THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH PODCAST
TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE 183:
THE FABRIC OF OUR LIVES

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Welcome to the History of English Podcast – a podcast about the history of the English language. This is Episode 183: The Fabric of Our Lives. This time, as we work our way through the story of English, we're going to continue to look at English contact with India and the Far East. We'll explore the first formal contact between England and Japan – and we'll examine how the discovery of a certain fabric changed the course of history and shaped the modern world – for good and bad. We'll also conclude the story of William Shakespeare with his death – and the destruction of the Globe Theatre. And along the way, we'll see how all of those events shaped the English language.

But before we begin, let me remind you that the website for the podcast is historyofenglishpodcast.com. And you can sign up to support the podcast and get bonus episodes at Patreon.com/historyofenglish.

And one quick note before we begin. I concluded the last episode with the arrival of the English East India Company in India in the year 1612. And the next episode of the podcast will focus on a manuscript that was prepared in the year 1619 by an English schoolmaster named Alexander Gil. His manuscript examined English spelling and pronunciation in the early 1600s. And the timing of that next episode is important because we are beginning to focus on the spread of English around the world. So Gil's manuscript provides an overview of what the language sounded like shortly before the various regional dialects began to emerge in the 1700s and 1800s.

All of that means that this episode will bridge the gap between the year 1612, where we left off last time, and the year 1619 when that important work of English spelling and pronunciation appeared. So that's the time frame for this episode.

And the theme of this episode centers around the important role that cotton played in the world economy of the early 1600s, and what happened when English traders encountered that fabric in India during this period. If you've listened to the entire podcast series, you will know that fabric and cloth is a recurring theme. And that's because fabric is essential to the human experience and has shaped in our language in so many different ways. The moment we're born, we're wrapped in a blanket, and we spend most of our lives covered in some type of fabric or clothing. Together with food, it is one of life's essentials, and our language is filled with terms that relate to clothing and textiles. In prior episodes, we have seen how this connection gave us phrases like "dyed in the wool," "to be on tenterhooks," "to be called on the carpet," and "to spin a yarn."

Now so far, in earlier episodes, we've seen that England had access to two major types of cloth. Sheep were plentiful throughout the country, so England produced a lot of wool, and wool cloth was an English staple. It was a strong, durable fabric that kept people warm and dry. Cloth makers in northern Europe also had access to the flax plant, which had long fibers that could be turned in a fabric called linen. Linen was usually light and airy compared to wool, and was more suitable for warm weather, and could be worn as underwear. The word ***lingerie*** is derived from the word ***linen***.

People in England also had access to hemp, which produced a coarse fabric used for rope and twine and canvas.

Those were the main types of fabrics found in the England at the current point in our overall story in the early 1600s.

In addition to those fabrics which were made by weaving certain types of thread, people also had access to animal hides, which could also be turned into clothing. Animal hides could be made into leather, and the furs could be used to make coats, beaver hats, and other items. It was this demand for animal hides that led the English to trade with the indigenous people of North America. In the last episode, we saw that Henry Hudson's expedition to North America in the early 1600s encouraged the Dutch to get involved as well. Hudson was English, but his expedition was funded by Dutch merchants, and after Hudson returned home, the Dutch decided to get in on the fur trade in the region that Hudson had explored. Between 1612 and 1614, Dutch traders sailed to the region around modern-day New York to establish trading posts there. They established a post at the tip of the island which the local people called 'Manna-hata,' or as it is known today, ***Manhattan***. They also sailed up the river that Hudson has explored and they established a trading post near modern-day Albany, well inland from the coast.

Of course, that river bears Hudson's name today – the Hudson River. But the Dutch called it the North River. And even today, some people around New York still refer to it as the North River. That reflects this early Dutch influence in the region.

Now those early trading posts weren't really intended as permanent settlements, so we'll have to wait another decade or so for this region to become a full-fledged colony of the Netherlands. But the groundwork was being laid around the current point in our story in the year 1613.

Of course, the English were also involved in the fur trade in North America. They mostly operated out of their base in Jamestown in the south. The Pilgrims had not made their way to Massachusetts yet, so Jamestown was still the only English settlement in North America.

By this point, English traders were reaching the far corners of the globe. In addition to North America, they were also reaching out to India and the Far East. As we saw last time, the English East India Company had just established a trading post at Surat in India. The company was also sending ships all the way to the Spice Islands in the Far East. And by 1613, products from around the world were making their way to England.

