<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_knitting>

Knitting is the process of using two or more needles to loop yarn into a series of interconnected loops in order to create a finished garment or some other type of fabric. The word is derived from *knot*, thought to originate from the [Dutch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dutch_language) verb *knutten*, which is similar to the [Old English](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_English) *cnyttan*, to knot. Its origins lie in the basic human need for clothing for protection against the elements. More recently, hand knitting has become less a necessary skill and more a hobby.

Early origins of knitting

[Knitting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knitting) is a technique of producing fabric from a strand of yarn or wool. Unlike weaving, knitting does not require a loom or other large equipment, making it a valuable technique for nomadic and non-agrarian peoples. The oldest knitted artifacts are socks from Egypt, dating from the 11th century CE. They are a very fine gauge, done with complex colorwork and some have a short row heel, which necessitates the [purl](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knitting#Knit_and_purl_stitches) stitch. These complexities suggest that knitting is even older than the archeological record can prove. Earlier pieces having a knitted or [crocheted](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crochet) appearance have been shown to be made with other techniques, such as [Nålebinding](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Naalebinding" \o "Naalebinding), a technique of making fabric by creating multiple loops with a single needle and thread, much like [sewing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sewing). Some artifacts have a structure so similar to knitting, for example, 3rd-5th century CE Romano-Egyptian toe-socks, that it is thought the "Coptic stitch" of nalbinding is the forerunner to knitting. Most histories of knitting place its origin somewhere in the [Middle East](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Middle_East), and from there it spread to [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe) by [Mediterranean](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mediterranean) trade routes and later to the [Americas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Americas) with European colonization.

Early European Knitting

The earliest known knitted items in Europe were made by Muslim knitters employed by Spanish Christian royal families. Their high level of knitting skill can be seen in several items found in the tombs in the [Abbey of Santa María la Real de Las Huelgas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abbey_of_Santa_Mar%C3%ADa_la_Real_de_Las_Huelgas), a royal monastery, near [Burgos](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgos), Spain. Among them are the knitted cushion covers and gloves found in the tomb of Prince Fernando de la Cerda, who died in 1275. The silk cushion cover was knit at approximately 20 stitches per inch. It included knit patterns reflecting the family armory, as well as the word *baraka* ("blessings") in Arabic in stylized [Kufic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kufic) script. Numerous other knit garments and accessories, also dating from the mid-13th century, have been found in cathedral treasuries in [Spain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain).

There also is a Votic knit fragment dated to late 13th century excavated in Estonia. This fragment is knit in a stranded pattern in three colors and was likely part of a mitten cuff. Several paintings from [Europe](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Europe) portray the [Virgin Mary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Virgin_Mary) knitting and date from the 14th century, including *Our Lady Knitting* by [Tommaso da Modena](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tommaso_da_Modena" \o "Tommaso da Modena) (circa 1325-1375) and *Visit of the Angel*, from the right wing of the Buxtehude Altar, 1400–10, by Master Bertram of Minden. These paintings show no [knitting pattern](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knitting_pattern); the earliest known knitting pattern was published in 1524. [Archaeological finds](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archaeology) from medieval cities all over Europe, such as [London](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London), [Newcastle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Newcastle_upon_Tyne), [Oslo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oslo), [Amsterdam](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Amsterdam), and [Lübeck](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/L%C3%BCbeck" \o "Lübeck) as well as tax lists, prove the spread of knitted goods for everyday use from the 14th century onward. Like many archaeological textiles, most of the finds are only fragments of knitted items so that in most cases their former appearance and use is unknown. One of the exceptions is a 14th or 15th century woollen child's cap from Lübeck.

