Textile Industry

Domestic System

Based on old woollen industry which flourished in sheep farming areas – the West, East Anglia and parts of Yorkshire.

Processes included:

1. Shearing of sheep (might otherwise be collection of other fibres, eg linen)
2. Washing and carding of wool or other fibres (to straighten fibres)
3. Spinning (twisting fibres into thread)
4. Weaving (criss-crossing warp and weft threads to produce cloth)
5. Fulling (softening cloth with hammers and simple chemicals)
6. Finishing (trimming roughness of new cloth with shears)

Developments (leading to mass production in factories).

1. 1733 Kays 'Flying Shuttle' – an attachment to a simple hand loom which knocked the shuttle (carrying thread) flying across the loom. Speeded up weaving and allowed broad cloth to be made by one weaver.
2. 1765 Hargreave's 'Spinning Jenny' – a development of the hand spinning wheel which allowed eight (later 120) threads to be spun at once. It speeded up spinning but the thread was rather weak.
3. 1769 Arkwright's 'Water Frame' – the first factory machine (1771), powered by water. It spun a strong but rather thick thread.
4. 1779 Crompton's 'Mule' – the first steam powered machine (1785). It spun a fine, strong thread.
5. 1785 Cartwright's power loom or 'Impossible Machine' – a steam powered loom that they had said was impossible. It began to be common in factories c1830 when the domestic system finally died out.

Why cotton?

Cotton became more popular as trade with India and America began to grow. It was cool to wear, more comfortable next to the skin, easy to wash and could be printed cheaply in bright colours.

Why there?

Liverpool became a major port as the cotton was imported through there from the southern states of America to Manchester, which quickly established itself as the major cotton producing town.

The climate in the north-east was damp – ideal for spinning cotton. Expertise existed from the old woollen cloth industry of the north and new machinery was produced in Lancashire.

Thousands of people began to flock to such towns, many out of work on the land. Serious social problems and disease followed as working and living conditions proved appalling in many places.