

Spinning – a great wheel

Spinning is the process of drawing out and twisting fibres into a continuous thread. It has been done for centuries.

To achieve this twist, spinners used a variety of different hand spindles and then, as demand for yarn grew, alternative means of achieving the twist were developed. In Wales the technique of spinning with a spindle and distaff goes back to prehistoric times.

In the 14th century the major break-through was the introduction of the spinning wheel. The spinning wheel was the mechanization of the spindle and whorl. The **great wheel**, as we know it, uses a large drive wheel revolved by one hand while the other pulls out the fibres, which are then wound on to the metal spike that also inserts the twist.

Then around the 16th century a **flyer wheel** was created. Smaller in size, with a treadle, it allowed the spinner to sit at the work. Until the introduction of the spinning jenny in the mid-1700s which allowed multiple threads to be spun at the same time, these two types of wheels produced all the yarn that was then woven into cloth.

Great wheels, cheaper to make than the flyer wheels, continued to be used in particular for woollen yarn rather than worsted, even into the 19th century, and their use was notable in Wales. The use of great wheels is dying out now as modern spinners turn to flyer wheels, but the considerable skill required is demonstrated in this short video.

For information on types of yarns, and cloth

<https://www.permanentstyle.com/2017/12/the-guide-to-flannel.html>

For more information on the two types of spinning wheels, see here.

<https://theknittinggenie.com/2014/03/05/youre-doing-it-even-more-wrong-or-how-the-great-wheel-survived/>