

## What kind of fabric did people use to make quilts?

Four hundred years ago, materials used in quilt making and clothing only came in a few, plain colours and did not feature any pattern.

Although European textile manufacturers could dye and weave cloth, they lacked the skills to print on it.

In the 17th Century, merchant traders started bringing exciting new types of material to Europe from Asia.

The East India Trading Company bought Indian cloth like 'chintz' and sold it to wealthy people in Britain for bedcovers and clothes.

Faced with the threat of this new Eastern material, European manufacturers developed their own printing skills on linen and cotton. From the mid 18th Century, people could buy printed fabrics to make quilts and garments, although they were very expensive.

That's why so many patchwork quilts contain tiny pieces of cloth in various colours - even wealthy people wanted to recycle their fabric!



**From top:**

Close-up image from 1718 Silk Patchwork Coverlet showing plain and printed silks.

Mid-section image from the same coverlet illustrating intricate patchwork made from small pieces of various coloured silks.

Both images courtesy of Quilters' Guild of the British Isles. Photographs: Michael Wicks, Tina Fenwick Smith.