Although the purl stitch was used in some of the earliest knitted items in Egypt, its knowledge may have been lost in Europe. The first European purl stitches appear in the mid-16th century, in the red silk stockings in which [Eleanora de Toledo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleonora_di_Toledo), wife of [Cosimo de Medici](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosimo_de_Medici" \o "Cosimo de Medici), was buried, and which also include the first lacy patterns made by yarn-overs, but the technique may have been developed slightly earlier. The English Queen [Elizabeth I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_I_of_England) herself favored [silk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk) stockings; these were finer, softer, more decorative and much more expensive than those of wool. Stockings reputed to have belonged to her still exist, demonstrating the high quality of the items specifically knitted for her. During this era the manufacture of stockings was of vast importance to many [Britons](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_people), who knitted with fine wool and exported their wares. Knitting schools were established as a way of providing an income to the poor. The fashion of the period, requiring men to wear short trunks, made fitted stockings a fashion necessity. Stockings made in England were sent to the [Netherlands](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Netherlands), [Spain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spain), and [Germany](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Germany).

Importance in Scottish history

Knitting was such an important occupation among those living on the [Scottish Isles](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland) during the 17th and 18th centuries that whole families were involved in making sweaters, accessories, socks, stockings, etc. [Fair Isle techniques](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fair_Isle_technique) were used to create elaborate colorful patterns. Sweaters were essential garments for the fishermen of these islands because the natural oils within the wool provided some element of protection against the harsh weather encountered while out fishing. Many elaborate designs were developed, such as the [cable stitch](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cable_knitting) used on [Aran sweaters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aran_sweater" \o "Aran sweater), which was developed in the early 20th century in Ireland.

Industrial Revolution

The [stocking frame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stocking_frame) or mechanical knitting machine was invented in 1589 and subsequently improved. The [Worshipful Company of Framework Knitters](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worshipful_Company_of_Framework_Knitters) was incorporated in 1657 London. Framework knitting was predominantly performed at home, often with the entire family participating. The city of [Nottingham](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nottingham), particularly the district known as [Lace Market](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lace_Market), was a major producer of machine-knitted [lace](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lace). [Leicestershire](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leicestershire) and neighboring counties had long had an association with the hosiery industry. This continued particularly growing with the invention of portable circular knitting machines. Machines could be hired and worked from home rather than relying on a large [stocking frame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stocking_frame) or the much slower hand knitting. One manufacturer of these machines was Griswold, and such work was often called Griswold work. Some framework knitters were among the [Luddites](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luddites), who resisted the transition to factories. By the middle of the nineteenth century, the knitting industry had still not made the transition to factories. With the improvement of steam-powered [knitting machines](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knitting_machine) in the mid-nineteenth century, machine knitting increasingly shifted to factories to accommodate the larger machines. By the mid-nineteenth century, hand knitting was declining as part of the knitting industry but was increasingly a hobby Printed patterns and yarn were produced for leisure as well as for industrial use by authors such as [Jane Gaugain](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jane_Gaugain).

1920s: the Russian Civil Wars and China

After the [White Russians](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/White_movement)' defeat in the [Civil War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Russian_Civil_War), many units retreated into China's [Xinjiang](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xinjiang) and were interned there. As China was about to descend into a [civil war of its own](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chinese_Civil_War), the Russian internees were transported by [camel caravans](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camel_train) to Eastern China. According to [Owen Lattimore](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Owen_Lattimore), it was then that they passed on the art of knitting to the Chinese caravan men, who had ready supply of [camel hair](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Camel_hair) from their animals. In 1926, Lattimore was able to observe camel-pullers "knitting on the march; if they ran out of [yarn](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarn), they would reach back to the first camel of the file they were leading, pluck a handful of hair from the neck, and roll it in their palms into the beginning of a length of yarn; a weight was attached to this, and given a twist to start it spinning, and the man went on feeding wool into the thread until he had spun enough yarn to continue his knitting." This way the camel men not only provided themselves with warm camel-hair socks, but were able to make knitwear for sale as well.

1920s: Fashions

The 1920s saw a vast increase in the popularity of knitwear in much of the western world. Knitwear, especially sweaters/pullovers became essential part of the new fashions of the age for men, women and children, rather than mostly practical garments of associated with particular occupations (e.g., fishermen). The late teens and early 1920s saw a fashion for knitted [neckties](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Neckties). Knitwear was often associated with sport and leisure. Garments often became associated with particular sports; for example, white sweaters/pullers, often with colored stripes (club colors) in the collar, became common for [tennis](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tennis) and [cricket](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cricket).

