "angora" refers to the angora goat.

ANORAK, AN: A term used to describe someone who is perhaps a non-conformist, has an unusual personal dress sense, and dwells in a world of interest shared by a select few.

APRON: The original spelling of this word was "napron". Over the ensuing centuries words similar to "napron" lost or gained the letter "a" when preceded by the indefinite article "a" or "an". Consequently, a "napron" was transformed into an "apron" and an "ewt" became a newt.

APRON, A BLUE: An archaic term which denoted an everyday shopkeeper by virtue of the blue apron he tended to wear.

APRON, TO WEAR A GREEN: An interesting term which was once used to describe a lay preacher.

ARMS, TO HAVE A COAT OF: In times of old when knights were bold a linen or silken surcoat was worn as a means of protecting the armour from the rays of the sun or from dirt. Embroidered on it would be the knight's coat of arms. History books show that a coat of arms would contain the shield, helmet crest, mantling and supporters. The shield, however, always maintained the central focus.
ARRAS: The French word for Arras is "tapisserie". Arras is a tapestry which is very decoratively woven and originates from the medieval French town of Artois. Elizabethan literature is peppered with references to spies lurking behind the proverbial arras. Shakespeare's Hamlet (c1603) is recorded as "making a pass through the arras", thus ensuring Polonius' mortal unease.

ASHES, TO WEAR SACKCLOTH AND: An old Hebrew tradition which signified a period of penitence or mourning. The sackcloth was the material in which the Hebrews kept their grain.

ASS, TO SEEK WOOL ON AN: An old Greek proverbial expression denoting the stupidity of behaving irrationally.

AT, TO SET ONE'S CAP: A comment used when someone is trying to impress a person of the opposite sex. Used in the 19th century in Victorian social circles.

AUBUSSON: Synonymous with the kind of fine-pile carpets made at Aubusson in France. Many other towns and cities gave their name to particular types of textiles. They included Milan (figured silks), Madras (cottons), Paisley (elaborate shawls and scarves), Witney (blankets), and Wilton and Axminster (woven carpets). The list is endless.

AWAY, A SOCK: An interesting Australian term which means to stash something away in secret. It is apparently a reference to the habit of hiding money in socks for safe-keeping.

AWNING: A canvas covering supposedly introduced by a Captain John Smith as a means of protecting a ship's deck from sun and rain. The word is derived from "haven" (a place of shelter) and the French word "auvent" meaning a shade made of cloth and placed in front of a shop window.

A-WOOL-GATHERING, TO GO: An ancient phrase which implies that the person undertaking this task is actually very confused.

AXMINSTER: The name for a type of woven carpet originally manufactured in Axminster, Devon. The industry is said to have commenced in 1755 and these carpets were originally woven by hand just like tapestries or oriental carpets. In those early days, the Axminster was produced to a given dimension so that it could fit a particular room. What is interesting is that Thomas Whitty (bap. 1713-92) made the name famous by coming first in three out of four attempts in the Royal Society Competition for seamless carpets. By the mid-19th century, carpet manufacture had ceased in Axminster, but the tradition was revived in
Loom tuner Vincent Gilmartin carries out a final check on a Gripper-Axminster loom built by David Crabtree & Sons of Bradford.
Wool sorting is a skilled procedure which involves dividing the fleece into various characteristics such as length, crimp or fineness.
Eugene Nicholson

1936 by Mr. Harry Dutfield, a Kidderminster carpet manufacturer determined to restore the production of Axminster carpets in the town in which the process was created. Axminster Carpets Ltd., the company he and two business partners established, wove the first carpet to be made in Axminster for 102 years on Coronation Day, 1937. The company has remained in business ever since.

The "Sultana" Axminster is one of the world's most exquisite carpets. First designed and woven by John Crossley & Sons, of Halifax, as long ago as 1902, it has been produced since September 1997 by The Sultana Carpet Co., of Stourport-on-Severn, Worcestershire, using the looms originally imported by Crossley's from Crompton & Knowles, of Worcester, Massachusetts. The "Sultana" is a narrow-width Axminster traditionally woven from English lustre wools, and has a very dense pile. Classic designs such as "Mogul", "Medallion" and "Sun King" can incorporate up to 40 colours and are of very high definition. The "Sultana" has a very high reputation in the retail carpet trade.

BACK, HER CLOTHES SIT ON HER LIKE A SADDLE ON A SOW'S: A disparaging way of describing clothes worn by a certain class of woman.

BACK, TO GIVE THE SHIRT OFF ONE'S: An expression which reflects a person's complete generosity. An early example of its use can be found in Tobias Smollett's novel “Humphrey Clinker" published in 1771.

BACK, WOOL ON THE: An interesting way of describing wealth or riches. It probably stems from the fact that wool has always been an important commodity in the Northern mill towns and of importance to the national economy.

BACKS, TO BE WOOLLY-: A phrase which described members of any Trade Union who were opposed to industrial action sanctioned by the Union. The men concerned were then branded as "woolly-backs".

BAGGIES, TO WEAR: The American state of California has quite a talent for introducing new words or phrases into the English language. One such example is the phrase "to wear baggies", which describes the rather over-size shorts worn by Californian surfers.

BAGS, OXFORD: During the 1920s, wide-bottomed flannel trousers became all the rage. This craze was started by Oxford undergraduates who favoured this look.

BALACLAVA, TO WEAR A: The origin of this garment can be attributed to the famous battle of Balaclava which took place during the Crimean
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War in 1854. The issue of this item of woollen gear, worn over the soldier's head and shoulders, will always be associated with that particular conflict.

**BANDANNA, TO WEAR**

A: Victorians had many names for handkerchiefs. A bandanna was a large silk handkerchief with spots or other patterns, and was worn round the neck or tucked in a pocket.

**BANNER, TARTAN:** First World War (1914-18) army rhyming slang for the old-fashioned sixpence.

**BAPTISTE:** This fine, soft fabric in a plain weave was often used to make shirts, dresses, lingerie and handkerchiefs. It takes its name from Jean Batiste, a weaver who worked in the town of Cambrai in France. The English liked the material and named it after the weaver, but, unfortunately, misspelt the name in the process. There is also another theory that the fabric owes its name to the cloth used to wipe the heads of babies after they have been baptised.

**BAREGE:** This fabric was first manufactured in the town of Bareges situated in the Pyrenees. It had a ceremonial function and was used in marriages and baptisms. The fabric was originally made of all wool but much later was produced in silk and wool.

**BARGES, BLACK-SILK:** Rather ample Victorian women who preferred to wear black silk dresses to make themselves look slimmer.

**BARRAS:** First mentioned in a State document in 1640 granted by Charles II (1660-85), this quaint, coarse linen fabric was originally imported from Holland. In 1754, over two million yards were imported into England.

**BATAVIA:** This shot silk fabric takes its name from the Indonesian capital of Djakarta.

**BATTY, TO GO:** Before the advent of washing machines clothes were washed or soaked then beaten with a wooden board. This rhythmic action would often create an induced drowsiness. Hence the expression "going batty" which is still in use.

**BEAR, WOOLLY:** American slang for a policewoman. The expression is reputed to come from "woof" (a woman's pubic hair).

**BEATRICE AND ESTRELLA:** Not a title for a romantic Edwardian novel, but two charming names used by Bradford worsted manufacturers for some of the most popular fabrics in their seasonal collections. "Beatrice" was a twill weave cloth used as a lining for men's and ladies' dress goods and was generally dyed in black.
"Estrella" was a dress fabric made in plain weave from a silk warp and fine Botany wool weft. The weft was highly twisted to produce a crinkled crepe effect in the finished piece.

BEIGE: The word originally meant natural, undyed wool, and came from France.

BELCHER, TO OWN A: This in essence was a spotted handkerchief much favoured by the English prize fighter Jim Belcher (1781-1811), who wore it round his neck. The handkerchief, itself, was blue with white spots which had dark blue centres. In the course of time, other prize-fighters began to sport handkerchiefs in their own colours.

BELT, TO HAVE A WHITE: Particular standard of proficiency in martial arts. Those achieving the highest standards are awarded a black belt.

BENDIGO, TO WEAR A: A Bendigo was a fur cap worn in the southern counties of England during Queen Victoria's reign (1837-1901). It takes its name from a noted boxer.

BENEDETTO SACCO/SACO BENDITO: The most obvious feature of this linen robe is its colour (yellow) and its design of two crosses decorated with flames and devils. It was worn by those sent to the stake during the Spanish Inquisition. If a penitent was taken before the Inquisition he or she was required to wear the robe for a specified time. If they were Jews or sorcerers they had to wear a robe with a Saint Andrew's cross in red, on back and front.

BENGAL: This thin fabric made in silk and hair used for women's apparel was originally made in Bengal, India. Striped cotton muslins made in Paisley during the 18th and 19th century were also called Bengal.

BERETS, GREEN: This phrase has become associated with the British Commandos who wore this type of headgear.

BERGAMOT, BERGAMO OR: This rather coarse tapestry takes its name from the town of Bergamo, Italy where it was originally made. It was constructed of wool, cotton, silk, hemp and goat hair.

BERSERK, TO GO: To prove to the enemy that they had no fear and their courage was unquestionable, the Viking warrior would enter battle wearing a bear skin and no armour. In effect, "bear to the shirt", taken from "bern" (a bear and "serker" (a coat).

BIGGIN, TO WEAR A: This type of linen cap was worn by children and was said to have been inspired by the Beguines, a women's religious order.
BIKINI, TO WEAR: This exotic, revealing two-piece swimming garment gets its name from a Pacific atoll which was used by the Americans in 1946 to test the atom bomb. It was introduced to the fashion world by Louis Réard four days after the explosion but he could not persuade anyone to model it on the catwalk. It was finally launched in September of that year.

BIRTHDAY SUIT, IN ONE’S: Apparently, a phrase similar to this entered the English language in 1791. It refers to the fact that we come into the world unclothed. This phrase originates from the 1870s.

BLACK-COATED WORKER: Any clerical worker who wears pin-striped trousers and black jackets.

BLANCO, TO BE DRESSED IN KHAKI: This phrase describes a white polish that was applied to webbing and shoes made of buckskin.

BLANKET: This type of fabric is reputed to have entered textile history in the reign of Edward III. The accredited originator is Thomas Blanket (or Blanquette), a Flemish artisan who had settled in Bristol. Blanket is a corruption of two words: the French word “blanc” (white) and the Anglo-Saxon word “kett” (covering). It was, therefore, an undyed woollen piece of cloth. Blankets were made in many textile towns and districts throughout the British Isles, but the main centres of production were Witney (Oxfordshire), Ayrshire (Scotland) and the West Riding of Yorkshire.

BLANKET, A WET: A phrase often used to describe someone who refuses to take part in an activity. A wet blanket thrown over a fire smothers the flames and prevents them from gaining hold.

BLANKET, ON THE: The Irish Problem, which was a source of deep concern in the United Kingdom for many years, generated many new expressions. One of these, “on the blanket”, is a reference to terrorist prisoners who refused to carry out prison duties, wear clothes, or wash. They were hoping by their behaviour to obtain recognition, and the status of political prisoners.

BLANKET, TO BE BORN ON THE WRONG SIDE OF THE: A cruel expression which signifies that someone has been born out of wedlock. Perhaps the earliest use of this was by Tobias Smollet's literary character Humphrey Clinker, who said: “I didn't come on the wrong side of the blanket”.

BLANKET, TO HAVE A BENGAL: An expression much used in the Victorian era. It is a reference to army life in India as well as to the effects
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the Indian sun had on a soldier's complexion.

BLANKET, WAGGA: This is an Australian term which describes a piece of sacking used by tramps to cover the ground before settling down for a good night's rest. Wagga-Wagga is a town in New South Wales.

BLANKETEERS, THE: On the 10th of March 1817, 10,000 starving handloom weavers and spinners gathered in St. Peter’s Field Manchester. Carrying only blankets their intention was to march to London and present a petition highlighting their grievances to the Prince Regent (1810-1820). Six reached Ashbourne Bridge before the ill-fated march was abandoned. Only one person managed to reach London to present the petition.

BLANKET-RATTLE, TO WEAR A: A blanket-rattle was a military great coat with buttons, which could also be used as a blanket. It was given this name because the buttons jangled.

BLAZER: This word can be traced as far back as 1845 when Captain I W. Washington of "H.M.S. Blazer" ordered his ship's personnel to be attired in white and blue guernseys. Much later, the cricket world adopted this item of clothing.

BLAZER, A BLUE: An American term used to draw a distinction between hospital personnel with administrative duties and those who treat or care for patients.

BLOOMERS, BOMBAY: An archaic nickname for army shorts.

BLOOMERS, TO WEAR: The original pair of bloomers startled the world when it was introduced creating, as it did, a full yet baggy appearance around the knee. It was named in honour of the celebrated American feminist Amelia Jenks Bloomer (1818-94). The original design, however, was constructed as a complete garment comprising a loose-fitting skirt and trousers secured at the ankles by elastic. This garment was reputedly influenced by the Oriental/Turkish look. It made its debut at a ball in Lowell, Massachusetts in July 1851 and proved to be controversial. Many felt that this item should be worn only by men.

BLOUSE, TO BE A BIG GIRL’S: A term especially used by the late great Northern comedienne Hilda Baker (1905-86) in the TV comedy programme “Nearest and Dearest” (1968-73). It is now used to describe a man who is weak-natured and lacks determination and drive.

BLUE SHIRT, TO BE A: An Irish Fascist organization led by a former commissioner of the Irish Garda, General Eoin O’Duffy (1892-1944). The
general commanded a blue-shirted battalion during the Spanish Civil War (1936-39).

**BLUE, THE BOYS IN:** A phrase associated with the original colour of uniform worn by the British police force.

**BLUE, TO WEAR NAVY:** A phrase which owes its importance to the navy blue uniforms worn by British sailors in 1857. The colour blue or navy blue was the colour of the jacket. Much later it became synonymous with several shades of blue.

**BLUE, TRUE AS COVENTRY:** This phrase comes from the time when the city of Coventry wove a cloth that was dyed in a permanent shade of blue.

**BOBBIN, THAT'S THE END OF THE:** A textile term through and through meaning to come to the end of some particular task or exercise.

**BOBBINS:** A word which is used to indicate that something is of no value. It is believed that the word refers to the waste bobbins used in British mill towns.

**BOBBY-SOX, TO WEAR:** This phrase became associated with American young girls in the 1940s. Their "trade mark" became long, white cotton or ankle socks. Their hysterical behaviour would often be seen and heard at any public performance of the leading popular singers of the day such as Francis Albert Sinatra (1915-98).

**BOBTAIL, TO BE A:** At the beginning of the 19th century, wearing tail coats which came to a point was regarded as being fashionable. This name was given to people who wore those coats.

