



**“I am not able to answer the Welsh flannel.”**

So wrote Shakespeare in his ‘Merry Wives of Windsor’, but sometimes we have to try to answer questions about our flannel



Our museum was originally built to house two factory floors of handlooms. Here, as well as in scores of similar factories in Newtown, weavers produced the flannel that the town became renowned for. The word ‘flannel’ comes from the Welsh word for wool, ‘gwlân’ or ‘gwlânien’, which was translated into English as flannel.

Visitors to the museum often ask do we have any flannel woven in Newtown. Sadly, our answer normally is ‘no’. The closest we seem to have had is this lovely red flannel shawl. But we are not sure where it was made. It dates from around 1900, but we think it was made in south-west Wales, possibly Pembrokeshire.

However tucked away within the 1,300 paper items of our archive of Amelia Ray, draper of High Street, there are a number of letters requesting fabric samples. One of these is a hastily scribbled note with a small piece of red flannel pinned to it (above). The writer asks for “2 yards of flannel like pattern”. Look carefully. You can almost feel the quality of this soft fabric!. Scarlet flannel was popular amongst the



ladies for making petticoats and, of course, a scarlet shawls was the classic accessory for traditional Welsh costume.

We know that Amelia stocked locally manufactured flannel, as this invoice for 163 yards of 'Welsh (flannel) shows (left).

We also know that many of Amelia's customers were very particular about which type of flannel was the most suitable, as the letter (below) indicates. The writer asks for 'a few patterns of Welsh flannel (not Lancashire [.] ) she does not want them fine but good stout [will] do for winter"

So, it is quite probable, that our small sample pinned to the note is, in fact, a piece of Newtown Welsh flannel. All the more interesting because it is so rare!

