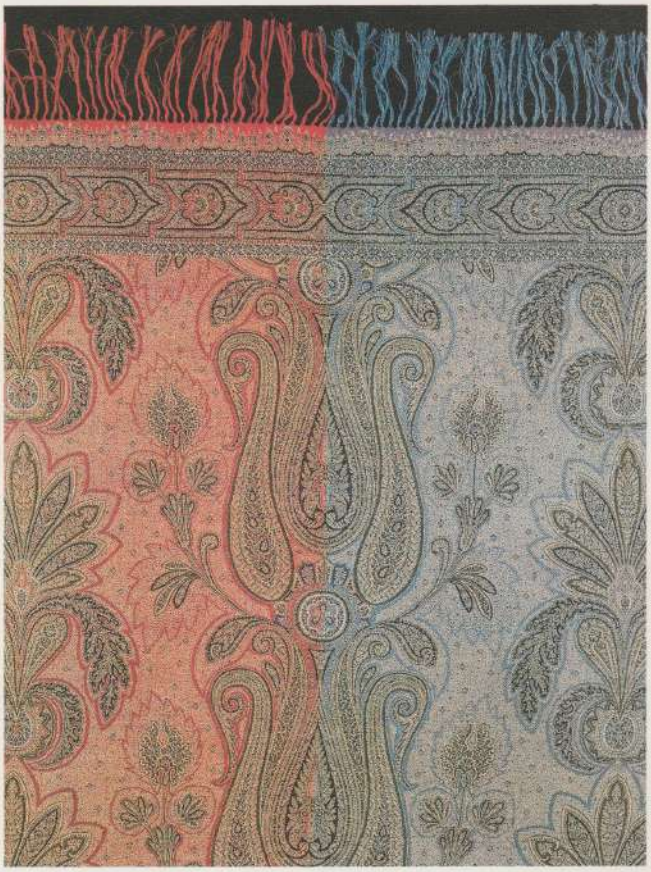
Director Francis Cheetham OBE BA FMA FRSA

Norfolk
Museums Service
Information Sheet

Norwich Shawls

1 Detail of shawl with silk ground and silk and wool fillover, made about 1847, by Towler, Campin, Monteith & Co.



2 Detail of Jacquard woven silk shawl, made about 1860, probably by Clabburn, Son & Crisp

Norwich became an important shawl manufacturing city for two reasons. Firstly, there was a textile industry in the city which had flourished for several hundred years, and secondly, the eighteenth century saw the importation of beautiful and exotic goods from the East. Among these goods were shawls of a fineness and beauty hitherto unknown, woven in Kashmir from the wool of the Tibetan goat. This wool was very soft and silky, with the result that the shawls made from it were supple, light, warm, and draped beautifully. They were very much sought after, but were very expensive. Seeing the popularity of these shawls, the textile manufacturers of Norwich spent both time and money in trying to make a comparable article which would be very much cheaper.

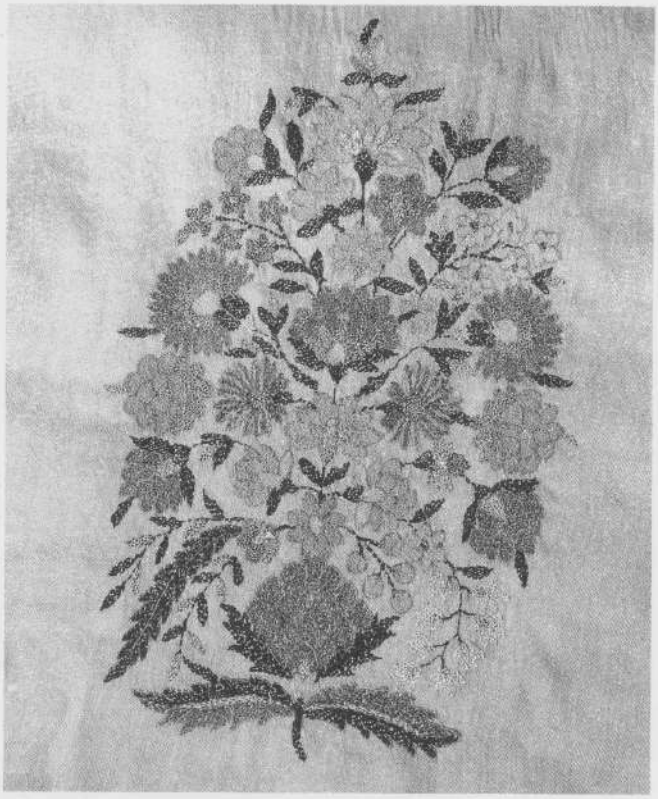
The first man to achieve any success was Alderman John Harvey in his manufactory in Colegate. There he was joined by P. J. Knights who succeeded in 1792 in weaving the Norwich shawl counterpane which was 12ft. (3.6m) wide with no seam. These were of wool on a silk warp, and as at this time it was not thought possible to weave in the design, this was embroidered in by women and children, using a close darning stitch (fig. 3).

