



# WEAVING wonders

Discover the mills where our tradition of crafting fine textiles is flourishing

**T**he heyday of British weaving may have peaked back in the 19th century, but there are still some fabulous mills, weavers and craftspeople dedicated to the traditional skills of yesteryear.



## Stunning silks

Set within the original Georgian building of England's oldest silk mill, Whitchurch Silk Mill museum in Hampshire is home to

a unique heritage attraction showcasing the art of silk weaving. Using traditional 19th-century machinery, the working museum still produces quality silk products as well as bespoke commissions, including the ribbons on Kate Winslet's hat in the blockbuster *Titanic*.

In 1819, with the silk trade booming, 130 workers were employed at the mill. In the past, it has crafted all sorts of silk wonders, from academic gowns to the linings for Burberry raincoats, and even the silk for the late Princess Diana's wedding dress.

The mill was bought and

**Whitchurch Silk Mill is now a working museum**

restored in the 1980s by the Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust and later helped by a National Lottery Grant, which now preserves the artistry of silk weaving through its training and museum.

**\* For more information and visiting times, go to [whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk](http://whitchurchsilkmill.org.uk)**



## BEAUTIFUL BROCADES

Gainsborough Weaving produces some of the world's finest furnishing fabrics and has an archive of more than 7,000 luxurious fabric samples that tells a riveting history dating back to 1903. It's based in Sudbury, Suffolk, which has been at the centre of British weaving since the arrival of Huguenot weavers in the 19th century.

Favoured by the Royal Family, Gainsborough specialises in historical reproductions of interior fabrics: the company has woven furnishings for period

dramas including *Downton Abbey* and *Pride & Prejudice*.

Gainsborough's fabrics have also adorned the walls of Middle Eastern palaces, luxury hotels, state coaches and even *RMS Titanic*.

Today, its team of 20 create damasks, silks and brocades using design and weave effects dating back to the 15th century, using old and new technology. The traditional looms are still used for fabrics that can't be woven to the same high standard on a modern loom.

**\* Visits by appointment only at [gainsborough.co.uk](http://gainsborough.co.uk)**



**Gainsborough is one of the oldest silk producers in Britain**





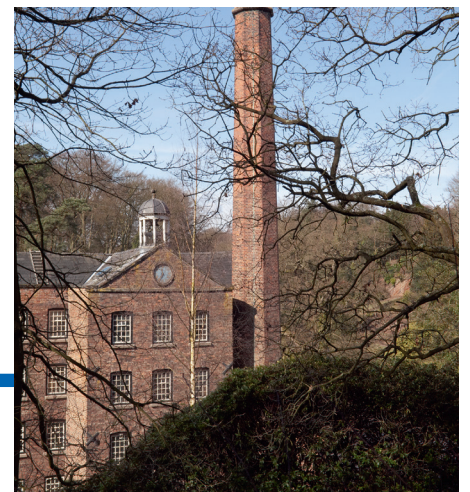
## MORE MILLS AND MUSEUMS TO VISIT



**John Arbon Textiles** is a small-scale worsted spinning mill in the heart of north Devon. It may be a newish building but it's packed with vintage mill machinery – watch them transform raw fibre, much of which is from local sheep, into beautiful yarn or take one of the small group tours on offer. Don't miss the upcoming Mill Open Weekend (16-18 June).  
\* [jarbon.com](http://jarbon.com)

**Paisley Thread Mill Museum** in Scotland tells the stories of the now-closed Paisley & Renfrewshire thread mills, from which the Paisley pattern took its name. This tiny museum is run by volunteers and is free to visit (Wednesdays and Saturdays 12-4pm).  
\* [paisleythreadmill.co.uk](http://paisleythreadmill.co.uk)

**Quarry Bank in Styal, Cheshire** is an 18th-century cotton mill with working heritage machinery. The National Trust site offers visitors the chance to experience the mill in (noisy!) action. You can also explore the former owner's home, the Apprentice House, a worker's cottage and beautiful gardens.  
\* [nationaltrust.org.uk](http://nationaltrust.org.uk)

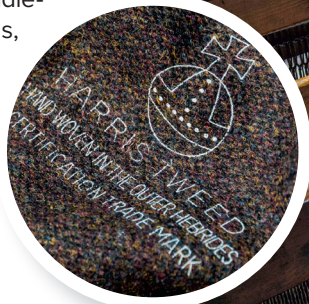


## Terrific tweed

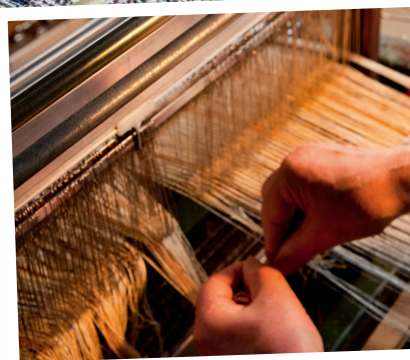
Woven on treadle-powered looms, Harris Tweed® is the only cloth in the world that, by law, has to be woven using human power and no electricity.

Across the islands of the Outer Hebrides, weavers continue to create beautiful tweed in their homes. All the wool is still dyed, blended, carded, spun, warped and woven on the islands.

As far back as the mid-1800s, when crofters wove the hard-wearing cloth for practicality, the cloth became recognised not only for its quality but also its beauty. The stunning wools, while appearing to be one colour from a distance, are woven from secret recipes of many separately dyed colours.



**By law, Harris Tweed® must be hand-woven**



Originally popular with discerning gentlemen for hunting and fishing, the cloth has gone on to grace the catwalks of world-famous designers and fashion houses, yet is still crafted with the skills and attention to detail passed down from generation to generation.

\* **To visit or buy from the weavers and the mills, go to [harristweed.org](http://harristweed.org)**