**BOLL(ER), TO BE A:** A power loom operative or minder.

**BOMBAST:** A word which was derived from "bombyx" i.e., silkworm or silk, but was later applied to cotton padding. When clothing was padded with this fibre the meaning became associated with padded-out or elaborate speech-making. In reality the word is taken from the name of the Swiss physician and writer Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim (1493-1541).

**BOREL, A:** A word originally used to describe a type of very rough cloth used as head wear. Eventually, the word was used to refer to the person wearing this type of cloth. As it was usually worn by yokels, it became a word of derision.
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BOTTLE, BLUE: A derisory term to describe a policeman. It was prompted by the colour of the officer's uniform.

BOWSERS PETROL: Australian rhyming slang for trousers.

BOX, COTTON-: An American clipper used for carrying cotton.

BRAS, BURN YOUR: A slogan much used in the 1970s by the growing band of feminists in the United States, Europe and elsewhere. This was a protest against the unfair treatment of women by men in all walks of life. To make their point, women were encouraged to show their liberation from men by burning man-made objects, namely their bras.

BREECHES, PART-: A female actress playing a male role.

BREECHES, SHE WEARS THE: An unflattering expression aimed at the man whose wife takes control of the roles he is expected to perform.

BREECHES, TO WEAR CLOTH: An archaic expression used to describe the English middle classes. The phrase originates from the mode of dress they would have worn.

BRILLIANTINES: The Oxford Dictionary defines brilliantine as a "dressing for making hair glossy". It was sold in expensive-looking bottles and kept in the bathroom cabinet or on a dressing-table together with talcum powder and perfume. Brilliantines were softly-finished dress cloths of a lustrous appearance made in huge quantities by Bradford worsted manufacturers in the early part of the 20th century. They were constructed in a plain weave, beamed (warped) with perfect tension and woven with what manufacturers called "a constant beat". They required unusual care during the burling and mending process.

A number of Bradford companies specialised in making this type of cloth, but more especially the factories owned by the textile magnate John Emsley. A collection of "Mohair Brilliantines" was a feature of the John Emsley stand at the Imperial Wool Industries Fair held in Bradford in July 1931 to mark the 600th anniversary of the introduction of wool weaving into Great Britain by a group of Flemish weavers, who had been invited to "this country by Edward III", in 1331, for that purpose.

By the 1930s, the demand for "bright goods" such as Brilliantines, Sicilians and Granadas was on the wane, and within a matter of years they "disappeared from the leather and dress-wear trade, along with bonnets and elastic-sided boots", wrote Harry Golden, the author of a definitive history of the English dyeing and finishing trades.
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**BROADCLOTH:** The origin of this term came from the requirement of cloth to be woven in wide widths to take into account the natural shrinkage that occurs during the finishing process. This type of "broad white doth" can be traced back to the county of Essex where the Flemings had settled. During the reign of Richard III a distinction was made between "Broadcloths", which were two yards wide, and "Streits", which were one yard. This term was also used in many districts to denote garments worn by the clergy.

**BROWNCOAT, A:** A member of the London Police Carriage Office whose job is to test the competence of trainee cab drivers.

**BRUNSWICKERS, THE BLACK:** The Black Brunswickers were a body of volunteers under the command of Frederick William of Brunswick. They were called "Black" because of the colour of their uniform.

**BUCKRAM, THE MAN IN:** A term which means "a person who does not exist".

**BULL'S WOOL, TO HAVE:** Another way of expressing incredulity at a certain word, statement or phrase.

**BUM-CURTAIN:** A somewhat archaic word used to describe the type of brief university gown worn by the undergraduates who studied at St. John's College England.
BURNET, TO WEAR: This word describes a type of cloth made from wool.

CADDICE-GARTER: Another word for a servant or a man of low standing: "caddice" - worsted yarn, or binding - "crewel". When there was a vogue for garters, the cheaper kind tended to be worn by servants or tradesmen etc. Prince Henry calls Pons a "caddice-garter" in William Shakespeare's play "Henry IV", Pt. 1, 11, IV).

CADDIS, WEAR: This is a type of garter made of worsted and was worn by the lower classes in Elizabethan England.

CADOGAN, TO SPORT A: This fashion accessory derives its origin from the first Earl of Cadogan (1675-1726). It is a ribbon which is tied into a knot and positioned at the back of one's hair.

CALICO: A term forever associated with a cotton fabric made in Kozhikode, better known as Calicut, located on the South-West coast of India. Originally calicoes came in two colours, one colour in a ground whilst the other is with a figure or design. It was the custom many years ago to use a cheap common dye. This may seem strange today but the idea was for the colours not to run or fade when the fabric was washed. One of the earliest references to these beautiful Indian "painted calicoes" was made in the 13th century by Marco Polo (1254-1324), the famous European explorer. The name calico can be attributed to the East India Company who most probably imported this fabric into England either in 1627 or 1631. In the United States of America calico has always been regarded as a cheap, plain type of material.

CAMELINE, TO WEAR: During Chaucer's time, cameline was a cloth made in silk and camel's hair. Centuries later this type of cloth was simply made in camel's hair.

CAMISARDS: This word comes from a stormy period in French history (1685-1705) when the Dragonnades violently prosecuted the Protestant insurgents of the Cevennes. The Protestants were distinguishable by their distinctive "blouses" or "camise".

CAMLET/CAMELOT: Camlet was a highly-prized cloth, made of camel's hair and silk and dated back to the 13th century. In time, this cloth came to be made in a cotton and wool mixture before the advent of India-rubber. "After dinner I put my new camelot suit, the best that I ever wore in my life, the suit costing me above £24." - Diary of Samuel Pepys (1st June 1664).

CAMORRA: This 19th century word has become more familiar in modern
A Bradford wool warehouse in the 1920s. This scene would have been typical of many warehouses found in the West Riding.
times, and is another name for the infamous Mafia. Camorra was the type of smock worn by many of the members involved in the shadowy world of gambling and blackmailing.

**CANDIDATE:** The name is derived from the Latin word for white clothing "'candidatus'. In Roman times candidates who solicited the office of quaestor, praetor would wear loose white togas in order to show the assembled populace their lacerations. White became the colour associated with humility and fidelity.

**CANVAS, ON:** This expression was used by the British military police to signify someone who was serving a prison sentence. All inmates were given canvas mattresses and nightshirts.

**CAP, DOFFING ONE'S:** A textile phrase which means taking the bobbins off their spools on a spinning frame. Today, it is a term used to signify being subservient in front of one's betters.

**CAP, MONMOUTH:** Worsted flat cap much used by sailors and soldiers. It was reputed to have been made in Monmouth.

**CAP, TO THRUM ONE'S:** Another way of saying "to waste one's time". Taken from a bizarre image of covering one's head with waste pieces of threads and thrums.

**CAP, TO WEAR A BLACK:** A phrase with legal connotations. A judge would place on his head a black piece of cloth to signify that the defendant was guilty and the sentence was death by hanging.

**CAPEADOR:** A Spanish name for the assistants whose job is to distract the bull with their cloaks. In Spanish the word "aparear" means to deceive or trick the bull by means of a cloak.

**CAPS, TO BE A BLUE:** This is a name given to the famous Dublin Fusiliers. The name was adopted by the Fusiliers during the Indian Mutiny of 1857 when Nana Sahib (c1820-59) was heard to remark "those blue-capped English soldiers who fight like devil".

**CAPUCHINS:** This word came from the order of Franciscan monks whose distinct wear consisted of brown robes with pointed hoods -"capuche".

**CARACALLA:** This word owes its origin to the Roman Emperor Aurelius Antoninus (211-17) who chose to wear the Gaulish Caracalla instead of the traditional Roman toga. The Caracalla was a large garment with a hooded mantle which extended to the knees.
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CARDIGAN, TO WEAR A: An item of clothing inspired by Thomas James Brudenell, the 7th Earl of Cardigan (1797-1868), who led the Charge of the Light Brigade at the Battle of Balaclava (25th of October 1854). This action was immortalised in a famous poem by Lord Alfred Tennyson (1909-92).

CARMAGNOLE: Adopted by the French revolutionaries, this workman's jacket was originally worn in Carmagnola, Piedmont. So popular was this jacket that very soon the revolutionaries became associated with its name. During the terrible days of the executions a song would often be heard sung - "dansons la caramagnole, vive le son, vive le son; dansons la caramagnole, vive le son ducanon."

CARPET: In years gone by, inmates in prison would talk of someone having a "carpet" sentence. This, in fact, was the period of time which a convict would take to construct a carpet, namely three months. However, the word is no longer used in this context.

CARPET, A KNIGHT OF THE: In tales of chivalry the term "knight of the carpet" meant that the knighthood was conferred on Shrove Tuesday. To obtain this title the knight had to kneel in front of his sovereign on a carpet.

CARPET, TO: In the era when rich men had vast households, a master would often summon a servant into his carpeted chambers to verbally admonish him. The servant had to stand on the carpet to receive his punishment.

CARPET, TO COME OR BE BROUGHT ON THE: An alternative of being introduced into a situation.

CARPET, TO WEAR A: This is an American expression used to describe a bald man wearing a false hair piece or toupee.

CASHMERE: This fine-haired fibre is found on goats which live in the Himalayas, Kashmir, China, Iran and Iraq. Kashmir shawls which are hand-woven from this luxurious fibre originated in the northern part of India.

CENDALL, TO WEAR: In Chaucer's (c1343-1400) time this cloth was made in rich silk and was worn by the affluent.

CEREMENT, TO BE DRESSED IN: As part of the funeral rites during Shakespeare's time the dead were wrapped in cloth which had been impregnated with melted wax.
CHAPERONE, TO: A custom from medieval times. A chaperone was originally a hood worn by priests. Much later on it became fashionable to wear a mantle. By the 18th century, the word "chaperone" was used to describe an older married woman who accompanied a younger woman for the sake of propriety.

CHECKLATOUN, TO WEAR: In Chaucer's time, "checklatoun" was a cloth which was designed with squares or checks.

CHINTZ: This word is derived from the old Sanskrit word meaning "speckled or variegated". Chintz or "chints" is the name for a plain woven cotton cloth which featured various hand-painted images of flora or fauna. These materials were introduced into Britain by the East India Company in the 17th century. They proved so popular that they soon posed a threat to the British silk industry, resulting in a law being passed in c1700 preventing their importation.

CHUFF, TROUSER: A phrase used in the popular comic magazine “Viz” by its creation Johnny Fart Pants. It means "to break wind".

CIRCLE, DRESS: In Victorian times and perhaps earlier, it was the upper-class ladies who dressed for the theatre and were then escorted to the circle to enjoy an evening’s entertainment.

CLERK, DRESSED UP LIKE A POX DOCTOR'S: Used by Australians to describe a person dressed in a gaudy manner and showing poor taste in his choice of clothes.

CLOAK, A GREY: An interesting phrase used to describe an elected member of a community who had the privilege of serving as mayor.

CLOAK, BLACK: A term taken from Shakespearian drama and denoting an actor announcing a prologue. His outfit was quite often a very long, sweeping, black cloak.

CLOAK, BLUE: The uniform used by domestic servants.

CLOAK, KNIGHT OF THE: A term often used to describe Sir Walter Raleigh (1552-1618), who made gallant use of his cloak to prevent Queen Elizabeth 1st (1558-1603) stepping into a puddle.

CLOAK, TO WEAR HECTOR'S: This phrase is a reference to Hector Armstrong's betrayal of Thomas Percy, Earl of Northumberland in 1569. In effect, it means to show treachery to one’s closest friend.

CLOAK-AND-DAGGER: Taken from the type of theatrical productions
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in which skulduggery was often carried out by villains using underhand methods.

Clobber, to have: A phrase which is often associated with clothes or a collection of accessories.

Cloth, a knight of the green: A term used when describing a gambler.

Cloth, Byrd: This cloth was developed for use in the Byrd Antarctic Expedition. It was made in a light or medium cloth from combed ply yarn. The construction was 2/2 twill line on both sides of the fabric.

Cloth, Coronation: This suiting is made in wool and is in three colours: red, blue and black. It was introduced in 1901 at the Coronation of Edward VII.

Cloth, cut your coat according to your: A phrase underlining the importance of not spending more income than one earns. This expression can be dated back to John Lyly in 1580.
CLOTH, DORNICK: The name for this figured table linen originates from Dornick, the Flemish name for Tournai. During the 15th century this term was used to describe a low quality of damask made up of wool and silk yarns with gold thread ornaments.

CLOTH, HAMMER: This type of cloth would be found draped over the driver's seat on horse-drawn carriages. The word may be derived from "hammock cloth".

CLOTH, MAN OF THE: Many years ago, men of a certain professions were distinguished by the colour of their garments. Although this practice became outdated the clerics managed to retain this description and are often called "men of the cloth".

CLOTH, OXFORD: At one time, the four most famous Universities in the Western World were Harvard, Yale, Cambridge and Oxford. At some point in time, a group of Scottish weavers decided to weave some shirt cloth and name it after these four seats of learning.

CLOTH, PARAMATTA: This type of cloth was originally used as apparel fabric and made of wool weft and silk warp. It owes its name to a town in New South Wales. It is recorded that the very first looms installed in the town in 1801 manufactured approximately 306 yards of the material. Although first used as an item of apparel for the Australian working man, the cloth became very popular in England. It is, therefore, not surprising to discover that hundreds of thousands of yards of Paramatta tweed cloth were exported to the mother country. When this cloth was made in a worsted warp and weft it was called a Coburg. (Introduced soon after the marriage of Queen Victoria to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg in 1840).

CLOTH, PLYMOUTH: In days gone by persons arriving in Plymouth who did not have appropriate clothing such as the ubiquitous cloak were supplied with canes or walking sticks.

CLOTH, TATTERSALL: This is a checked cloth originally used as a horse blanket. It has always been associated with Richard Tattersall (1724-95) of London, England, who felt that his style of cloth would distinguish his horses from those of other owners.

CLOTH, THE: A term used to describe the clergy.

CLOTH, THE BOARD OF GREEN: In the British Royal Household there exists a department called the Lord Steward's Office. Traditionally, business would be transacted from the green baize tables. This is where this phrase originates from.
CLOTH, TO WEAR A BLACK: It is an old theatrical custom, probably dating back to Shakespeare's time, for the Prologue to a play to be read by a man wearing a long black cloak.

CLOTH, TO WEAR BARME: A quaint term describing a type of apron that is placed over a woman's legs.

CLOTH, WEAR A CHRISOM: Many years ago, when a child was baptised it was anointed in a simple white cloth. This practice was repeated if the child died within the first month of its life. The word "chrisom" was also used to describe a child.