By 1802 there were twelve shawl manufacturers listed in the city directories, presumably all producing woven shawls embroidered by hand, but about this date, for some reason which is at present obscure, it was found possible to weave in the design on a drawloom, rather than embroider it. This type of shawl became known in Norwich as the 'fillover shawl', although it does not differ in technique from the harness shawls of Paisley. The name 'fillover' comes from 'filled in'. In 1795 James Bidwell, a shawl manufacturer, had in his stock '2 Embrd 6/4 fillings', but in 1798 the phrase used was '6 Embrd 5/4 Filover',[1] and as the woven variety which looked very like the embroidered came in soon afterwards these became known as 'fillovers' also, though in advertisements up to the 1850s they were frequently just called 'filled shawls' (figs. 1, 4).

The width of shawls was always measured in quarter yards, and in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries they were generally 5/4 or 6/4, i.e. 45in. (1143mm) or 54in. (1372mm) wide, and frequently square, but as well we read of 5/4, 6/4, 7/4, and 8/4 shawls which might be up to 2½ yards (2.3m) long. As with any other article of dress, fashion played a large part in determining the size and shape, and in 1832 one partner in the firm of Grout and Co., was writing to another, 'Please tell Mr. Grout we are cutting our 8/4 shawls into 4/4 shawls, and that we have stopped the other widths'.[2]

Shawl manufacturers during the early tentative period were

experimenting constantly to find a yarn, or combination of yarns, which would rival the softness and suppleness of the Kashmir, with the result that very few shawls feel alike, as so many different types of yarn were tried. Generally a silk warp was used with one of a variety of wools for the weft, or else the shawl was of spun silk, but whatever yarns were used for the ground the fillover was always of wool.



3 Detail of darned counterpane

A further development in the history of the shawl industry was the introduction of the Jacquard loom which had been invented in the very early years of the century but did not come into use in Norwich until about 1830. There is a series of acrimonious letters in the Norwich Mercury, written in 1836, from various weavers who were disputing with each other as to who actually used the first Jacquard in the city and at what date, and it appears to have been Willet and Nephew about 1829 or 1830. The Jacquard loom, though basically the same as the drawloom, did not need the services of a drawboy as it used punched cards on the harness for the automatic selection of the colours. At the moment it is difficult to tell whether these looms were all used in manufactories, large or small, or whether some Jacquards were used by the weavers in their own homes. It does seem that the height of the harness and the number and weight of cards would have precluded their use in a small cottage or tenement.

During the 1830s weaving went through a very depressed period. Work was uncertain, wages were low, and other centres, especially Paisley, were producing shawls of as good quality, cheaper, and in as great numbers as Norwich. For many years there had been rivalry between these two centres, with accusations of piracy of design from Norwich, but there was also co-operation, notably in the field of dyeing, and quite a few of the Norwich operatives were Scotsmen. However, in 1838 Parliament appointed a Commission to enquire into the plight of the Handloom Weavers in all parts of the country, and J. Mitchell, Esq., Lld., reported on Norwich and Norfolk. As one of the results of lengthy and exhaustive enquiries it was suggested that the designs of shawls might be registered, mainly to reduce the chance of piracy. In 1842, Cap. 100 of the Public General Statutes enacted that, for a fee of 1/- (5p), shawls, depending on their type and class, could have their designs registered for three, six or twelve months. It was also stated that the design so registered could be used either as a whole or in part, which meant in practice that there could be a very considerable number of variations and permutations from any one design. It seems that the designs could not have been pirated so frequently as claimed as a remarkably few manufacturers availed themselves of what would appear to have been a heavensent opportunity to protect their goods. Of twenty six shawl manufacturers in the City in 1843 only three registered designs, and in the years between 1843 and 1875 only 315 designs were registered from seven manufacturers. However, small in number though they are, those 315 designs (now in the Public Record Office) make a firm basis for the attribution of Norwich-made shawls after 1843, and up to the present time fifteen shawls have been authenticated from this source.

