

STROUD AND THE WILD WEST

Jim Simmons

A short time ago my wife was consulting our *Chambers English Dictionary* (1992), and came by chance across the following entry:

stroud, n. a blanket made for trading with American Indians - n. *strouding*, its material, coarse wool [Probably made at Stroud in Gloucestershire]

The sources

This led me to check with the large *Oxford English Dictionary* which confirms the definition and gives various references:

STROUD, [?obs,] also STROWD [? from Stroud in Gloucestershire.]

(1) A blanket manufactured for barter or sale in trading with the North American Indians. Also stroud blanket.

The attributions mainly in 19th century American publication include:

- (i) 1683 - "four garments of Strouds."
- (ii) 1752 - "Six Strouds two Match - coats and a string of wampum."
- (iii) 1752 - "Be pleased to give to the son of the Piankasha king these two strouds to clothe him."
- (iv) 1809 - "Before him on a new stroud blanket was placed a bason of water."
- (v) 1812 - "a large but coarse blue blanket called a stroud."

1858 Simmonds Trade Directory.

(2) The material of which these blankets were made:

Attributions are:

- (i) 1759 - "12 pieces re stroud and 25 ditto blue."
- (ii) 1805 - "five yards of blue stroud."
- (iii) 1844 - G Dodd, *Textile Manufactures* "A kind of cheap cloth called stroud, made from woollen rags, was exported to North American Indians."

(3) Attributions:

- (i) 1683 - "Four Stroud coates and two Duffle coats."
- (ii) 1814 - "The merchandise which consisted of strouding, blankets, beads, guns, etc."
- (iii) 1886 - "A few yards of blue strouding such as the Indians used for breech clouts."

Webster's *Third New International Dictionary* has:

(1) Strouding: a coarse heavy woollen cloth usually in plain weave formerly used in trade with North American Indians.

(2) A blanket or garment of stroud.

Discussion

The two O.E.D. (Oxford English Dictionary) references of 1683 are from a biography not published until 1864, so may not be wholly reliable. But even discounting these, it appears this term was known and accepted in America for well over a hundred years. This suggests a fairly substantial trade, yet none of the available books on the history of Stroud (and West Of England) textiles which I have consulted mention blankets or blanket making.

Mr Lionel Walrond, who has had enquiries from America, suggests that the trade was carried on by small, often short lived firms at the bottom end of the market, using recycled woollen waste. As their 'Strouds' were probably too small and too light to comply with the formal definition for 'blankets' he feels they might have been described in the mid 19th century as 'shawls'.

Miss J. de L Mann, in *The Cloth Industry in the West of England from 1640 to 1880*, tells us that T. Sampson of Ham Mills (also of Nailsworth and Piccadilly Mill, Stroud) was having difficulty in c. 1860 when his shawls went out of fashion. William Barnard, of Hunt and Barnard of Lodgemore Mills, was a partner of T. Sampson using similar machines. Apart from this there is a dearth of information on locally made shawls.

There would appear to be an opening for some research into this aspect of the local woollen industry. Is any on going to America?

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