CLOTH-CARE: A canopy of fine linen or silk cloth placed over a newly-married couple during a wedding ceremony in a Roman Catholic church.

CLOTHES, TO WEAR PLAIN: This usually refers to uniformed personnel who are dressed in everyday clothing as opposed to their regular issue.

CLOTHING, TO WEAR SLOP: Very cheaply-made clothes originally issued to sailors.

CLOTHING, WOLF IN SHEEP'S: The earliest use of this phrase is to be found in the Bible in Matthew (7:15). Jesus, in the Sermon of the Mount, speaks of "false prophets which come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly they are ravening wolves." This phrase has been used down the centuries to describe those who deceitfully conceal their true intentions or beliefs.

CLOTH-LONG: This term is often associated with a tight cotton fabric woven in the Madras district of Southern India. It began its journey from India to Britain as a shirting made of superior yarns but in a standard plain weave.

CLOTHO: This word is taken from the Greek "klotho" (to draw thread from a distaff). In classical Greek mythology, Klotho was one of the three Fates who drew from her distaff the thread of life.

CLOTH-YARD: This is an old measure for cloth. It widely differs in measurement to the Imperial yard that was eventually adopted.

CLOUT, TO WEAR A: In Chaucer's and Spenser's times this term was used to describe a tiny piece of cloth.

COAT, A BLUE - : Another way of describing someone who went to a Charity School. During Shakespeare's time it is believed that this was the official dress of a beadle. During the reign of Henry VIII (1491-1547) all
London apprentices wore blue coats in the summer and then changed to blue gowns in the winter.

**COAT, A GREY:** This expression originates from Cumberland and describes the colour of garment worn by that county's yeoman stock.

**COAT, A MAN IN A WHITE:** Anyone visiting a hospital can expect to see a doctor wearing a white coat. This phrase emphasises the "unofficial" garment a doctor wears.

**COAT, A PINK:** A description of the kind of coat an English huntsman would wear.

**COAT, A VICUNA:** In American politics this phrase has become a euphemism for succumbing to an inducement. Sherman Adams (1899 -1986), White House Chief-of-Staff of the Eisenhower administration, was offered a vicuna coat, promptly took it, and then had to resign because of the ensuing scandal.

**COAT, A WHITE:** A term which describes a senior member of staff from the Police Public Carriage Officer who makes sure that trainee taxi drivers have attained a certain level of competence.

**COAT, CARD:** Court cards or coat cards are used to describe the key figure cards found in a pack of cards such as the king, queen and jacks.

**COAT, DUFFEL:** This heavy cloth with its thick nap is named after the village of Duffel in the Brabant, 10 miles from Antwerp.

**COAT, STEEL-POINT:** The visual similarity between the traditional dress coat and the split nib found on a dip pen.

**COAT, TO DUST A MAN'S:** This is another way of saying "give someone a good thrashing".

**COAT, TO TRAIL ONE'S:** Used when someone is trying to cause a fight or argument. This expression can be traced to an old Irish custom of sweeping coat-tails along the floor. This was an invitation to others to tread on them at their peril.

**COAT, TO TURN ONE'S:** An expression dating back to the time when soldiers wore extremely decorative uniforms to show which side they were on during a battle. Unfortunately, mercenaries could and did switch allegiances during battle. To signify their changeover, the mercenaries would turn their coats inside out, revealing a different colour lining. The term "turncoat" is used to describe a person who changes sides.
COAT, TO WEAR A BENJAMIN: A phrase borrowed from the biblical story of Joseph and his coat of many colours. In Victorian times it was used to describe someone who wore a gaudy coat.

COAT, TO WEAR A BLACK: Used to describe a member of the clergy such as a parson.

COAT, TO WEAR A BROWN: A term that was used in prison circles. Debtors or prisoners on remand were issued with these brown coats. All other inmates tended to wear grey coats instead of brown ones.

COAT, TO WEAR A CLAWHAMMER: This is an American expression. A clawhammer was a coat with tails worn at evening functions.

COAT, TO WEAR THE GREEN: A naval expression which means to plead innocence or pretend to be innocent -- a foolish technique which more often than not did not work.

COAT, TO WEAR THE KING'S: A phrase which denoted the wearing of the King's colours. Mostly used during the 19th century.

COATS, LITTLE MEN IN WHITE: A phrase which has come to be associated with psychiatric nurses, dressed in white, escorting someone to a medical institution to undergo treatment.

COATS, THE RED: This is a description of the colour of uniforms originally worn by the British soldier.

COLLAR, OUT OF: An expression stressing a person's unemployment. It mirrors the expression "in or out of harness" where a horse is made ready for work by placing a harness over its head.

COLLAR, THE HEMPEH: A very old-fashioned phrase which was an unusual way of describing the hangman's noose.

COLLAR, TO FEEL SOMEONE'S: Derived from police slang this means to arrest someone.

COLLAR, TO WEAR A PINK -: This phrase seems to categorise employees who are badly paid. The job is lowly and quite often undertaken by women.

COLLAR, TO WORK IN AN OPEN -: An Americanism which describes a laid-back style of management. It could be argued that in such an organisation there would be no cause to dress in a traditional suit. Instead, one would expect to see personnel dressed in casual clothes and without ties.
COLOUR, TO WEAR: In Victorian times, it was customary for supporters of athletes or boxers to sport colourful handkerchiefs to indicate their support. These handkerchiefs were very colourful and were highly-prized.

COLOURS, CORONATION: "Royal events have often encouraged trade in textiles and helped firms to survive during difficult times (writes Mark Keighley). The Coronation of George VI in 1937 was a notable example. A year before the event, the British Colour Council standardised the red and blue shades to be used in decorations. The red that was approved was crimson, and the blue was the blue used in Admiralty bunting. As the big event drew near, Yorkshire mills reported a demand for new shades like 'Jubilee Blue' and 'Gloucester Green', which assisted business enormously. Demand extended to other shades, but notably 'Buckingham Lilac' and 'Hollywood Green'.

"The Bradford-based Dyers' and Finishers' Association issued a shade card specifically for cloth manufacturers and makers-up. Blue predominated and was intended to be used in combination with bright gold as a Coronation theme. 'Highland Blue' was a clear mid-tone for light spring cloths. 'Burmese Blue' and navy were to be used for heavier materials. Light rose tones were named 'London Pride.'"

COME, PUT YOUR CLOTHES TOGETHER WHEN YOU: An expression, much used in Victorian times, to remind someone who was setting out on a long journey to have ample clothing in case he or she needed to change.

CORDON BLEU: Now often used when referring to a cook of the highest calibre and training, although the real meaning is the French equivalent of "Blue Ribbon". This decoration can be traced back to the Order of the Holy Cross (St. Esprit). Recipients of this Order would meet and indulge in fine gastronomy, and the phrase eventually became associated with excellent food.

CORDUROY: Originally a cloth made of silk and worn by the kings of France for the chase ("corde du roy"). Because of its robust construction the cloth was also used by servants. Today, corduroy is one of the world's most popular fabrics and is made into a variety of garments because of its durability and strength.

COTTON: A vulgar American expression which describes a woman's pubic hair.
COTTON KINGDOM: A phrase denoting the southern states of the United States of America where cotton is the most important fibre grown and sold.

COTTON SNOBS: During the 19th century this phrase was targeted at any rich cotton grower in the southern states of America who still retained slaves on his plantation.

COTTON-LORD: A manufacturer who has become wealthy by buying or selling cotton.


COTTONOPOLIS: Just as Bradford, became the centre of worsted-cloth production in the 19th century, Manchester, England became the centre of cotton processing.

COTTON-PICKING: This is a phrase which originates from the southern states of America where both poor white people and black people worked on the land gathering cotton for the gin mills. Now used as a term of derision.

COUCH, VELVET: A cowboy's expression for bedding or equipment.

CRACKERS: Not to be confused with the snacks we eat. This is a term that describes a collection of tightly-packed broken fibres. They often congregate in thick clumps in cotton yarn. When the fibres were twisted between the fingers and thumb a crackle could be heard. This was an indication that the fibres were being manually ruptured - a fault that could cause serious problems during the weaving process.

CRAVAT, TO WEAR A: Another name ascribed to a neck scarf or necktie. During the Thirty Years War (1618-48) cravats were worn by the Croatian soldiers fighting on behalf of the French Army. Much later they became a statement of fashion and were re-named "cravats".

CRIME, TO TAKE PART IN A WHITE COLLAR: Probably a phrase dating back to the middle of the last century when professional-type employees indulged in "paper" crime such as non-payment of taxes, fraud and embezzlement.

CROSS, CUT ON THE: A phrase used in dressmaking or tailoring. The selected cloth is folded in such a way that the weft is parallel to the warp. This enables the cloth to be cut along the fold.
Eugene Nicholson

CUFF, OFF THE: In olden days, it was not uncommon for a speaker to write down parts of his speech on his cuff as an aide-memoire. This term originates from that practice.

CURTMANTLE: The introduction of the Anjou mantle has been attributed to Henri II (1154-89). It was not as long as the robe worn by the previous rulers.

CUT YOUR COAT ACCORDING TO YOUR CLOTH: A phrase outlining the importance of not spending more income than one earns.

DAKS, DROP ONE'S: An Australian term which means to drop one's trousers. Daks trousers have been popular in both Australia and Great Britain since the early part of the 20th century.

DAMASK: A word to describe a rich figured piece of brocade made of silk. It is reputed to have originated in the famed city of Damascus. Where damask is made in one colour, such as one finds with linen table covers, all the threads are manufactured in such a way to be lying at right angles to each other. This ensures that when light falls upon it the pattern stands out and becomes highly visible.

DECENT, COVER ME--: This expression originates from 1825 and was another way of saying coat.

DESTINY, THE SHEARS OF: This phrase is derived from Greek mythology and refers to the moment when Atropos took a pair of shears and began to sever the threads of life with them.

DIADEMS, TO WEAR A: Printers may think this is an early platen printing press but in actual fact diadems were the headbands worn by kings to signify their status in society. They were constructed in silk, linen or wool and fastened at the back, with the ends resting on the back of the neck. Much later these were followed by crowns.

DICKEY, TO WEAR A: Originally a German word which means to cover (decken). A dickey was worn as a shirt front. Eventually the shirt was discarded and the wearer simply wore the dickey.

DICKY DIRT: An example of Cockney rhyming slang and means shirt. Once a popular expression, but now no longer used.

DIMITY OR DAMIETTA, TO WEAR A: The town of Diametta was built on land between the River Nile and Lake Menzaleh. It was here, certain researchers claim, that the word "dimity" was first used to describe the type of cloth made in the locality. The cloth, plain or printed, is constructed in
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fine cotton and has a pattern of raised stripes which give the impression of being embossed. It is believed that in 1759 George Washington ordered some of this material to have it made up into a petticoat for his stepdaughter.

DIPLOMACY, SHIRT-SLEEVE: For a great number of years it has been the practice of the President of the United States of America to call weekly Press meetings at which he would provide information on foreign affairs.

DISTAFF: This word describes the staff from which flax is carefully and gently drawn out. In the past, flax spinning was a woman's occupation. The importance of the distaff can be seen in the Book of Proverbs where it speaks of how:

"the virtuous women seeketh wool and flax, and worketh willingly with her hands: she layeth her hands to the spindle and her hands hold the distaff".

The importance of spinning was reflected in Roman times. When a maid married, all the attendants following the wedding procession carried a distaff decked with woollen thread to remind the bride what was expected of her in married life.

DISTAFF SIDE, THE: In heraldry, a phrase to outline the female lineage of the family.

DISTRESS, SHOW A FLAG OF: A polite way of saying that someone's shirt is sticking out of his trousers.

DITTOES, OR A SUIT OF: This is a phrase which describes a person's sense of colour matching, e.g. matching a coat to a pair of trousers.

DOLLY SHOP: A term describing a second-hand clothes shop. It takes its name from a black doll which would be hung outside the shop.

DORNICK CLOTH: The name for this figured table linen originates from Dornick, the Flemish name for Tournay. An early reference to a "dornyk towall" appears in a register dated 1538. Norwich was the town where this fabric was made.

DOWN, OR WOOL IS WOOL IS UP: An Australian market term which is used to denote the movement in wool prices.

DRAPER, IN THE: A tailoring expression which signifies that a tailor is behind in his work.

DRAPER, LINEN: Rhyming slang for newspaper.
Eugene Nicholson

**DRAPES, TO WEAR:** An expression used by convicts to describe someone dressed in rather gaudy clothes. In American parlance, having a "full drape" means wearing a longish jacket, whilst "semi-drape" means wearing a jacket which is considerably shorter.

**DRAPET, TO LAY OUT A:** "Drapet" was a word certainly used in Spenser's time to describe the cloth placed on a table before it was decorated.

**DRAWERS, ALL KID GLOVES AND NO:** An interesting description of a particular type of woman. The expression is very similar to "all fur coat and no knickers". Possibly originating from the 1930s.

**DRESS, ADJUST YOUR:** An instruction reminding a gentleman to button or zip up his flies before leaving a toilet.

**DRESS: PUTTING ON YOUR LITTLE BLACK:** An important phrase uttered by many women in the last century. It meant that they were going to put on a well-cut, contoured dress of knee-length proportions.

**DROPPER-SHODDY:** A term once used in New Zealand to describe someone who sold inexpensive and incorrectly-described clothing.

**DUDS:** Derived from "dude", the old English word for second-hand clothes. Someone selling them would be called a "dudsmen".

**DUNGAREES: **"Dungri" or "dungaree" is an old Hindi word. Originally this cotton cloth was woven in the Indian province of Rajapur and Karwar. By the 17th century, the Dutch re-named the cloth "dangerijs", and began exporting it to Great Britain. The cloth is woven with blue dyed warp and weft. The word "dungaree" has also become closely associated with a fabric which is very hard-wearing and robust.

**DUNGAREES, TO WEAR:** This expression can be used in a disparaging way to describe the perceived sexuality of some "ladies" who choose to wear dungarees. Dungarees are in actual fact made out of a stout cotton warp-faced twill cloth woven in four-end twill from a coarse count weft and warp.

**DUST, TO SEE DEVIL'S:** Shoddy is believed to have been nicknamed "Devil's Dust" by a Yorkshire textile man, Mr. Busfield Farrand. Rag-tearing machines incorporate a cylindrical revolving drum made up of blunt steel teeth, and create a cloud of impregnated air or "devil's dust" as well as a pile of flock for further processing.

**EAR, TO MAKE A SILK PURSE OUT OF A SOW'S:** An expression reflecting the futility of trying to make something very fine out of
something that is poor or inadequate. Silk has always been a fabric associated with wealth.

**EARLIES:** Another example of Cockney rhyming slang. This time the word means "knickers", "early doors" means "drawers".

