



Le Spectre de la Rose. A ballet costume including a silk shawl with a paisley pattern showing how the shawl would have been worn in the early 19thC. Sold £1,410. Christie's 12th Dec 2000.

The Norwich shawl

by Zita Thornton

Price guide

It can be difficult to positively attribute a shawl to the city of Norwich. Many textile specialists list them as European or possibly Norwich.

However, the price of shawls at London auction houses, identified as Norwich, has fallen over the last five years. Over this period, Phillips has offered a good selection of Norwich shawls.

In 1996 they sold a number of Norwich shawls for between £320 and £460. In May 1999 two Norwich shawls were sold by them for £280 and £300 but two with an estimate of £250-£300 failed to sell. Later the same year they offered almost a dozen Norwich shawls and although two were sold for around £400, nearly half with an estimate of £200-220 remained unsold. Others went for £130, £220 and £300. Also in 1999, Sotheby's sold one lot containing two printed Norwich shawls for £207. In October 2000, Christies sold a shawl possibly Norwich for £235. A month earlier, Phillips had sold one for £138.

The highly decorated tear drop pattern we call Paisley, took its name from the Scottish town which used the design to decorate its shawls in the early nineteenth century. However, Paisley wasn't the first British town to produce shawls decorated in this way. Norwich had been using a similar pattern on the borders of their shawls since the late eighteenth century and by the nineteenth century, there were at least twenty shawl manufacturers in the town.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, Norwich manufacturers were dismayed by other towns, such as Paisley, copying their patterns and flooding the market, so removing the exclusivity of the design. In 1842, it became possible to register a design at the Public Records Office for one shilling. However, this protection was only valid for between six and twelve months so only seven companies took the opportunity of protecting their patterns against piracy in this way.

Indian origins

It was shawls from the valleys of Kashmir, woven from the fine, under belly fleece of Tibetan goats, which inspired Britain and France to produce their own, cheaper alternatives. They kept the tear drop motif, known as *botch* inspired by the Oriental territories which bordered Kashmir. The pattern had developed from a vase or bunch of flowers with tightly packed heads bending at the top, into the familiar decorated pinecone shape. The development of the Jacquard loom with its perforated pattern cards, allowed ever more complex patterns to emerge, which eventually covered most of the shawl rather than stopping at the borders. Ironically, by the late nineteenth century, shawls produced in Kashmir were influenced by designs from Europe.

However, even though manufacturers could copy the *botch* designs, they found it difficult to reproduce the soft feel of the high quality wool. Attempts to breed the goat in Britain, for the purpose of supplying wool, resulted in failure. A herd of 27 goats yielded only enough fleece to produce a few shawls. Norwich with its long experience of weaving fine quality, lightweight fabrics, came up with a combination of silk and wool which resulted in a warm and strong fabric with a soft feel.

The Norwich story

A tradition of textile manufacturing made Norwich a natural place to make shawls. In 1793 Knights mounted the Norwich Shawl Manufactory Exhibition in London. By 1803, shawl weaving was so established that their weavers demanded wages distinct from other weavers. Some companies were receiving orders for up to 42,000 shawls.

At this time, shawls were both long and narrow or square with woven borders featuring the *botch* motif and a plain central area or one sprigged with tiny flowers. The most beautiful Norwich shawls were produced in the 1830s-40s. Square and fringed, they contained *botch* of all sizes, sometimes crossing each other, sometimes filled with flowers and often almost completely covering the background. The full

designs of this time, showed off the designs well and shawls were at their peak of fashion. The company of Towler & Campin produced the highest quality of shawl. They were mostly a woven silk gauze, known as *leno* and easily identified by a unique band of thick ribbed weaving just in from the edge which protected the delicate shawl from tearing.

By 1850, printed shawls came onto the market. Many Norwich shawls were dyed with a colour identified as Norwich Red. These shawls, designed to cover crinolines, were over six feet square, or a twelve foot rectangle, filled with *botch* sometimes five feet in length, filled with flowers and covering the whole shawl. The Great Exhibition of 1851 gave Norwich the chance to show its shawls which impressed Queen Victoria who later ordered two of them.

There had always been a problem wearing a shawl which had a right and a wrong side. Kashmir shawls overcame the difficulty by sewing two together but this was not suitable for the heavier European shawls. However, in 1854 Clabburn, Sons and Crisp successfully produced a reversible shawl. Their shawls were the most intricate, woven from silk using a Jacquard loom. The pine cone shape became elongated, resembling the handles of a pair of scissors and scrolled from the border *botch* to the centre of the shawl, where there may or may not have been a plain central eye. Zebra shawls featured lines of complex patterns scattered throughout with tiny pine cone motifs.

However, as the crinoline, so well suited for supporting a heavy shawl fell out of fashion, the shawl was superseded by a short jacket or cape. The shawl once epitomising elegance and gentility, was now identified with the frail and dispossessed and by the 1870s the heyday of the shawl in Norwich, as in other European towns, was over.

The Norwich shawl in Norwich today

The excellent collection of Norwich shawls is contained within the city's costume and textile collection at Carrow House. The Norfolk Museums Service, is keen to point out that anyone can go and have a look at the shawls: collectors, tourists and craftworkers, as well as students and teachers.

There are over 100 Norwich shawls in the collection and around 500 shawls of other types. The Norwich examples have been credited to the companies that made them and where possible, a provenance is given, so you get a good sense of the shawl's place in the history of costume. It also makes you realise the sheer variety of the paisley pattern. Carrow House also contains over 1000 different items of underwear, accessories such as hats, fans, bags and umbrellas as well as dresses and other examples of clothing.

Carrow House is at 301 King Street, Norwich, 1 mile from the city centre. There is limited parking in front of the building and the centre is a twenty minute walk from the station. To arrange a visit, telephone 01603 223870, allowing three weeks notice.



This one shows a copy of a reversible Kashmir shawl from the 1850s. Photo courtesy of Vintage Textiles.



European shawl, possibly Norwich, from 1840s. Photo courtesy of Vintage Textiles.



French shawl c1839 designed by Couder for 1839 Paris Exhibition, using over 101,000 Jacquard pattern cards. Sold for £690 at Christie's June 1999.



This is the reverse side of the Kashmir copy showing how weavers perfected the reversible weave to compete with the double sided shawls which were coming from Kashmir. Photo courtesy of Vintage Textiles.



Detail of 'paisley' border of the shawl above. Photo courtesy of Vintage Textiles.



French shawl woven c1867 showing the difficulties of distinguishing between the different types of European shawl. Sold at Christie's June 1999, £4,600.



European shawl woven with a Jacquard loom which allowed intricate patterns to be used. Photo courtesy of Vintage Textiles.



Selection of shawls on sale at Christie's March 1999.