[Fair Isle knitting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fair_Isle_knitting) enjoyed a golden age during the 1920s, reputedly started by the Prince of Wales (future [Edward VIII](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edward_VIII)) wearing a Fair Isle pullover sweater to play [golf](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Golf). Both Fair Isle and [Argyle](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argyle_(pattern)) styles have since been associated with the sport. High fashion also embraced knitwear, with [Coco Chanel](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coco_Chanel) making prominent use of it and [Vogue magazine](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vogue_magazine) featuring patterns. Before the 1920s, the majority of commercial knitting in the Western world had centered around production of underwear, socks and hosiery. This vastly expanded as the public taste for knitted fashion did also. Both hand and machine knitting were commercially active on a large scale prior to the [Great Depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression).

The 1920s saw a continuation in the growth of interest in home/hobby knitting which grew during the [First World War](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_World_War). Conditions of trench warfare lead to a shortage of socks in particular, and the Allied home front was encouraged to support the troops by knitting. Home knitting grew in popularity, especially as fashion fully embraced knitwear. Companies started, or expanded, to meet the demands of home knitters, producing patterns, yarn, and tools.

1930s: The Depression

The prominence of knitwear in fashion of the 1920s continued, but reflected the changes of fashion. The combining traditional methods in new ways became more common and new technologies such as [zip fasteners](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zip_fastener) began to be used in knitwear. New synthetic yarns started to become available.The hardship experienced by many during the [Great Depression](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Depression) meant some turned to knitting through necessity. It was much cheaper to knit your own garments than to buy hand (or even machine) knitted products. Skills were needed for repairs to existing garments, socks and underwear. Patterns, now often included in popular women's magazines frequently reflected this need. Socks with replaceable toes and heels were common. Some hobby knitters took to part-time work, hand-knitting for extra income. The 1930s also saw a rise in the popularity of commercial [machine knitting](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Machine_knitting). Much commercially sold knitwear during the 1920s was hand-knitted, however the costs of this and other pressures of the time saw a large shift in consumers towards cheaper machine knitted products.

1939–1945: Knitting for Victory

*Make do and mend* was the title of a booklet produced by the British wartime government department, the [Ministry of Information](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ministry_of_Information_(United_Kingdom)). Wool was in very short supply, and the booklet encouraged women to unpick old unwearable woolen items in order to re-use the wool. Knitting patterns were issued so that people could make items for the Army and Navy to wear in winter, such as [balaclavas](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Balaclava_(clothing)) and [gloves](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glove). This not only produced the much-needed items, but also gave those on the "home front" a positive sense of contributing to the war effort.

1950s and 60s: Haute Couture

After the war years, knitting had a huge boost as greater colors and styles of yarn were introduced. Many thousands of patterns fed a market hungry for fashionable designs in bright colors. The [twinset](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Twinset) was an extremely popular combination for the home knitter. It consisted of a short-sleeved top with a long-sleeved cardigan in the same color, to be worn together. Girls were taught to knit in school, as it was thought to be a useful skill, not just a hobby. Magazines such as *Pins and Needles* in the UK carried patterns of varying difficulty including not just clothes, but also blankets, toys, bags, lace curtains and other items that could be sold for profit.

1980s decline

The popularity of knitting showed a sharp decline during this period in the Western world. Sales of patterns and yarns slumped, as the craft was increasingly seen as old-fashioned and children were rarely taught to knit in school. The increased availability and low cost of machine-knitted items meant that consumers could have a sweater at the same cost of purchasing the wool and pattern themselves, or often for far less. Alternatives to traditional woolen knitwear gained in popularity, such as [tracksuits](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tracksuit) and [sweatshirts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sweatshirt), which began to be worn as everyday wear rather than only in a sporting context. Sewn from a micro-knit synthetic fabric and brushed on one side, these were more fashionable at the time, produced more cheaply and quickly and easier for consumers to care for. These fabrics could also easily be printed with fashionable designs. Although made from a kind of knit fabric they are not usually considered knitwear. These new garments, along with trends away from formality in clothing meant traditional knitwear was no longer seen as sportswear as it had been in the 1920s. Knitwear became more associated with smart casual" wear. Technological advances such as computerized knitting machines saw new designs and approaches to knitting. Some artists began to see knitting as a legitimate art form rather than a craft or cottage industry, and more attention was placed on the design possibilities of knitting from an artistic perspective rather than just fashionable or practical approaches.