**END, FAG:** In the North of England the "fag" was the end of a cloth piece. Today, the word is used to describe the butt of a cigarette.

**ENDS, ODDS AND:** This phrase may owe its origin to "odd ends" or left-over pieces of cloth. Nowadays it means anything which has not been used up.

**EYES, PICKING OUT ROBIN'S:** Tailoring is very rich in expressions. This is one such expression used to describe the stitching on the surface of high-quality cloth.

**EYES, TO PULL THE WOOL OVER SOMEONE'S:** This expression dates from the time when important gentlemen wore powdered wigs. These not only looked very similar to wool in its fleece-like state but also proved rather awkward to wear. The result was they tended to slip off the wearer's head and obscure his vision.

**FASHION, WORLD OF ZABIAN:** A term denoting affection for the planets.

**FELT, TO TAKE:** This phrase was used in the Royal Air Force to indicate that someone had retired or was about to do so.

**FENCER, TO BE A DRESS:** Usually attributed to a tramp who sold lace.

**FENT:** During the early days of the domestic textile industry this term was used to describe rolls of un-cut cloth waiting to be measured. Any fabric found to be of an insufficient length was promptly withdrawn and sold off as a fent (remnant).

**FERRANDINE:** Very little is known of the true origin of this fabric. Samuel Pepys was one of the first to record that it was made only in silk. He reveals that he purchased a silk suit on June 9th 1665 with the express intention of celebrating the English navy's success over the Dutch navy. The description he gives this cloth is "coloured silk ferrandin". It is interesting to note that he found his wife in tears because a gentleman thief had stolen her ferrandin "waistcoat".

**FERRET:** Not to be confused with a cute, furry animal. Ferret is cotton or silk tape. In documents written in 1765-66 and kept in the House of
Commons, a mention is made of ferret being made from silk waste. The documents relate to a petition made by silk manufacturers who complained of the import of silk goods. In 1812 Horace and James Smith recount the use of ferret in their Rejected Addresses:

"Red wax and green ferret
    Are fixed at the foot of the deeds"

The tapes were made in wool and/or cotton as well as silk.

**FERRONNERIE:** Sometimes cloth is specially made to resemble everyday objects. Examples include certain Italian velvets produced in the 14th and 15th century whose designs were based on those found on ferronnerie cloth and resembled wrought-iron work.

**FETTLE, IN FINE:** If you are in "fine fettle" you are in good condition and may possibly be happy as well as healthy. In the textile industry, fettlers help to ensure that woollen and worsted carding machines - huge and thunderous pieces of equipment - operate at maximum efficiency. Their work is known as "fettling" and involves removing fibres and grease that tend to accumulate in the metallic card clothing with which the swifts (rollers) and certain moving parts such as strippers and workers are fitted. Special tools are used to remove the fibres from the card wires and the operation is carried out at fairly frequent intervals.

**FINERY, MONMOUTH STREET:** In the Victorian period Monmouth Street in London was the hub of the trade in second-hand clothing. Charles Dickens (1812-70) disparagingly referred to the street as the "burial place" of fashion.

**FISHES, TO MAKE CLOTHES FOR:** An old Greek phrase meaning to behave in an irresponsible manner.

**FLANNEL RED:** A term used to describe very senior army officers whose rank is denoted by the red-coloured markings on their hats.

**FLEECE, TO:** The act of defrauding someone This definition is taken from the removal of wool from a sheep's back by the age-old art of shearing.

**FOOLS, FLANNELLED:** An expression from Rudyard Kipling's (1865-1936) novel "The Islanders" published in 1902. The "fools" were people who spent too much time playing sport and were invariably to seen wearing flannels.

**FOOT, CLOTH:** In times gone by this expression was used to describe
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a horse blanket. The more prestigious the person, the more elaborate the blanket.

FRIAR, A RED: A term which describes a Knight's Templar.

FRIARS, BLACK: An order of Dominican Friars whose characteristic dress was a black mantle. The area in London known as Blackfriars was the site of the Dominican monastery.

FROCK, SMOCK: A type of coarse cloth that was made into a baggy mid-leg garment. It was worn by both convicts working in Australia and by English farm labourers.

FROCKS, PARAMATTA: An Australian expression associated with convicts who wore white woollen Paramatta frocks.

FUSTIAN: This coarse cloth is made of cotton and flax shares and has similar characteristics to a number of fabrics including corduroy, moleskins, velveteen, imperial and canton. It is constructed with a short pile and woven with a large amount of picks per inch. Fustian is believed to owe its name to a town called Fustat situated in a suburb of Cairo where this fabric was first woven. The theory is that the Dutch and Walloon settlers introduced this fabric into East Anglia. In 1601 there is the first recorded manufacture of this cloth in Lancashire.

FUSTIAN, RED: Port, claret or red wine.

GENEVAN, BLACK: This phrase is derived from a religious ceremony and refers to a black preaching gown used in many Anglican churches. It takes its name from the Swiss city of Geneva where Calvin preached, wearing such a robe.

GEORGETTE MATERIAL: Named after a dressmaker called Mme. Georgette de la Plante. This is a thin silk crepe-type fabric.

GINGHAM: The name for a striped or checked cotton and tussah silk cloth originally woven in North East India. Gingham became very popular in Europe, and was made into dresses, shirts, umbrella and table cloths or curtains.

GLOVE, THE IRON HAND IN THE VELVET: A neat way of describing harsh conduct concealed by a gentle manner.

GOAT, NANNY: Rhyming slang for "coat".

GOLD, FIELD OF THE CLOTH OF: An expression which portrays
the time, place and setting when François I of France arranged to meet Henry VIII. The meeting took place near Calais in 1520. This expression is attributed to the array of colours and monarchical textiles on show.

**GOODS, STUFF:** This historical term can be defined as any typical Bradford dress and lining cloth. The construction of this cloth comprises a lustre weft (English, mohair or alpaca) held together by a cotton warp. The twill is often plain or simple in construction.

**GOVERNMENT, A PETTICOAT:** This phrase suggests a male's complete loss of lifestyle caused by a woman.

**GOWN, A GENEVA:** A type of black gown worn by certain clergymen, and long- associated with the Calvinist movement based in Geneva.

**GOWN, A RED:** A term describing a student attending St. Andrew's University, Scotland.

**GOWN, TO GIVE A GIRL A GREEN:** This unfamiliar phrase relates to a man who entertains a girl "al fresco". The roguish nature of the man's intentions would be evident from the stained green dress the girl would be wearing after her assignation.

**GOWN, TO WEAR A BLACK:** A phrase which describes a clergyman or, indeed, any other highly-educated person, who could be identified by the colour of the cloth they would have worn.

**GOWN, TO WEAR A BLUE:** Now a largely obsolete expression. A blue gown was another name for a prostitute. When placed in a house of correction the woman would have had to wear such a dress. In the Middle Ages, Scottish kings would give alms to their bedsmen, who were known as "blue gowns" from their dress of coarse blue cloth. The number of bedsmen was equal to the king's years and they had the right to ask for alms throughout Scotland.

**GOWN, TOGS AND:** An old war cry used on the 5th of November to herald an ensuing fight between so-called "cads" and undergraduates in university towns.

**GREEN, TO BE CLAD IN:** Robin Hood was always described as wearing Lincoln green. Lincoln green is a dye that was made in Lincoln.

**GREEN, TO WEAR KENDAL:** In the time of Richard II the market town of Kendal in Westmorland was famous throughout the British Isles for the manufacture and dyeing of woollen cloth. This cloth became known as Kendal Green.
GREEN, TO WEAR LINCOLN: This cloth was originally manufactured in the town of Lincoln. It is supposed to have been named after the bright green leaves found in the surroundings around Lincoln. In his famous poem (1810) "Lady of the Lake", Walter Scott (1771-1832) makes a reference to this cloth:

"The sounds increase, and now are seen
Four mounted squires in Lincoln-Green"

GREENSHIRT: A word which can be traced to the 1920s Social Credit Movement founded by Major Douglas. To identify themselves with this movement all the supporters wore a green shirt.

GREY, BANKER'S: A shade of colour that many bankers are supposed to wear. This non-controversial, universally-popular colour suits the corporate image bankers like to portray.

GREYS, THE SCOT: A title given to the famous Scottish Dragoon Regiment because of their distinctive grey uniforms and grey horses.

GROG BLOSSOM: An expression which describes how red a drinker's nose may become after drinking many measures of alcohol. The origin is probably derived from the alcoholic liquor "grog".

GROG, SIX-WATER: The nautical proportions of water to rum - 1 : 6 (see next entry).

GROGGY, FEELING: Today, if someone feels unwell or giddy they are said to be feeling groggy, but the original meaning of the phrase was very different. In 1740, Admiral Edward Vernon became the first recorded commanding officer in the British Navy to serve his officers and sailors with a concoction of rum and water. Its popularity with the crew soon earned the drink the nickname of "grog" after the grogram* cloak Admiral Vernon habitually wore. During this period, the word "groggery" was closely associated with drinking dens used by sailors.

*Grogram was a coarse fabric constructed from silk, mohair and wool.

GROGRAMS, BLOOD OF THE: Taken from the colour of cloth they wore, this expression relates to a bogus-style aristocracy.

GUNNYSACK, A: Derived from "goni", an Indian word to describe sacks made from coarse jute yams.

HAMMER CLOTH: This type of cloth would be found draped over the driver's seat of horse-drawn carriages. "Hammer cloth"
This photograph shows a sheep shearer at work.
On Tenterhooks may well be derived from "hammock doth".

HAND, CAP IN: In days gone by, a clear cut hierarchy existed between a master and his servant. To go cap in hand means to make a request in a respectful manner.

HANDKERCHIEF, A SAILOR'S SILK: Apparently this was worn as a mark of the great respect shown towards Lord Nelson (1758-1805). It was originally worn round the head when sailors were engaged in or about to go into combat. The handkerchief would supposedly prevent sweat running into the eyes.

HANDKERCHIEF, TO THROW THE: In the days of refinement and courtship, to "throw in the handkerchief" was one way for a lady to attract a man's attention or interest. It takes its name from a children's game called "Kiss in a Ring".

HAROLDS, TO WEAR A PAIR OF: An Australian phrase to signify someone is wearing trousers or undergarments. The origin of this expression is unknown.

HAT, TO BE A SILK: During the period 1890-1914 gangs would raid tailors' shops with the express intention of stealing practically all the stock.

HAWK-WOOL: An Australian word which describes a very competent sheep shearer.

HEAD-RAG: A disrespectful term to describe someone, quite often an Arab, wearing traditional headwear.

HENRIETTA: A name taken from a French Queen, Henrietta Maria, Consort to Charles I (1625-49), and used to describe a type of dress fabric in a silk warp and a very fine Botany weft. Henriettas were a speciality of the Bradford worsted-manufacturing trade in the early part of the 20th Century.

HIM, SOCK IT TO: Many people may remember the zany American comedy Rowan & Martin's Laugh In, which featured this expression. Its truer meaning implies to give someone a good hiding.

HOME, HANG UP YOUR SOCKS AND GO: An expression which is probably used in sporting circles to indicate that any help given or suggested is now no longer needed.

HOOD, LITTLE RIDING: One of the best-known fairy stories of a
young girl making her way to her grandmother's house only to find a wolf lying in wait for her. Although this was only a fairy story the wearing of hoods became quite popular.

HOSE, TO WEAR A YELLOW: The colour of jealousy is often regarded to be yellow.

HOUSES COUNCIL: A term which means "trousers", and is taken from rhyming slang.

HOWE, TO WEAR A JACKY: This phrase was synonymous with a sleeveless shirt worn by sheep shearers and Outback workers in Australia. It was attributed to a famous Queensland sheep-shearing legend John Robert Howe (1855-1922), who in 1892 manually sheared 321 Merinos in one day.

HOYTS, TO BE DRESSED UP LIKE THE MAN OUTSIDE: Used in Australia to describe someone who is over-dressed. The phrase was inspired by a well-turned out commissionaire who used to stand outside Hoyts, a theatre in Melbourne.

IMMENSEIKOFF: This word can be attributed to the Victorian music hall star Arthur Lloyd (1840-1904) who introduced it first. Calling himself "Immenseikoff", he would appear on stage in a heavy, fur-lined overcoat. Arthur Lloyd claimed to have penned well over a thousand songs - Immenseikoff (The Shoreditch Toff) was probably his best-known work: "I fancy I'm a toff / From top to toe / I really think / I looks - Immenseikoff".

Immensikoff
INDESCRIBABLES, INEXPRESSIBLES, INEXPLICABLES.
All Victorian words denoting trousers and originating from the work of Charles Dickens (Sketches by Boz, 1836)

IT, IF THE CAP FITS, WEAR: This phrase implies that if a person feels that a criticism applies to them, it probably does.

IT, TO PICK FLIES OFF IT: This is a phrase which tailors used to describe imperfections, or blemishes, on a finished garment.

IT, TO PUT A SOCK IN: In those good old days when wind-up gramophones had large swan-neck horns volume control proved impossible to regulate. The only way people could control the volume was to place a sock into the inner recess of the horn. Hence the expression "put a sock in it" has gradually come to mean to ask someone to be quiet.

JACKET, BARBOUR: A trademark of the Sloane Rangers who often sported this distinctive type of waterproof oilskin jacket. It was first made in the closing years of the 19th century when John Draper, a Scottish draper, set up a company in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Today, Barbour jackets are sold in many countries.

JACKET, BLUE: This expression was frequently heard in the naval services between 1857 and 1890, the period when blue jackets were worn. Eventually they were replaced by jumpers.

JACKET, GIVE A RED-LACED: An old military term, much used in the early 19th century to describe the result of a flogging.

JACKET, MONKEY: This is a disparaging term for a man dressed in a short coat.

JACKET, NEHRU: This distinctive type of jacket was made famous by the Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru (1889-1964). The garment is a narrow cut jacket with a stiff collar.

JACKET, PEA COAT: The origin can be traced to the old Dutch word "pij", the type of coarse cloth used in its construction.

JACKET, SEND IN ONE'S: An expression much used in the last quarter of the 19th century by jockeys when resigning.

JACKET, THUNDERBIRDS: This is a short jacket fastened by a zip and worn by members of the Royal Air Force. It is said to resemble the jackets worn in the hit children's TV programme "Thunderbirds".
Eugene Nicholson

JACKET, WEAR THE GREEN: A jacket worn by the victor of the United States Golf Master's Tournament, held at the exclusive Augusta National Golf Club, in Georgia.

JARMAS, JAMS, JIM JAMS, TO WEAR: Several ways of saying "pyjamas."