4 Detail of fillover shawl

At the same time as shawls were being manufacturered with the design woven in, they were also being printed. These have been called the poor relation of the woven shawl, and they were certainly cheaper, but though some were printed on fairly thick wool and are not very attractive, others printed on muslin or leno have a beauty and freshness which need fear no comparison with the woven type. These were shawls worn with light summer dresses, or for evening, and some were wonderful examples of the blockmaker's and printer's art. One firm which appears to have specialised in this type in the 1840s and 1850s was Towler, Campin and Co., of Elm Hill, Norwich, and the Norfolk Museums have nine of their shawls and have identified several others. They are all woven as leno (gauze where two threads of warp which pass between the same splits of the reed are crossed over each other, and twined like a cord at every thread), and are distinguished by a band of tight weaving approximately 2 in. (50 mm) wide, and about 1½ in. (38 mm) in from the edge of the shawl. So far no shawl in this group has been found without this characteristic (fig. 5).

In the late 1840s and 1850s there were at least twenty eight manufacturers making shawls of different types in the City, and the order book of E. & F. Hinde[3] for 1849 gives some indication of the number and variety being made. There are twenty six different types and a total of 39,000 for the year. Unfortunately none of the shawls mentioned are described, and it has so far proved impossible to identify most of them. One kind, named in the book as Arab, either Low, High, or Superior, appears to be what is more commonly called 'Burnous', that is, a semi-circular shawl with a short

section of the straight side sewn forming a mock hood, with a tassel hanging down centre back (fig. 6). Other styles mentioned, so far unidentified, are Top Shawls, Doeskins, Lustres, Galas, and Satin Stripes, though these last are possibly the mousseline or gauze shawls which have narrow over-checking in white satin weave, of which type Norfolk Museums Service has a large collection, held at Strangers' Hall.

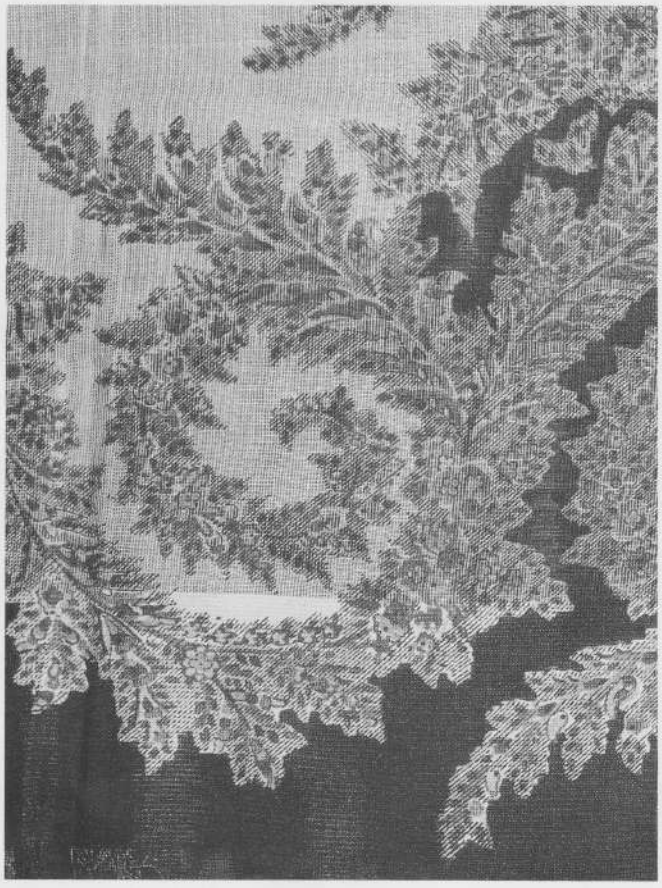
During the 1850s shawl production in the City was at its peak and much favourable comment on the quality of the manufactory was made at the Great Exhibition of 1851. Towler, Campin and Co. showed printed shawls and what they called fillover scarfs; but as the scarfs were four yards long and two yards wide (3.6 x 1.8 m) they would now be called fillover shawls. E. T. Blakely showed what is named as a 'Norwich Cashmere green scarf shawl with gold introduced' and 'shawls of Cashmere wool of pine and flower pattern with gold introduced'.[4] One shawl of this kind has been noted and is in the Auckland Museum, New Zealand. Clabburn and Son showed 'Registered figured Cashmere shawls' and 'Spun Silk, fancy check and Albanian shawls'.[5] In 1855, at the Paris Exposition, Clabburn Son & Crisp won a first class award for their shawls 'made by a patented process differing from any other in use, which, besides making a perfect back, imparts so exquisite a finish as enables them to bear comparison with the finest productions of India'. This type of reversible shawl, which had been patented by W. H. Clabburn in 1854, was also shown at the 1862 International Exhibition, but as the inventor of the process was a juror the shawls could not gain a prize. However, at the 1862 Exhibition shawls were shown by C. & F. Bolingbroke & Jones, Caley Bros., F. Hinde and Son, and Middleton & Answorth. Of the latter firm the catalogue says: 'In the shawls they have a variety of light tissue goods, both printed and woven with rich fancy borders. We would especially recommend an inspection of a very rich Jacquard Bordered Shawl with a centre of Norwich Twill, the design being most recherché, and the Brilliant but tasteful Alhambra shawl cannot escape admiration.'[6] Alas, no Norwich Alhambra shawl has been identified.

