

What is Flannel, and how is it different to Worsted

We are often asked about the definition of flannel, and how it differs from another woollen fabric known as worsted. The simple answer lies in the type of woollen thread used in the production of the cloth. For worsted the woollen thread is made by the long fibres being parallel to each other and therefore smoother. For flannel, the fibres in the thread are intermingled and shorter giving a rougher texture.

The first thing to note is that the modern use of the word flannel often refers to a fabric made from cotton or synthetic fibre as well as wool. In the Museum we are only talking of the woollen cloth – the original fabric of that name where the woollen threads, woven together, produce a soft fabric. The main characteristic of which is the soft, fuzzier appearance. Flannel is just one type of fabric made from this sort of yarn.



A piece of flannel cloth

Worsted is also a woollen cloth but it has a smooth appearance and is best known for its use in men's suits and smart, crisp garments.

So, how is it that wool is the raw material used in both flannel and worsted, but the end result is so dissimilar? It seems that the characteristics of the

threads are as different as is possible, and it is the processes involved that create this variation.

In a woollen thread used for flannel the fibres are intermingled in the teasing and carding process by separating and then re-blending the fibres in one common but confused thread which is subsequently twisted on itself to provide strength.

In a worsted thread, all the processes of manufacture are aimed at arranging the fibres to lie parallel with each other, producing a symmetrical and smooth thread, which in turn produces a smooth cloth.

For more information go to:

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

<https://thedreamstress.com/2014/08/terminology-whats-the-difference-between-worsted-woollen-wool-fabrics/>

There is more to the history of flannel, of course :

<https://www.felinfach.com/blogs/blog/welsh-flannel>