JEKYLLS, TO WEAR A PAIR OF: Rhyming slang for a pair of trousers ("strides"). In other words, wear a pair of "Jekyll and Hydes". Derived from the title of the novel by R.L. Stevenson, "The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde" (1886).

JOHNS LONG, TO WEAR: Long Johns were often worn by elderly men, but most famously by John L. Sullivan (1858-1918), the heavyweight boxing champion, who tended to sport this type of garment.

JUMPER: Today, this word is used to describe any knitted garment. It takes its name from the French word "jupe" (petticoat).

JUMPER, UP YOUR: A term which is used when someone wishes to respond in a defiant manner to an aggressive act.

KAMEEZ, TO WEAR SHALWAR: This is the type of dress associated with Punjabi and Muslim men and women. It consists of baggy trousers and long shirts perfectly appropriate for the hot climates of Asia.

KECKS, TO WEAR A PAIR OF: "Kecks" was a word used widely in the north of England to describe trousers. The true origin of this word is not known but it is reputed to have been in the English language since the 17th century.

KHAKI, TO BE DRESSED IN: A word derived from the Hindustani for "dust-coloured". Whilst stationed in India, British troops wore white uniforms. These were then dyed a dusty colour during the Indian Mutiny 1857-58. The colour was officially adopted by the British Army in 1882.

KILL, DRESSED TO: An expression often used today. To "dress to kill" implies a determination to achieve some desired intention by sartorial means. The expression comes from America.

KILT, WEAR THE: A phrase which describes the role of the passive partner in homo-sexual behaviour.

KING, A COTTON: A phrase that alluded to the fact that any rich cotton manufacturer from Lancashire had achieved fame and fortune by trading in cotton. Sadly, no Kings of Cotton remain.
On Tenterhooks

KINGDOM, COTTON: A phrase denoting the southern states of the United States of America where cotton is the most important crop grown and sold.

KNICKERS!: An expression of defiance or exasperation.

KNICKERS, TO WEAR IRON: An expression often used by men when describing a woman's reluctance to indulge in sex of any description.

KNICKER-WRECKER, TO BE A: A male who is a sexual predator of the female race. This expression tended to be used by young, middle-class girls in the 1960s.

KNICKS: A shortened version of the word "knickers".

KNIGHTS, THE RED: A term which can be traced back to 1795 when red uniforms were provided to the famous Cheshire Regiment.

KNITTING: A strange expression to describe girls or women - perhaps because knitting is seen as a woman's thing.

KNOCKER, DRESSED UP TO THE: An expression which highlights the fact that someone is extremely well-dressed and stylish. The actual expression alludes to the time when door knockers were positioned high up on doors to prevent them from being stolen. This particular practice was widespread.

LACE, TO WEAR MALTESE: This naval expression was used if a sailor wore trousers with bell-bottoms or tunics with worn cuffs.

LACE, WHITE: Another expression for gin.

LACED, TO BE STRAIT: An expression taken from the time when ladies wore tightly-fitting corsets. The corset ensured that ladies were unable to bend and often had to remain bolt upright. This phrase signifies a rigid frame of mind or extremely virtuous behaviour.

LAP, TO TAKE ONE'S TAP IN ONE'S: An interesting Scottish phrase which describes the act of gathering together the tow from one's distaff before setting off home. Tap is, in fact, another word for top.

LAVA-LAVA, TO WEAR A: A typical printed skirt or loincloth worn by the many peoples of Polynesia. "Lava-lava" is the Samoan word for clothing.

LECTURE, TO HAVE A CURTAIN: Many years ago when four poster
beds were popular it was not unusual for a married couple to retire to the bedroom, climb into bed, and draw the curtains around it so that the wife could then reproach her husband for something he had done, without any fear of being overheard by the servants.

LEOTARD, TO WEAR A: A phrase taken from the thrills and spills of circus life. It was inspired by the French acrobat Jules Leotard (1824-70) who wore a tight-fitting outfit during his performance. He never referred to this garment as a leotard but chose to call it a maillot (pronounced "my oh"). Today it is attributed to a style of woman's bathing suit. It is said that the famous music hall song "The Daring Young Man on the Flying Trapeze" was based on him.

LESLIE: A term to describe a Scottish tartan of green and black bars which is separated by white lines and navy, red or black stripes.

LIFE, SEAMY SIDE OF: Used in Shakespeare's "Othello", iv, ii 146 (c1622), to describe the worst aspects of life. A reference to the seams on the "under side" or the reverse side of clothing.

LIMOUSINE: It is difficult to believe that this word owes its origin to textiles. The word is a French word meaning a "cloak". Thus, a car with a closed body could be considered to be fitted with a cloak.

LINE, CLOTHES: A term used to describe the type of conversation or chit chat between two neighbours hanging out the washing. This phrase originates from the time when people lived in houses with back yards.

LINE, TO SLEEP ON A CLOTHES LINE:-: People, especially in Victorian times, who were down on their luck would sleep anywhere, including a strung-out line.

LINEN, COOL IN ONE'S: An unusual way of describing a dead person.

LINEN, PURPLE AND FINE: This phrase is found in Exodus xxvi 1 and Esther i 6 and was used to portray something that was majestic and sublime.

LINEN, THE: Another way of saying theatre curtain.

LINEN, TO WEAR BUTCHER'S: A distinctive type of linen cloth in blue weave and white stripes often worn by butchers. Today, the linen fabric has been replaced by cotton.

LINEN, WRAP UP IN CLEAN: A method of wrapping up or disguising something that is distasteful.
LUSTRE, BRADFORD: During the 19th century, Bradford became acknowledged as the "Worstedopolis" of the world. The city's range of fabrics was second to none so it is not surprising to discover that some of the materials were named "Bradford Lustres". These fabrics were used for dresses and linings. They were made with mohair and a cotton warp, and alpaca or lustre worsted weft. The group known as Bradford Lustre cloths included Brilliantines, Glacés, Grenadas, Melanges, Orleans, Lustres, Puritans, Pekins and Sicilians. Even so, this list is by no means exhaustive.

MADAPOLLAM: This cloth was allegedly first made in Madapollam in India. It was a simple bleached, woven all-cotton fabric made for the Indian home market.

MADRAS: This area in the south-east of India has become famous for its many cotton weaving establishments which churn out an array of cloths ranging from gingham, shirting and gauze, to lace, muslin or handkerchiefs. Madras handkerchiefs were brightly coloured, made of silk warp and cotton weft and usually striped or checked. Bleeding Madras was a term given to these fabrics when the non-permanent dyes bled after washing. In Victorian times Madras handkerchiefs, with their large coloured checks, were much favoured by industrial workers who would often wrap their meals in these "red handkerchiefs" and take them to work places.

MALLABY-DEELEY, TO WEAR A: This phrase owes its name to the originator of cheap suit of clothes - Mr. Harry Mallaby-Deeley (1863-1937). The phrase became synonymous with mass-produced cheap clothing for men.

MAN, A GABERLUNZIE: This expression is taken from a rather coarse woollen fabric often worn by a certain class of beggar.

MARKET, GOING TO LAWN OR LAON: This renowned linen comes from the French town of Laon near Rheims. The use of this material became associated with the clergy. In fact, "men of lawn" was a term used at one time to describe prelates. "Going to lawn" meant an impending sentence of death.

MARTIN, ALL MY EYE AND BETTY: This phrase originates from the annals of early Christianity. Saint Martin was born in Hungary in A.D. 316 but in his early life had been a soldier. As a soldier he was once accosted by a beggar in need of help. He felt he had to help the man and cut his cloak into two, giving one half to the beggar and keeping one half for himself. Christ appeared to Martin in a dream and revealed that he
had been the beggar. The story of this miraculous encounter spread, and the
cloak became a cherished relic. Many years later, it is said that when
Portuguese soldiers were engaged in battle and needed spiritual help they
would shout out this phrase:

"O mihi beate Martin"

English soldiers who fought alongside them in battle unfortunately
misunderstood the phrase and translated it as:

"All my eye and Betty Martin"

Martin was made Bishop of Tours in A.D. 374.

MEDLEY, TO LISTEN TO OR PLAY A: It may seem somewhat strange to
include this phrase in a dictionary of textile words or phrases but once upon
a time the word "medley" meant a woollen fabric which had been
originally dyed in its raw unwashed state. The cloth and the use of the
word can be traced back to the 18th century.

MELTON, TO WEAR: This is a cloth which supposedly originates from
Melton Mowbray in the English county of Leicestershire. Melton tends to
be a thick type of fabric which has been closely cropped to give it a
smooth handle. It has a cotton-warp and a woollen weft. The colours tend to
always be solid colours and the cloth is usually made into uniforms,
overcoats or fox hunting jackets. Byron refers to the "Melton Jacket" in
"Don Juan". Several of the principal actors were attired in "melton
costumes" which were coats with rounded tails.

MEND, MAKE AND: In British Naval ships it was not unusual to see
mariners darning their clothes when they were not on duty.

MERCER: A word taken from the Medieval period to denote a draper.
(Lat. merx, wares). The Company of Mercers were given their charter in
1393. They originally dealt in fine silks or costly fabrics.

MERCERIZE, TO: It was in 1844 when John Mercer introduced this
process as well as a new textile word. To mercerize cotton thread, yarn, or the
finished fabric, is to apply caustic soda to it. The result is a yarn which
becomes much stronger and easier to dye.

MERE, CORDUROY: One of those old-fashioned terms which describe the
working classes by referring to the type of fabric they tended to wear.

MERINO, PURE: An Australian expression which signifies that the
person or persons in question have no association with convicts and In
effect, belong to a group of people or family of unquestionable
On Tenterhooks

lineage. This term reflects the pure breed of the Merino sheep.

MESSALINE: This light-weight silk fabric was named in honour of the wife of the Roman Emperor Claudius.

MOB-CAP, TO WEAR A: This item of headwear owes its origin to the Dutch word "mop", meaning cap or head-dress. In times gone by, the wearers would have been country maidens or domestics working in grand houses.

MOHAIR: This word is derived from the Arabic word "mukhayyar" which, when translated, means "a fabric made from goat's hair".

MOHAIR, THE MEN OF: An old term which was used to describe the inhabitants of France.

MONTY, THE FULL: The origin of this phrase will still be debated many years after this book has been published. In 2003, the prestigious textile journal The Wool Record published a definition which had been supplied by a representative of the Uruguayan Wool Secretariat (SUL). This was as follows: "In the 19th century, much of the South American wool clip was exported to Bradford where it would be sold. Market traders could claim that consignments of Uruguayan (Montevideo) wools always contained "Full Montevideo" bales". Over the course of the years this expression was shortened from "Full Monty Bales" to "Full Monty", and became widely used in the North of England.

MUFTI, TO BE IN: A phrase probably first adopted by British soldiers serving in India to describe the civilian clothes worn by someone who normally wore a uniform. The true Mufti is a doctor of Muslim Law.

MUNGO: This interesting word was reputedly coined by a Batley woollen-rag processor, Benjamin Parr, who was asked whether a tightly-woven cloth could be reduced to a fibrous state. His workforce said that "it wouldn't go". Benjamin Parr's counter reply was "It MUN go!" (It must go). The word became part of the textile industry's vocabulary.
NANKIN, NANKEEN: This cloth was manufactured in Nanking, China for whence it takes its name. Originally it was a fabric from dark yellowish brown coloured Chinese cotton. \textit{(Gossypium religiosum)} Later on the name was attributed to a cloth of bleached, dyed yarn or natural coloured cotton exported from Britain to the Far East. On a trip with Lord McCartney through the Chinese province of Kiangnan, Sir George Staunton recorded that the cotton had the "same yellow tinge which it preserves when spun and woven into doth".

NAPPS: For many years the art of making wool naps for the knickerbocker and Donegal yarn trade was the closely-guarded secret of A. Hall & Son, a small firm of woollen carders and spinners based at Newtown St. Boswells, in the Scottish Borders. According to Mark Keighley, a former editor of the "Wool Record" and author of "Wool City", Halls were the only spinners in Scotland able to make naps of uniform size.

In effect, naps are balls of wool fibres in varying sizes from pinhead upwards. Hall's made them from pure merino or crossbred wool, including Scottish grades. This company received orders for a certain number of kilos, or, more usually supplied them in 100 kg. bales. The company was especially busy in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the demand in Europe for fine Donegal cloths. Scottish and English wool merchants were regular customers. Hall's celebrated its 101st year of production in 1981.

*Also see entry for "Neps and Knops"*
On Tenterhooks

NEEDLE, KNIGHT OF THE: An old term to describe a tailor.

NEEDLE, TO GET THE: This expression is applied when a tailor becomes annoyed because of his poor needle work and subsequent injury

NEPS AND KNOPS: Neps are small, tightly-compressed cluster of fibres. In the English worsted industry they were generally regarded as faults and could spoil the appearance of finished fabrics if they are not removed at the earlier stage in the manufacturing process. In the Scottish woollen industry neps were often and deliberately introduced during the course of production to create a homespun effect. They can be added to the wool blend before the carding operation begins, or can be dropped into the carding machine at the Scotch-feed stage.

Knops are fancy woollen or worsted yarns that enable designers to create ladies' dress and costume cloths with a novelty appearance and texture. They are sometimes used in combination with other fancy yarns like gimps or boucles and remain a feature of ladies cloths produced by Neill Johnstone, of Langholm in the Scottish Borders and Linton Tweeds of Carlisle. They are highly-prized by customers in Japan and Italy as well as the famous Paris Couture.

In the English pottery industry, a 'knop' was the ceramic flower bud used to decorate the knobs on classical Worcester and Coalport teapot covers during the late-18th Century and the Regency period. In all probability, potters were the first to use the word, and textile men adopted it later.

NESSUS, THE SHIRT OF: One of those fabulous mythological stories from the legend of Nessus, who caused the ultimate death of Hercules by presenting him with a poisoned shirt.

NOILS: This word "noils" may have first been used when spinning and carding was carried out at home. Noils are the short fibres removed during the wool-combing process. They are as good as the greasy wool from which they are combed in every respect except staple length. English manufacturers believed that it was not practicable to produce high-class wool velours or piece-dyed cloths of similar quality unless a proportion of good noils had been incorporated in the fibre blend.

Before industrialisation, wool was carded using two hand-held boards covered in rows of very sharp nails. When carding was carried out properly, the long fibres were removed at the top of the cards whilst small amounts of wool were caught near the base. In the opinion of the late Mr. Royston Millmore, a former distinguished editor of the "Wool Record" it is quite feasible that these small quantities of "noils" were caught at the "bottom of the nails". Over a period of time, the word
The removal of noils (short fibres) during the combing process.
On Tenterhooks "nails" may have been corrupted to "noyls" or "noils"

One of Bradford's best-known textile men, Barry Whitaker, has discovered what he describes as "another little jewel of the Bradford trade". He comments: "My family, whilst they tended to call themselves topmakers, were, in reality, noil merchants. I had always been intrigued by the odd comments about them supplying noils to the Ministry of Defence during the Second World War, and frequent questioning never elucidated any answer as to what purpose this noil was put.