In the 1860s and 1870s the firm of Clabburn, Son & Crisp made what are generally considered to be the most perfect Norwich shawls. They are woven entirely of silk, plaid size, frequently using a rich, deep crimson for the warp. The designs, though often with a pine motif, are very flowing, and some have a strong feeling of that style later known as Art Nouveau (fig. 2). One such, in the colours of the Danish Royal family, was given to Princess Alexandra on her marriage to the Prince of Wales in 1863.

By the middle of the 1870s the heyday of the shawl was over, due to a variety of causes including the changing shape of women's dress. However, a few more were made until the 1930s by Grout & Co., now of Great Yarmouth. These were of China crape and printed, but until 1954 a small Jacquard woven shawl, 45 in. long by 30 in. wide (1143 x 762 mm) was being made by Hindes. Then the last handloom became worn out and was given honourable retirement in the Bridewell Museum, Norwich.

It is still difficult to give certain attribution to shawls. This is partly because different centres generally made approximately the same type at the same time. Fashion plates, paintings, advertisements and magazines of all periods between 1770 and 1870 very seldom show anyone wearing a shawl, because being frequently large and enveloping, the shawl would hide the dress from view, and it is the dress which needs to be seen. Another difficulty is that in the first half of the nineteenth century Norwich had better dyeing facilities and dyers than Scotland, and so the Scottish manufacturers sent their yarn to be dyed in Norwich, with the result that the colour palettes are very similar.

Research into the industry is going on steadily and will continue, but it seems unlikely at the moment that the provenance of all shawls will ever be established, except in very well-defined groups.



5 Leno shawl, showing band of tight weaving

6 Arab shawl, back view

References

1 Stock lists of Bidwell, Shawl & Sack Manuf. Private possession.
2 Norfolk Record Office. D.50/77. Written permission for access only.
3 Order book for the firm of E. & F. Hinde for 1849. Norfolk Museums Service.
4 Official Catalogue of the Gt. Exhibition, 1851. Class 12 & 15. No. 285.
5 Ibid. No. 284.
6 Catalogue of the International Exhibition 1862.

