K

Kendal

A woollen cloth.

A kind of → woollen cloth woven, or originally woven, in Kendal, a town in Westmorland (now Cumbria); therefore called **Kendal cloth, cloth kendalles**; as an adjective it meant made of Kendal cloth. The earliest references to the cloth date from legislation of 1390, and imply cloth of the poorest quality (see → cloth: dimensions and weights). → Gowns and → hoods of Kendal are mentioned from *c.* 1443, from earlier Proceedings in Chancery recorded in the reign of Elizabeth 1.

See also the → naming of cloth.

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Kermes

A scarlet-red dyestuff, the most costly dye in medieval Europe and the Islamic world.

Kermes is the European term derived from the medieval Arabic *kirmiz*, meaning a 'worm'; and in this context it is close to the late Roman Latin term *vermiculus* ('little worm'), used in the Vulgate bible for 'scarlet', from which is derived the English term *vermilion* (a bright red shade), and the equivalent French term *vermeil*. By Carolingian times the word *vermiculatus* was being used to describe scarlet-coloured garments, displacing the old Roman word for such garments, *coccina*, derived from the dyestuff term *coccus*, itself derived from the much older Greek term *κοκκος*, which meant 'a berry'. Neither a worm nor a berry, the *kermes* dyestuff was in fact of insect origin: extracted from the eggs of oak-feeding Mediterranean shield-lice. Because these eggs, when desiccated, appear to be grains (like those of salt or sand), their scarlet-red dyes were most commonly known by that term in later medieval Europe: *granum* in Latin, *grano* in Italian, *graine* in French, *grein* in Flemish and German, and *grain* in English.

Kermes-dyed textiles first appeared in the medieval British Isles in an urban context (probably) in Anglo-Saxon Winchester and Anglo-Viking → York, but at this point kermes was confined to imported → silk. Although → wool textiles dyed with kermes are known from Roman times, they do not reappear in northern Europe until the 11th century, becoming a major element in the medieval economy in the following centuries. Kermes has been discovered on ten samples of woollen and silk textile from excavation in London at Swan Lane (13th century), Baynard's Castle (1325–50) and Custom House (1300–50). There is also a reference in the Customs Accounts of Hull, to cloth dyed with kermes coming into the port in the mid- to late 15th century.

The fine woollen → broadcloths known as scarlets had kermes as their essential dye and most expensive component, so that eventually the name 'scarlet' became transferred to the characteristic colour, though by a combination of → woad or indigo and kermes, a range of red, brown, grey, black, mulberry, and blue shades could be achieved.

The dyestuff itself does not appear to have been imported into England until the 12th century, which may have resulted from the initiative of Jewish traders and dyers. The principal sources were Spain, Portugal, southern France, north Africa and the Caucasus. The earliest record of dyeing in grain in England comes from the mid-13th century.

The prestige of kermes in late medieval England is reflected in the fact that accounts from the 13th to 15th centuries often specify that a cloth is 'deied in grein', 'teint en grein' or 'senz grein' ('without grain'), or that they are partially dyed in kermes, as in the case of 'plunkets sanguyins and violetz en greyn rayés' ('scarlet and violet

plunkets striped in kermes'). The high status of kermes-dyed woollens is such that they come first in the inventories of textiles supplied to the Great Wardrobe of Henry VI, indicated in the accounts of 1442–3 and 1443–4.

The fashion for bright and multi-coloured clothes which had prevailed in the 14th century was replaced in the course of the 15th by a taste for dark and monochrome textiles. In the 16th century, with the exploration of the New World, another insect dye, Mexican cochineal, was discovered, which displaced kermes.

See also → scarlet.

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Kersey

A coarse woollen cloth; a piece or manufactured length of this cloth.

Probably named from Kersey, a town in Suffolk, this cloth is first mentioned in 1262. Most references refer to legislation governing wool cloth (see → cloth: dimensions and weights); no garments made of this material are mentioned before 1450, and there seem to be no literary references. A modern definition, however, says it is now used of a compact, lustrous woollen fabric, diagonally ribbed or twilled, which has been heavily fulled and finished with a short nap. Possibly it has changed its meaning, but the early references are so neutral that all that is really known is that it was a → woollen cloth, often produced in lengths of less than twelve yards, and therefore ignored by the → alnagers.

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Knitting and related non-woven structures

There are surviving looped and sprang artefacts in Britain 450–1450, but no evidence for production. There is text evidence for cap knitting in Britain from the 13th century, and surviving knitted fabric and knitting needles in England from before 1450. (**Figs. 43, 44, 45**).

Definitions and history

The early history of non-woven fabrics is obscure but some conclusions can be drawn from the available evidence: artefacts, pictures and text references. Knitting appears to have been developed from the ancient and universal looping (→ nålebinding) technique. Sprang is not technically related to either of these, but its products have been mistaken for knitting. Confusion arises not only from the visual similarity of the fabrics, but because one technique may produce many structures, and a specific structure may be produced by more than one technique. Since what is