"It seems it was an official secret. At the end of the war my uncle spent a lot of time purchasing all the surplus gas masks that he could find at virtually give-away prices. This also intrigued me and it was only recently that I discovered that the filter medium inside the end of the gas mask was noil. Apparently, my uncle in buying up these gas masks had bought back the noil which he had originally sold, and employed casual labour taking the masks to bits and getting the noil out of the end for re-sale. Noils must have fetched a reasonable price then to justify the labour."


OF, LOSE THE THREAD: One way of saying that someone has not completely followed a conversation or discussion. Probably dates back to the days when yarns were spun by hand. Much later, this phrase began to be associated with the narration of tales or stories.

OF, TO STICK WOOL ON THE BACK: Another interesting phrase that meant offering a present to someone.

OFF, GET YOUR KIT: This expression means to "take your clothes off" and is derived from the time when soldiers were demobbed.

ON, KEEP YOUR SHIRT: Advising someone not to get over-agitated. Potentially, the preamble to a fight. In the past, protagonists tended to remove some of their clothing before the fight began.

ON, TO COTTON: Used to indicate that someone has grasped the significance of something that has been said. Originally, a reference to the tendency of cotton fibres to stick other fibres when it came into contact with them.

ON, TO PUT A DIAPER: It is believed that this phrase is taken from the French word "diaper" (a flowery white cloth). The word itself is used in the United States of America to describe a child's nappy.

ON, TO PUT A NAPPY: Nappy, or napkin as it was originally called, was
a small piece of material worn by babies for sanitary purposes. During the last century, nappy became the most widely-used item and replaced napkin.

ON, WITHOUT A STITCH: In the first quarter of the 19th century "stitch" was another word for "piece". Consequently, to say that someone is "without a stitch" is to bring attention to the fact that the person is wearing nothing at all.

ON, WOOL WITH THE HANDLE: An unusual way of describing mutton chops.

ORLEANS CLOTH: Also known as Lustre Orleans, this cloth appeared for the first time in Orleans, France, and was used to cover umbrellas. It was constructed in a cotton warp and a fine woollen weft. Later it was made in alpaca and mohair.

OUT, TO RAG: An Americanism denoting that a person is dressed in his best clothes.

OVERCOAT, TO BE IN A WOODEN: An expression used during the First World War (1914-18) to signify that someone was dead and that his body had been placed in a wooden coffin. An earlier expression was "to have a wooden dress or cloak".

OXFORDS: A type of black and white woollen cloth made in Oxford.

PACKET, STEAM: Rhyming slang for "jacket". Tended to be used in the 19th century.

PAISLEY: The Scottish town of Paisley will always be associated with one of the world's most popular textile designs, the elaborate tear-drop pattern that has been a feature of fashion accessories since the early 1800s. Often dyed in rich and vibrant colours using Turkey Red dyestuffs, the Paisley pattern was derived from designs found on Indian and Himalayan shawls. Paisley weavers began making shawls in the late-18th Century and were said to be among the highest-paid workers in Britain. The first and finest shawls were made purely of silk and were very expensive. Women, including Queen Victoria, liked to wear them over crinolines, and thousands were bought for use as christening shawls.

Paisley Victoria Museum has the world's largest collection of the shawls for which the town became famous. In 1991 Paisley local authority presented the Queen with a replica of a traditional Paisley shawl to mark the 500th anniversary of the town.
On Tenterhooks

Mark Keighley notes: "Mr. Dalziel Begg established Alex Begg & Co., a firm of Paisley shawl makers, in the 1870s. The company eventually moved to Ayr, its present location, and continues to supply the luxury end of the fashion-accessory and travel-rug industry. In the 1990s it obtained steady business for cashmere stoles six feet in length and in Paisley patterns. These were chosen by women for evening wear and included rose-coloured Paisley designs with a mink or black fringe. Paisleys made in Scotland, it seems, still have the potential to set the heather alight."

PANTS!: An exclamation widely used in the 1990s by juveniles to express their annoyance.

PANTS, TO WEAR A PAIR OF HOT: This sexy item of women's clothing was very popular in the early 1970s.

PANTS, TO WEAR CALIFORNIA: California pants were popular with. They were in bold checks and made in a double woollen weave.

PANUPESTASTON: A loose-fitting garment with wide sleeves.

PARLIAMENT, TO BE IN A BLUE STOCKING: Relates to the stockings which the Puritans wore in the "Little Parliament" of 1653.

PATROL, SKIRT: An armed forces expression to signify a male's quest to seek out females.
**Penelope:** A tale from Greek mythology. Ulysses spent a considerable time on his travels, leaving his wife Penelope at home. Courted by many men, she repelled their advances by telling them she was engaged on a daily basis in the weaving of a shroud for her father-in-law. What her admirers never knew was that each night she unravelled all the work she had done that day. "Penelope" is a type of canvas cloth which has a stiff finish ideal for embroidery work. It is a difficult cloth to weave.
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**PENNISTONE:** During the 16th and 17th century this coarse frieze was manufactured in the Yorkshire town of Penistone.

**PENSIONER, TO BE A PETTICOAT:** An expression much used in Victorian times to describe a man who lived on the earnings of a prostitute.

**PETERSHAM:** This heavy, rough-napped woollen fabric was given its name by Lord Petersham who had promoted it in the society he frequented. It was used in men’s overcoats.

**PICKING, COTTON:** An American phrase used to describe that something is not of great substance or worth. Also a term of derision.

**PIECE-COD, TO WEAR A:** Today, this item of clothing can be found and purchased in Anne Summers' shops, or similar adult outlets. As far back as the 1500s, this triangular piece of material or elaborate jockstrap was worn by gentlemen to accentuate their genitalia.

**PIECER, A WOOLLEN BILLY:** An operative in a woollen mill who links up yarn which breaks during spinning.

**PIG (PORK):** If a garment was badly made and could not be rectified it was called a 'pig' and steps would be taken by the tailor to have it proverbially 'killed'

**PLUSH, JOHN:** An archaic term which denotes a footman. It owes its origin to the kind of fabric his breeches were made of.

**POCKET, LINING THE:** This term refers to a bribe and originated in Beau Brummel's (1778-1840) era. Any tailor hoping for Beau (George) Brummel's patronage would send him a coat lined with money. If he liked the coat, Brummel would send the tailor a note acknowledging his approval.

**POPLIN, TO WEAR:** This fabric was originally woven in the city of Avignon, southern France, and takes its name from the French word "popeline". Avignon was a papal town and consequently this fabric tended to be used for church vestments. When poplin was originally produced it had a worsted weft and silk warp with a corded surface. Today, this type of fabric is used mainly for pyjamas and shirts.

**PROPERLY, COVER-ME:-** A Victorian expression which meant wearing something nice.

**PUBLIC, WASH YOUR DIRTY LINEN IN:** A rather reactionary comment. It signifies that a person's affairs should not be paraded in
public lest untold secrets or truths be revealed, causing that person untold embarrassment.

**PURITAN:** A lining fabric constructed in a cotton warp and grey alpaca yam. It could be made in either a plain or fancy twill weave.

**PURPLE, BORN TO THE:** Anyone born into an Imperial family could expect to be clothed in garments of this particular colour.

**PURPLE, THE:** This is an interesting term used to signify the status or rank of a cardinal. It was the colour of his official apparel. Not surprisingly, purple was the colour of robes worn by Roman dignitaries.

**PURPLE, TO ASSUME THE:** Roman Emperors wore clothes of this colour to denote their imperial status. "To assume purple" meant that a person had reached a position of great importance.

**QUEEN, THE WHITE:** A term bestowed on Mary, Queen of Scots (1542-67), who decided to follow the custom in Continental Europe of wearing white during a period of mourning. It was customary in Scotland and England to wear black.

**QUEERLY, COVER-ME:-** A Victorian expression referring to clothing that had seen better days.

**RAG, DAMP:** In tailoring slang this term is used to denote a pessimist.

**RAG, RED:** A slang term which means the tongue.

**RAG, TO USE AN OILY:** This is a reference to those occasions when an employee is ordered to perform a particularly dirty job. It tends to be associated with the less glamorous side of employment. Also rhyming slang for "cigarette".

**RAGS, TO WEAR GLAD:** An American phrase originating at the beginning of the last century and used to describe one's best clothes or evening wear.

**RAID, PANTY:** A reference to the habit of certain young male students of sneaking into women's dormitories with the sole intent of stealing items of intimate lingerie. This was seen as some mark of achievement.

**RAINCOAT:** Anyone who has watched American black & white "B" movies of the 1940s cannot fail to remember where this word comes from. A private detective is someone whom Hollywood and crime writers depict as wearing this type of coat. "Raincoat" is also an American phrase used to describe a male contraceptive, i.e. rubber sheath.
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RAYNES: Like so many towns in the past this fine linen was manufactured in Rennes, France. During the 14th century this fabric was used during church services as alter cloths. It proved to be very popular in England until the 16th century.

REEL OFF: If a man "reels off" a list of facts or figures he probably has the ability to speak fluently about a particular subject. Reeling is a textile operation requiring a high degree of accuracy and is carried out in spinning mills. It involves unwinding yarn from cops and bobbins always ensuring a smooth rewinding onto a revolving reel to form a skein or hank of pre-determined length that is suitable for dyeing, or converting into balls of hand-knitting wool.

REVOLUTION, VELVET: This word seems to have originated in 1989 when the Czechoslovaks dismantled the Communist system without blood being spilt.

RIBBON, RED: Brandy.

RICHES, FROM RAGS TO: From poverty to affluence in a short period of time.

RICHES, RANK AND: A modern expression derived from rhyming slang ("breeches").

RIGOLETTE, TO WEAR A: A rigolette was a woollen head-scarf worn by French ladies during the 19th century. It takes its name from one of the characters in "Mysteres de Paris" (1842-43) by Marie-Joseph Sue.

RIPPER, READ A BODICE: People who read books of this kind expect them to be peppered with lascivious passages.

ROAD, CORDUROY: This phrase describes causeways in the United States, Canada, etc. which have been constructed by laying logs side by side. When seen from a distance, the logs remind people of the ribs in corduroy fabrics.

ROAD, GENTLEMEN OF THE GREEN CLOTH: An expression which describes billiard players. It probably dates back to the time when the game of billiards was played by "gentlemen" of dubious reputation.

ROBE, GENTLEMEN OF THE LONG: An old English phrase used to describe barristers and judges.

RUG, HEARTH: An expression taken from Cockney rhyming slang to mean someone who is intellectually challenged.
RUG, TO CUT A: When two people were dancing in a rather energetic way they were said to "cut a rug". This term was first used after the Second World War (1939-45) and prior to the advent of Rock and Roll.

RUGS, HEARTH, TILDEN'S: This phrase was coined after the visit to England of William Tatem Tildens (1893-1953), who played lawn tennis at Wimbledon in the 1920s. His impressive, long sweaters caused a stir in the tennis world and became a national talking point.

SABLES, A SUIT OF: In the reign of Henry VIII (1509-47) this costly clothing could be worn only by those of higher rank than an earl.

SALE, DRESS FOR: An expression describing a prostitute, or rather the type of clothes she wears and service she is prepared to offer.

SANFORIZE: This word is attributed to the New York inventor Sandford Lockwood Cluett (1874-1968) who invented a mechanical way of compressing pre-shrunk cotton fibres.

SARTORIAL: A word which is often linked to men's apparel. Derived from the Latin word "sartor" meaning "tailor".

SATARA CLOTH: This is a heavy, ribbed broadcloth, and was woven in the Indian town of Maharashtra.

SATIN, TO GO FOR A YARD OF: An archaic expression used by certain "well-to-do ladies", who would claim to be undertaking this chore whilst in reality they intended to drink a glass of gin. Servants or domestics, on the other hand, would use the words "ribbon" or "tape".

SCHMUTTER, TO WEAR: A Yiddish word which means "clothing" and is derived from the Polish word "szamata" (a sample of cloth).

SEAM, ON THE BACK: An old tailoring term which was used to describe a tailor who fell onto his back or took a nap on the shop boards.

SETTLERS, DUNGAREE: When the Australian outback was being colonised many settlers wore a very coarse cotton fabric.

SHALLOON: This woollen fabric was first made in Chalons in France. It was particularly well-known in the 17th and 18th centuries. Jonathan Swift (1667-1745) records the shalloon in his writing:

"In blue shalloon, shall Hannibal be clad"

Today, this fabric is known as a fine textured, light-weight worsted fabric.
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**SHAWL, TO SPORT A:** The name given to this fashion accessory has never altered since it was first introduced. Originally, a shawl was a piece of Kashmiri woven cloth made from Tibetan goat hair.

**SHEARS, KNIGHT OF THE:** A quaint name for a tailor.

**SHEET, STAND IN A WHITE:** An expression which describes someone who is obliged to dress in a white sheet while asking for public forgiveness.

**SHEET, TO WEAR THE WHITE:** A Roman Catholic custom obliging a person to wear a white sheet as part of a penance for some crime he or she has committed.

**SHIRT, BLACK:** Originally, this was a shirt worn by Mussolini’s Fascist supporters in Italy (1919-43). It was later adopted and widely used by English Fascists led by Oswald Mosley (1896-1980). "Black shirts" was also the nickname given to the German SS or Schulzstaffel led by Heinrich Himmler (1900-45).

**SHIRT, LOSE YOUR:** An expression which signifies that a gambler is in danger of leaving a card game with nothing - not even his shirt!

**SHIRT, TO BE A RED:** This refers to the colour of a shirt adopted by the famous Italian patriot and revolutionist Giuseppe Garibaldi (1807-82)
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and subsequently worn by his troops during the liberation of Italy, (1859-66). It is interesting to note that red flannel shirts were worn by gold and silver miners in America as well as merchant seamen who worked in and around the American port of Baltimore.

**SHIRT, TO BE A STUFFED:** In the early history of shop window dressing an attempt was made to give the impression that dress-shirts seemed fuller than they were. This was achieved by packing them with a suitable material. Thus, to be a stuffed shirt means that you are probably a pompous and shallow person.

**SHIRT, TO DESERVE A WHITE:** An Australian phrase which may have originated in Yorkshire, England. This curt phrase implied that someone deserved to die because of his lack of loyalty.

**SHIRT, TO HAVE A BALD-FACED:** An expression used by American cowboys who wore white muslin or linen shirts. Inspired by Hereford cattle which have a white face.