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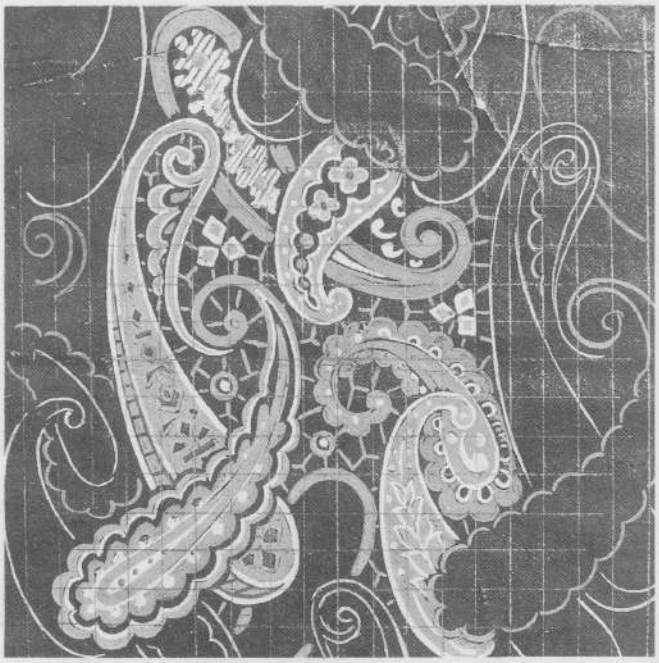
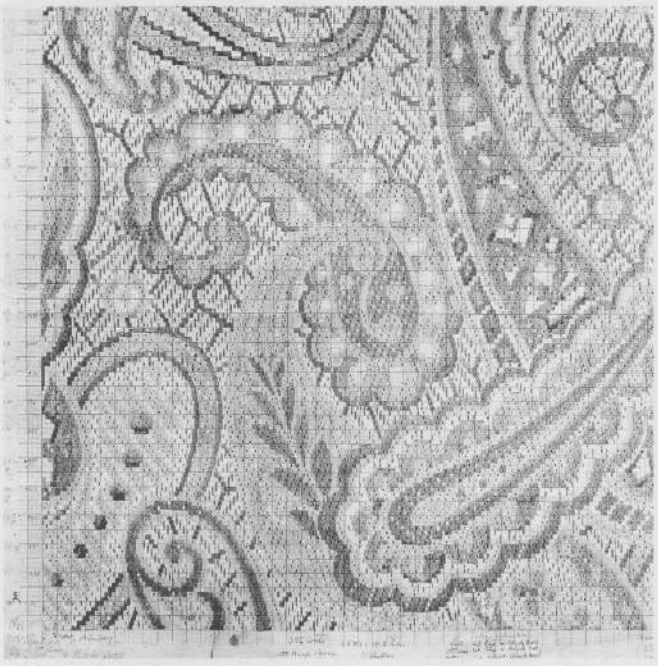


7 The original design, on a grid



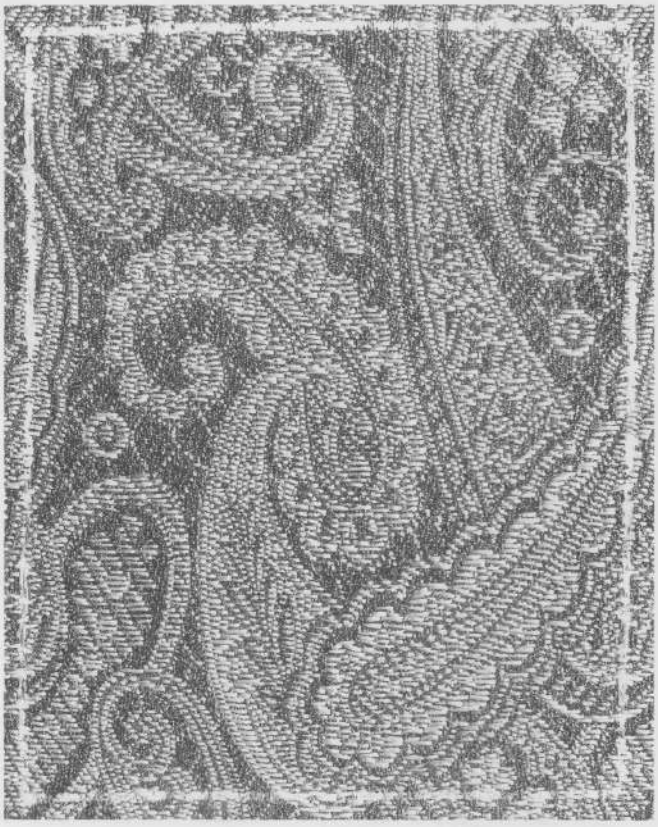
8 Enlarged design for cutting

Stages in Jacquard weaving, from design to finished article

7 The original coloured drawing for a design using 352 cords with 160 warp threads to the inch (25 mm). Weaving would be done with three shuttles; one for each of the three colours.

8 The design enlarged on the grid and marked to show the position of the holes to be cut in the cards for use in the Jacquard loom. The cards enable the appropriate warp threads to be lifted mechanically. The cutting instructions on the margin of the design read: Ground—cut red and black dots; 1st tissue—cut blue and black dots; 2nd tissue—cut yellow and black dots. For each colour 288 cards are required, making a total of 864 cards for each repeat of the design.

9 A sample of the woven fabric. The section marked off by white lines is one repeat, and corresponds to the area of the complete pattern shown on the design.



9 The finished weaving