1990s

By the late 1980s, many of the suppliers to the home knitting market had disappeared or been absorbed into other companies, while local wool shops suffered a marked reduction in numbers. However, home knitting still had a strong and loyal following. The growth of craft fairs, release of well researched books on many aspects of knitting and the continued support among those who had learnt the skill in the heyday of the 60s and 70s kept a considerable amount of interest in knitting alive. One of the most influential changes was the spread internet, which enabled knitters to share advice, patterns and experience, but also it meant that home knitters had direct access to supplies rather being reliant on local sources. These trends have continued.

Early 21st century revival

The 21st century has seen a resurgence of knitting. This resurgence can be noted in part to coincide with the growth of the internet and internet-based technologies, as well as the general "Handmade Revolution" and interest in DIY crafts. Natural fibers from animals, such as [alpaca](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alpaca), [angora](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angora_wool) and [merino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Merino) and plant fibers, chiefly [cotton](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cotton), have become easier and less costly to collect and process and therefore more widely available. Exotic fibers, such as [silk](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Silk), [bamboo](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bamboo), [yak](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yak) and [qiviut](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qiviut" \o "Qiviut) are growing in popularity as well. The yarn industry has started to make [novelty yarns](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Novelty_yarns), which produce stunning results without years of knitting experience. Designers have begun to create patterns which work up quickly on large needles, a phenomenon known as instant-gratification knitting. Celebrities including [Julia Roberts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Julia_Roberts), [Winona Ryder](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winona_Ryder), [Dakota Fanning](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dakota_Fanning), and [Cameron Diaz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cameron_Diaz) have been seen knitting and have helped to popularize the revival of the craft. There has also been a return by men to the art of knitting - one illustration being the role models in the designer partnership of [Arne Nerjordet & Carlos Zachrison](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arne_%26_Carlos), and another the publication of books aimed at a male readership.

As time and technology change, so does the art of knitting. The Internet allows knitters to connect, share interests and learn from each other, whether across the street or across the globe. Among the first Internet knitting phenomena was the popular KnitList, with thousands of members. In 1998, the first online knitting magazine, [KnitNet](http://www.knitnet.com/), began publishing. (It suspended publication with its 54th edition in 2009.) Blogging later added fuel to the development of an international knitting community. Patterns from both print and online sources have inspired groups (known as knit-a-long's, or KAL's) centered on knitting a specific pattern. Knitting [podcasts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasts) have also emerged, with much cross-pollination of ideas from blogs, 'zines, and knitting books. Traditional designs and techniques that had been preserved by a relatively small number of hand-knitters are now finding a wider audience as well.

In addition, a type of [graffiti](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Graffiti) called [yarn bombing](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarn_bombing), has spread worldwide. Like traditional graffiti, this consists of creating knit pieces in public spaces without permission. On January 14, 2006, influential author and knit-blogger [Stephanie Pearl-McPhee](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stephanie_Pearl-McPhee), otherwise known as [Yarn Harlot](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarn_Harlot), challenged the knitting world to participate in the 2006 Knitting Olympics. To participate, a knitter committed to casting-on a challenging project during the opening ceremonies of the [2006 Winter Olympics](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2006_Winter_Olympics) in [Torino](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torino), and to have that project finished by the time the [Olympic flame](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Olympic_flame) was extinguished sixteen days later. By the first day of the Olympics, almost 4,000 knitters had risen to the challenge. As another sign of the knitting's popularity in the early 21st century, a large international online community and social networking site for knitters and crocheters, [Ravelry](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ravelry" \o "Ravelry), was founded by Casey and Jessica Forbes in May 2007. At first available by invitation only, the site connects knitting and crochet enthusiasts around the world and, as of May 2016 had over 6.21 million registered users.