**SHIRTS, HIGH COLLARS AND SHORT:** An English music hall riposte aimed at certain gentlemen who were seen to be above their natural stations.
SHIRTS, THE DIRTY: A name attributed to the 101st Battalion of Munster Fusiliers who earned it when they fought short-sleeved in Delhi during the 1857 campaign.

SHODDY: The word "shoddy" means different things to different people. Manufacturers in the Heavy Woollen District of West Yorkshire understood it to represent the fibrous waste obtained by "Fearnoughting" or tearing up soft-twisted fabrics such as hosiery goods, which were then used alone or blended with noils or new wool to make heavy woollen cloths such as overcoats. In the Bradford wool-combing industry, "shoddy" was the word that was used to describe the dusty, mixed fibres that gathered under carding machines, even though the correct word for this extraneous material was "fud".

Some spinners in the Leicester spoke of "shoddy" when referring to what firms in the Bradford district would have termed hard wastes created during the worsted-spinning process. There are so many meanings for such a short word that, unfortunately, is now generally used in the English Language as an adjective describing a product of inferior quality. During the 1950s the Yorkshire-based Association of Reclaimed Fibre Manufacturers attempted to drop the word "shoddy" altogether, but could not come up with a new name to replace it.

SHORN, TO GO FOR WOOL AND COME BACK: An expression found in Cervantes's "Don Quixote" (1547-1616) and used to describe someone who sets out to administer a punishment but ends up being punished himself.

SHORTS, EAT MY: An expression of contempt widely used by the ever-popular TV cartoon figure Bart Simpson from the Simpson Family. The American word for underpants is "shorts".

SHOULDERS, TO HAVE AMERICAN: An old-fashioned tailoring term for accentuating the shoulders in a jacket. The idea was to make them appear to be larger than the wearer's real shoulders.

SHOWING, YOUR SLIP IS: A term which denotes that some secret or confidence may have been given away in a moment of weakness. The image is conveyed of a woman who is embarrassed to be told that her underskirt is showing.
**SHUTTLE**: Shuttle is one of the busiest words in the world-renowned Oxford Dictionary. Shuttlecocks are hit repeatedly from one side of the court to the other during badminton matches. "Le Shuttle" is the name given to the trains that transport passengers backwards and forwards between London, Paris and Brussels at speeds of more than 150 miles per hour.

The weavers of Ancient Egypt were amongst the first to devise shuttles of a rudimentary type. Kay's "Flying Shuttle", introduced in 1733, enabled weavers to produce cloth twice as quickly. Willie Hutchinson, a Bradford weaving mill manager and author of several books on power weaving and the *Art of Loom Tuning*, believed that the greatest strides in shuttle-making took place in the early part of the 20th century. Shuttles, he observed, had to be made of wood that was "fine in grain, hard in structure, and capable of taking a very fine polish". The size and weight of the shuttle was determined by the kind of material to be woven, the length of the pirn or bobbin placed inside the shuttle, and the make of the loom.

Shuttle looms began to take a back seat in the late-1950s after Sulzer Brothers, of Switzerland, developed a new type of weaving machine incorporating a method of propelling weft yarn through the warp yarn by means of a small metal projectile rather than shuttles. This invention
allowed weavers to produce cloth at unprecedented speeds. Thousands of shuttle looms remain in operation in India, Iran and the African countries. The few that have been retained in English and Scottish mills are usually reserved for short production runs and pattern-making.

**SIDE, SPINDLE:** It was King Alfred (871-899) who called the female side of his family the "spindle side". It was reputed that King Alfred's mother was very skilled in spinning and had educated her own daughters in this skill.

**SILK:** A cowboy's expression for barbed wire.

**SILK, CARRY OR SPORT:** When participating in a horse race, jockeys wear or sport silk jackets.

**SILK, HIT THE:** A person's flight from danger. **SILK, ON THE:** Leaving a stricken plane by parachute.

**SILK, TO TAKE:** An expression which signifies that someone is about to enter the profession of Queen's Counsel at the Bar. It owes its origin to the silk robes the Queen's Counsel wears.

**SILK, YARD OF:** Rhyming slang used by Cockney milkmen for a pint of milk.

**SILKWORM, A:** An expression much used in the 18th century to describe a type of woman shopper who spent a considerable amount of time in drapers' shops looking at and sampling fabrics without actually buying anything.

**SILKWORM, TO BE A:** A Victorian "scam" which involved a well-dressed woman entering a jeweller's shop and purchasing a small quantity of items such as rings, necklaces etc. In the course of the transaction, she would try to steal as many trinkets as possible.

**SISTERS, THE DISTAFF:** Another name for the Fates.

**SLEEVE, HIPPOCRATUS:** This was a one-piece woollen bag with all its opposite corners joined to create a triangular pouch. It was reputedly used by apothecaries to strain syrups.

**SLEEVE, TO HAVE SOMETHING UP YOUR:** This is a term used in conjuring circles. When the magician is about to perform some magical
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illusion he or she will often say “There is nothing up the sleeve”. It is a throw-back to the time when magicians did conceal objects up their sleeves.

SLEEVE, TO LAUGH UP YOUR: In past times, the sleeves of a garment tended to be quite wide and ornate. Thus, a person could smile or laugh behind them without fear of being observed.

SOCKS, BLESS HIS/HER LITTLE COTTON: This is a term of endearment often used by the English middle classes. It is thought to have come into use in the 19th century.

SOCKS, TO WEAR NETHER: During the 19th century persons of great importance wore stockings which extended as far as the thigh. The lower classes, however, tended to wear them only up to the calf.

SPENCER, TO HAVE A: This is a phrase from the fashion world. A Spencer was a gentleman’s double-breasted overcoat used in the late-18th century without shirts. It takes its name from George John Spencer the Second Earl Spencer (1738-1834). At some point in the 19th century the phrase referred to a tight-fitting jacket worn by women.

STABBER, RAG: Tailor

STAPLE: The word is reputed to have been taken from the French word "etape" meaning "stacked" or "heaped". Hundreds of years ago, certain
This type of Warping Mill would have been found in many textile weaving mills. Warping is a process that precedes weaving.
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English towns became centres for the collection of wool, e.g. Barnstaple, or any other town whose name ends in "staple".

**STATESMAN, A BLUE APRON:** This term refers to a person who is not a professional statesman. It should be noted that many shopkeepers wore blue aprons.

**STITCHES, TO HAVE GRINNING:** When milliners produced unsightly stitching on their products these were referred to as "grinning stitches". To a layman these stitches look like a set of uneven teeth.

**STOAT, WEASEL AND OR WEASEL:** A rhyming expression to denote a coat.

**STOCKING, TO BE A BLUE:** This describes a lady librarian, clerk, secretary etc. A disparaging expression used by some male employees to describe female employees.

**STOCKINGS, TO WEAR YELLOW:** An expression which describes a husband or lover who is very jealous.

**STRAIT-LACED, TO BE:** A term which originated from the time young women wanted to have a trim waist and would use corsets to hold their figure in. In Victorian literature the heroines would faint at key moments in the drama, not perhaps from love or fear but probably due to the fact that their corsets were too tight. This term, therefore, means to act in a proper manner.

**STRINGS, TIED TO ONE'S MOTHER APRON:** Little can be said of this expression. To be under the absolute control of one's mother.

**SUIT, TO HAVE AN ICE CREAM:** This type of lightweight garment would have been very popular at the turn of the 19th century. The garment consisted of a blue blazer and trousers in a shade of white similar to vanilla. It was worn on excursions and Sunday outings.

**SUNDAY SUIT:** Nowadays, men would laugh at the idea of buying a suit only to be worn on Sundays. This, however, used to be the case in almost every part of Britain. It is probably true to say that "Sunday suits" made of superior hard-wearing materials such as solidly-woven, navy-blue serge began to lose ground to cheaper outfits in the 1930s when men began to buy cheap suits and to sport flannel "bags" and pullovers and the durability of fabrics was of secondary consideration to price.

Tom Coombs, the Lord Mayor of Leeds, complained in 1937 that Leeds
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made the best clothes but was not the well-dressed city. "Very often a good suit is spoiled by wearing a jumper. A woollen jumper or pullover is all very well on the golf course, but in business and professional offices it is altogether out of place," he remarked.

SWEATSHOP, TO WORK IN A: In the Victorian period, Henry Mayhew published a book entitled "London Labour and the London Poor" (written between 1851 and 1861) outlining how the poor had to eke out an existence by working in hot, sweaty clothing workshops for a pittance.

SWORD, A TAILOR'S: Another way of saying needle.

TABBY, A: An interesting name often given to a species of cat which is of a brindled colour. This colour owes its origin to the type of tabby silk made in Utabi, an area outside the city of Baghdad.

TACKER, RAG: An archaic description for a dress maker.

TAILOR, BARAGAN: This term was used between 1870 and 1914 and describes a tailor whose work leaves a lot to be desired. Baragan is a type of Fustian cloth.

TAILS, WHITE TIE AND: A formal item of clothing featuring a swallowtail evening jacket worn with a white bow tie. Probably dating back to the 19th century when elegant parties were a feature of English life.

TALMA, TO WEAR A: A 19th century term to describe men or women who went about their business wearing this distinctive cloak or cape. The term is attributed to the great French tragedian Francois Joseph Talma (1763-1826).

TAMMY, TO HAVE A: A fine, good-quality worsted cloth which has a shiny finish. Its name is a corruption of "tamin" which was a loosely-woven type of woollen cloth. The word itself may have originally been derived from the French word "estame".

TAN, BLACK AND: A term of Irish origin linking a pack of hounds in County Limerick with a body of irregular soldiers who in 1920, were enlisted by the British Government to swell the ranks of the Irish Royal Constabulary. They were so called because of their distinctive appearance, i.e. black belts and green caps of the RIC worn with khaki uniforms. In America, Republicans who refused to give up their slaves after the Civil War (1861-65) were also called Black and Tans.

TAPE, RED: In times gone by, there was a tendency to tie up all official
forms in a pink or red tape. This practice is still in use, although the words are used to refer disparagingly to officialdom and bureaucracy in all its forms.

**TAPESTRY, GOBELIN:** A world-famous tapestry made by the "Gobelin" factory of Paris, France. The name is derived from the French dyer Jean Gobelin (?-1476) the discoverer of a scarlet dye.

**TAR, JACK:** This word was first used around the 14th century. It was associated with a tunic or coat crafted of "jacketed leather". Mariners of old would tar their trousers and jackets to make them waterproof. Today, this word has many meanings but can still be used to describe a military-type garment made of padded cloth.

**TARPAULIN:** In naval terms a piece of cloth which was covered in tar to make it waterproof. The word "paulin" is the Latin word for "cloak".

**TAUNTON:** During the 16th and 17th centuries this type of broadcloth was manufactured in Taunton. The tradition then was to name broadcloths after the towns where they were made. Two such examples were Tavistock (Tavestock) and Bridgewater.

**TAWDRY, TO BE:** This word can be reputedly traced back to St. Etheldrida, also known as St. Audrey, and was used to describe the kind of lace or colourfully-painted toys on sale at fair gatherings which took place on the Isle of Ely on the 17th of October or the 23rd of June each year. There is, however, a view that it was actually St. Audrey who wore gaudy clothing, and over a period of time the meaning changed to describe something which looks tired or shabby.

**TEA, "PUSHLOCK":** A rather strange North Country treatment for whooping cough. A "tea" would be brewed from lamb droppings or "pushlocks" and served to the person who was ill. In Wales, however, nutmeg was added when treating measles or the pox.

**TEETH, WOOL IN HIS:** Often used by shepherds to describe people with few or no principles.

**TENTERHOOKS, ON:** To be on tenterhooks suggests a state of anxiety, apprehension or foreboding. The phrase relates to the processes involved in cloth production. When woven cloth has gone through the wet processes it needs to be tentered or stretched by means of hooks to prevent any incidental shrinkage and maintain a uniformity of width.

**TENTMAKER, TO BE THE GREAT:** A description of the great Persian
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poet and philosopher Omar Khayyam (died. 1123). The term may have been inspired by Khayyam's father, whose occupation may have been a tent maker.

TEXT: This word is taken from the Latin "textus" which means something that is woven. The word "textile" is derived from the same word.

TEXTILES: This is a term often used by nudists to describe people who wear clothes, especially when they are on the beach.

THIN, TO WEAR: A textile expression which signifies that cloth is becoming thin due to its continual use. Today, this phrase is used idiomatically to indicate that something has become less amusing or interesting.

THREAD, CASTING THE WRESTED: This North Country expression was used to describe the treatment of sprains. Black and white woollen thread was twisted together and then bound around the sprained area. Once done the following words were recited:

"Bind white wool doubled in spinning on the front and sides;
Bind black wool doubled in spinning on his left hand, That there may enter no evil spirit nor evil demon."

THREAD, THRUM AND: A term denoting a collection of good and bad things in life. Thrum is the waste obtained during the felling of a warp, which is part of the weaving process.

THREADS: Another word for clothes worn in the 1930s and brought over from the U.S.A. to Great Britain during the Rock and Roll years.

THREADS, TO PICK UP OR LOSE THE: Threads keep a fabric together. Without them the fabric will simply fall apart.

TIE, THE OLD SCHOOL: Some people in positions of power and influence are said to have succeeded in business or professional life because they went to the right school. Sometimes referred to as the "old-boy network".

TIE, THE SILKEN: A phrase once used to describe the mysterious bonds of love and affection in a relationship.

TIER, WOOL: An American cowboy's phrase to describe someone who would fasten wool sacks after shearing.

TOGS, TO WEAR: A term which dates back to at least the 14th century.
"Togs" was a name given to clothing. The word may have been derived from the word "toga", the garment worn by Romans. A "toga praetexta" was a toga with a distinct purple selvedge often worn by children, magistrates and, much later, by emperors. The white "toga virilis" was worn to signify manhood. Even today, people still refer to clothes as "togs".

**TOP-COTTON:** A 19th century description of a wanton woman owing to the fact that she wore silk stockings with cotton tops.

**TOPPED, TO BE A WOOL:-** An archaic expression used to describe someone who is fearless in the face of adversity. Reputed to have been inspired by early negro prize fighters.

**TOWEL, THROW IN THE:** An expression often used in boxing. When a boxer has taken a beating his corner will throw in the towel, as a signal that they are conceding defeat.

**TRAMPER, WOOL:** After a sheep after been shorn, it would be someone's job to press or tramp the wool into the wool sacks.

**TREE, ALL DRESSED UP LIKE A XMAS:** A cruel phrase which implies someone is over-dressed.

**TRICK, TO CARRY OUT A SPUN YARN:** A cunning and duplicitous method of achieving a desired result. A reference to the way in which spinners piece together a broken strand of yarn.

**TROUSER:** A word used by women to describe the modern man.

**TROUSERS, ALL MOUTH AND:** An expression which implies that a gentleman is somewhat of a talker and is interested in only one thing - SEX

**T-SHIRT, BEEN THERE, DONE THAT, BOUGHT THE:** A rather hackneyed remark often used by the juvenile members of society to indicate they have undertaken a certain journey or attempted some act or deed.

**TUCKER, BEST BIB AND:** Imagine you are going to a swanky dinner party. The invited guests are obliged to dress in their best bib and tucker. The bib usually consisted of a frilly shirt for the gentlemen, whilst the ladies had to wear an item of lace around their necks.

**TURKEY RED:** Turkey Red dyeing, a method of producing a bright red on cotton textiles, was practised in the United Kingdom from the 18th Century until the 1930s. The process originated in the Far East, and
Alice Humphrey, a volunteer at Bradford Industrial Museum, holds one of the most striking patterns from the Museum's Turkey Red Collection.

reached Europe in the early 1700s and Britain in about 1785. The first factories were set up in Manchester and Glasgow but by the early 1800s the Turkey Red industry became concentrated in the Vale of Leven, in Dunbartonshire. By the middle of the 19th Century factories in this part of Scotland dominated the world market. The industry went into decline in the 1930s as a result of the introduction of new synthetic dyes that were cheaper to use. Bradford Industrial Museum is currently the custodian of the Society of Dyers and Colourists' collection of Turkey Red samples. These were collected over a period of many years and consist of more than 200 individual patterns of historical and artistic interest.

**TUX OR TUXEDO, TO WEAR A:** This is an American expression which describes a small jacket used on formal occasions. It was first introduced at Tuxedo Park New York in 1886. Its popularity has soared ever since it first hit the sartorial stage.
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**TWIST, GET ONE'S KNICKERS IN A:** An expression used to describe a state of great agitation and confusion.

**TWITCHER, TO BE A CLOAK-:** An expression greatly used in the Victorian times to denote robbers lying in wait for their victims.

**TWITTY:** If yarn is full of "twits" it means that it has faults such as knots which will make the spinning process more difficult.

**TYRANTS, PURPLE:** This was a term of derision describing any person from the Imperial family who wore the colour purple.

**UP, ALL GUSSIED:** In the splendid courts of yesteryear, the assembly of lords and ladies must have been a very fine spectacle. This phrase derives from the time when courtiers wore as many gussets as they could in order to make the greatest impact.

**UP, COTTON:** Used to describe someone who is attempting to socialise.

**UP, ROLL ONE'S SLEEVES UP:** An interesting expression to describe a person's ability to undertake a substantial task.

**UP, TO BE RAGGED:** An American expression meaning "well-dressed for a particular occasion" An alternative expression is "ragged out" which has the same meaning.

**UP, WOOL IS DOWN OR:** The importance of wool to Australia is immeasurable.

**VELCRO:** A word which means hooked velvet and from the French words "velours croche" This fastener, patented by S. A. Velcro in 1953, consists of a strip of small hooks and a strip of tiny loops. Once one is placed on top of the other they cling together.

**VELVET CLOTH:** This word is derived from the Italian word "velluto" which means a woolly feel. The fabric was originally manufactured in silk. Today other materials are used such as rayon, acetate etc. •

**VELVET, BEGGER'S:** One of the many duties of a maid was the making of the beds. The bed would be aired and any particles shaken out, collected and removed. If the maid was very lazy the master would discover a pile of unswept debris under the bed.

**VELVET, BLACK:** A derogatory name given to a prostitute whose complexion was dusky or black-skinned. The phrase was invented by British troops stationed in India.
VELVET, LITTLE GENTLEMAN IN BLACK: An interesting historical reference to the death of a much-hated king, William III (1689-1702). According to the history books, the horse on which the king was riding stumbled over a mole hill. The king sustained injuries from which he did not recover.

VELVET, ON: Someone who has a marked advantage in betting — so much so that he is likely to win.

VELVET, PILED WITH FRENCH: A rather archaic phrase describing someone who has contracted a sexually-transmitted disease, namely syphilis.

VELVET, STAND ON: Someone who has done extremely well in horse racing is said to stand on velvet.

VELVET, TIPPING THE: A reference to a particular lesbian sexual behaviour.

VELVET, TO BE ON: An interesting archaic term which means to prepare a wager or two in such a way that the person doing so never loses. It was also a reference in mid-Victorian times to someone who was enjoying a period of great fortune.

VEST, THE JACKET AND: Cockney rhyming slang for the "West End" (of London).

WAIST, TO BE A PANTY: A term often used in American society to describe a rather wimpish male. The image is evoked of a man wearing women's underwear.

WAISTCOAT, AN M.B: This waistcoat, much favoured by the Tractarian Clergy, became nicknamed M.B. (MARK OF THE BEAST) because of the clergy's alleged sympathies with the Roman Catholic Church. The waistcoat opened at the back or at the side.

WAISTCOATER, TO WEAR A: Probably a Victorian term to denote the kind of clothing worn by a prostitute. This item of clothing closely resembled a waistcoat. Eventually, this term was used in a derisive way to describe a prostitute.

WARDROBE, TO OWN A: A phrase used to emphasise the ownership of a storage unit for clothing or a collection of garments. The derivation is from the Old French word "wardrobe".

WAX, LAD OF: Tailors of years gone by used this expression when
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describing a tailor whose finished garments looked as if they had been modelled in wax.

**WEAKEST, THE THREAD BREAKS WHERE IT IS:** This is a very old English expression which explains the danger of not having a thread properly spun to an accepted standard.

**WEAR, I HAVE NOT GOT A THING TO:** An expression often used by the opposite sex to denote that their wardrobe is not as fully comprehensive as it could be.

**WEARING, WHAT THE BEST-DRESSED——IS:** An ironical remark which implies that the wearer is somewhat scruffy in appearance.

**WEAVER, BOTTOM THE:** Nowadays this is a metaphor for a person who thinks he can do anything or everything better than anyone else. In "A Midsummer Night's Dream" Shakespeare (1564-1616) portrays Bottom as an ignorant, self-conceited person. When Bottom makes his appearance he is represented by an ass’s head. The word "botto" is also used in heraldic language to represent a ball of thread used in weaving:

"The coat of Badland is argent, three bottoms in fess gules, the thread of" (Clarks Heraldry)

**WEAVER, TO BE A GENEVA:** During the 16th century psalm singing was a feature of church and family life. The best exponents of this type of choral singing were the Puritans who were also renowned weavers. The centre for Puritan worship was Geneva, in Switzerland.

**WEAVING, GET:** This Australian phrase means to undertake an activity with great gusto.

**WEBSTER, A:** Originally this word meant a female weaver. A male weaver, on the other hand, was known as Webb or Webber.

**WEDDING, TO HAVE A COSTUME:** A euphemism which describes the wedding of a girl or woman who is pregnant.

**WEEDS, WIDOW’S:** Tweed is derived from "waede" the Anglo-Saxon word meaning garment. It is said that the word became associated with the clothes widows wore when in mourning.

**WHICKERS, ALAN:** A term which refers to the wearing of knickers. Taken from rhyming slang. Alan Whicker (born 1925) was a popular British radio and TV broadcaster.

**WHITSTER A:** An operative who bleaches cloth.
Eugene Nicholson

**WIDE, ALL WOOD AND A YARD:** A phrase used in the drapery industry to describe high quality. Now used to define a person who is upstanding and very honest.

**WIGAN:** During the Victorian period women wore long skirts. To prevent the cloth from dragging onto the floor or pavements a medium-weight cotton cloth treated with a stiff finish was manufactured and was much favoured by tailors of the day. This cloth was first made in Wigan, Lancashire.

**WILTON:** Six years before the Great Fire of London (1666) "ingrain" (or carpets without a pile) were woven in the town of Wilton, near Salisbury. The manufacture of these carpets can be attributed to the immigrant Huguenots who came over from France. Nine years later, William III (1689-1702) granted Wilton a Royal Charter which ensured the monopoly of carpet manufacture in this area. Sixty years later, the 9th Earl of Pembroke paid a visit to Savonnerie, France and persuaded two of the local skilled weavers to leave their homeland and travel to Wilton. It was reputed that to ensure their escape from France these two gentlemen were smuggled out of the country in wine casks. Once in Wilton, Peter Jermaule and Antoine Duffossy erected the very first "Brussels" loom in England and were responsible for the " Wilton pile". From that moment onwards their products carried the name of the town.

Mark Keighley records that: "In the 20th Century, Woodward Grosvenor, of Kidderminster, became famous for producing not only some of the world's finest Wilton carpets but also some of the most elaborate and beautiful. The Grosvenor Wilton range of classic Persian designs became the 'flagship' of the company's collection from 1922 onwards. The designs were reproduced from the original carpets housed in London's Victoria and Albert Museum, and were made from two-fold 12's worsted yarns in a 100% English wool blend. Wilton power looms built in the 1920s achieved the high standard of definition associated with Persian styles. One of the company's Persian designs depicts a rich man's garden, with striped tigers, wild boars, birds of paradise, and even the reflection of trees in a pool.

"The production of figured Wilton carpets was revived in Halifax (West Yorkshire) in the 1980s by Avena Carpets, a company set up in 1976 when John Crossley & Sons ceased making those types of carpets but helped eight of its workers to carry on the craft using seven of the original narrow-width looms. Avena was eventually based in Bankfield Mills, Halifax, overlooking the former Crossley carpet mill. The company chose to specialise in designs of high definition and clarity, faithfully reproducing Wilton carpets first made in the Regency Period, and stylised florals. It includes one first laid in
On Tenterhooks

the Swedish Royal Palace in 1820. Avena wove the carpets laid in the Pump Room and famous tea room at Bath. Changes were made to traditional specifications in the mid-1980s. "Quite simply we found that people wanted to walk on our carpets as well as look at them," the company said.

WOOF, WARP AND: Taken from the textile industry. Warp refers to the horizontal yarns running down the full length of a fabric whilst the woof (or weft as it is called today) is the yarn running across the fabric. This expression refers to the building blocks or components of every-day life.

WOOL: A Victorian boxing slang term describing a person's spirit or courage.

WOOL BIRD: An unusual Victorian slang word for a lamb.

WOOL, ALL CRY AND NO: An old expression used to suggest that a person is guilty of talking a great deal about a subject of no great importance.

WOOL, DYED IN THE: An old textile term which emphasises that cloth dyed before weaving retains its colour and is far superior to the wool that is "dyed in the piece".

WOOL, KING: An Australian description for a man who owns a very large sheep farm as well as an equally large flock of sheep.

WOOL, MORE SQUEAK THAN: All words and no action and very little else.

WOOL, MUCH CRY AND LITTLE: This is an old English proverb which reveals that persons who claim to offer the most are often ones who provide the least. An example of this expression can be found in Samuel Butler's work (1612-1680):

"Thou wilt at best but suck a bull
Or shear swine, all cry and no wool."

Hudibras (1660-80)

WOOL, TO: Said of someone who gets the better of someone else.

WOOL, TO HAVE BULL'S: A phrase denoting incredulity.

WOOL, WHITE: Another name for gin or silver.

WOOL, WRAP IN COTTON: An expression to denote that someone or something is well protected and securely looked after.


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Eugene Nicholson

WOOL-BLIND: When wool grew over the eyes of sheep.

WOOL-GATHERING, TO BE: A reference to an utterly confused or bewildered state of mind.

WOOL-HOLE, TO BE IN A: An archaic expression for a workhouse.

WOOLLIES, TO BE WEARING: An indication that someone is wearing underwear made of wool.

WOOLLY, TO BE A: Slang used by members of the CID when referring to uniformed officers.

WOOLSACK, TO SIT ON THE: A term reflecting the importance of the wool trade to the economy of the United Kingdom. This tradition dates back to the reign of Edward III. It was in 1298 when the Woolsack was placed in the House of Lords. It was said that Edward III had imposed a levy on every sack of wool exported abroad to cover the expenses of war as well as a levy on all wool transported by water or road to Westminster. This money went to fund the roadway along the Strand. Today, the Lord Chancellor continues to sit in the House of Lords on a seat without backs or arms and made up of four sacks of wool. When Reports of Parliamentary debates are instigated they are always preceded by the following statement that "the Lord Chancellor took his seat upon the woolsack". It is believed that this tradition may disappear in the near future.

WOOLSEY, LINDSEY:- An old term used in English country districts which means "neither one nor the other". It originates from Lindsey, Suffolk where this type of cloth was produced. The cloth was a combination of linen and wool which could be described as "neither one nor the other". In Butler's "Hudibras" the term linsey-woolsey is used to signify that someone is neither one nor the other:

"A lawless, linsey-woolsey brother"

WOOLSTAPLER, A: Merchants who trade in wool were called woolstaplers. Staple means a centre or place of commerce. In Leeds before the First World War, half-a-pint of beer served in a pint glass was always referred to as a woolstapler probably due to the fact that woolstaplers usually ordered half measures.

WOOLWARD, TO GO: An old-fashioned expression which describes a punishment which involves having to wear wool next to the skin.

WORCESTER: A broadcloth which originated in Worcester and was produced there during the reign of Henry VIII (1509-1547).
On Tenterhooks

**Wuzzer** A textile worker of pre-industrialisation days who would whirl wet wool around his head to dry it. This term is no longer used.

**Yards, the Whole Nine:** An American expression which is similar in meaning to "the whole hog". The origin of this expression is clouded in mystery. It may be a reference to the length of cloth used to make a kilt or the amount of cloth used in arranging a turban.

**Yarn, Rogue's:** To prevent ropes from going missing in H.M. Dockyards, scheme was adopted of incorporating a red/blue worsted thread in the rope.

**Zoot, Wear a Suit:** During the 1930-40s this iconic garment, worn by American males, was greatly-admired and highly-prized in certain circles. It had a number of special stylistic features. The jacket had pronounced padded shoulders with an array of buttons on the sleeves. Its singular image was further enhanced by the rather baggy trousers which extended well above the waist.
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Wool, All cry and no .......... 72
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Are you feeling groggy after a few wool staplers or are you on tenterhooks that you are neither dressed to the nines nor gussied up in your best togs before receiving your green jacket and not a green coat? Then keep your shirt on and wear the old school tie with your Sunday suit so you will not be mistaken as a candidate for a man of the cloth.

It is not surprising that we regularly use many of these words and expressions in our everyday conversations. This fascinating A-Z compendium attempts to show, possibly for the first time, how the world of textiles has influenced the English language.

So before you start flicking through the selection of textile-related words and expressions in this book don’t go hatty or use cloak-and-dagger methods to discover what is meant by wearing sack cloth and ashes just remember to always cut your coat according to your cloth before going out.

Price £6.99