Ships brought new foods, new fabrics, new commodities, and new trinkets from faraway places. The Portuguese had been the first Europeans to trade extensively with India and the Far East, and Portuguese words were sometimes used to describe those new and unusual items that were appearing in the ports around England. In fact, at the current point in our overall story in the year 1613, we find the first known English use of a specific Portuguese term to refer to some of those trinkets. That term was ***feitiço***. It specifically referred to the charms, amulets and totems acquired from the people who lived along the coast of Africa. And I mention that word ***feitiço*** because it was soon anglicized into the modern word ***fetish***.

Since many of these items were venerated by the people who made them, the word ***fetish*** gradually acquired that sense of something venerated or revered, and from there, it came to refer to an obsession or something that produces an irrational devotion. So today, when we refer to someone's ***fetish***, it no longer means a small charm or amulet from Africa or Asia. But that's how the word started, and it first appeared in English in 1613.

As I mentioned, the word ***fetish*** is ultimately a Portuguese word because the Portugese had been trading extensively with Africa and Asia for over a century. But by the early 1600s, Portuguese power was in decline, and Dutch and English traders were starting to replace the Portuguese traders in those regions.

Over the prior century, the Portuguese had reached as far as Japan. The Dutch also reached an agreement with Japanese officials to trade there. And now, in 1613, the English arrived in Japan with the same goal in mind. An English captain named John Saris arrived there with a letter from King James requesting permission to access the Japanese market, and that approval was soon given to the English East India Company. That was the first official contact between Japan and England. And that initial contact laid the groundwork for Japanese words to pass directly into English for the first time.

Now I should note that the earliest Japanese words in the Oxford English Dictionary come from a book that had been published a few years earlier in 1577. That book was a collection of accounts about faraway places from various traders and explorers. The accounts had been compiled into a single volume, and in 1577, it was translated into English under the title "The history of trauayle in the West and East Indies, and other countreys lying eyther way . . ." That collection included what was essentially a long letter written by a Portuguese sailor who had been to China and Japan. It described both of those regions, and the translation of that letter in this book is the earliest English account of Japan. The translation retained some of the Japanese words used in the original letter like ***bonzi***, which meant a Buddhist priest or religious teacher, and ***cangue*** [c-a-n-g-u-e], which is usually rendered in Modern English as ***Kuge*** [k-u-g-e]. That word referred to a member of the Japanese nobility.

Now obviously, neither of those words are common English words today, but we do find another new word in that account of Japan, and it is a very common word today. It is in fact the word ***Japan*** itself – spelled [G-i-a-p-a-n] in this particular work. That was the first time that the name ***Japan*** was found in an English text, but ***Japan*** isn't technically a Japanese word. It's actually a Chinese word. And more specifically, it's a Chinese translation of the name used in Japan.

As you may know, the name of Japan in Japanese is ***Nippon***. It literally means 'sun origin,' but 'sun origin' is really just a shortened form of a longer name that means 'Land of the Rising Sun.' Of course, the sun rises in the east, and the island of Japan lies to the east of continental Asia. Well, the Chinese took that Japanese name and translated into Chinese as '***jih-pun***,' which again, meant 'sun origin' in Chinese. So it was a direct translation of the Japanese name. That Chinese version then passed into the Malay language spoken in parts of Malaysia and the Indonesian islands, where the Portuguese and Dutch traded for spices. The Dutch picked up that Malay version of the name and brought it back with them to Europe. And that's how the word ***Japan***

found its way to England and found its way into this description of Japan published in English in 1577. So the word ***Japan*** has been around in English since at least the late 1500s.

Interestingly, the actual Japanese name ***Nippon*** appeared in English shortly after the English traders arrived there. It appeared in a letter written by one of the English officials a few months later.

As I noted, the name ***Japan*** is a Chinese translation of the Japanese name. It was quite common for the Chinese to translate Japanese terms in that way. And it was also common for the Japanese to borrow Chinese words because of the overall power and influence of China in the region. And that relationship between Japanese and Chinese sometimes impacted English because English borrowed words from both languages.

Another good example of how that relationship impacted English can be traced to this period when the English first arrived in Japan. One of the English officials was named Richard Cocks, and he kept a diary of his time there. And his diary included the first English reference to the word ***shogun*** – the title of the Japanese miliary leader who was effectively the ruler of Japan. Well, the Chinese sometimes referred to the Japanese Shogun as the ***ta-kiun***, which was a Chinese term meaning 'great prince.' The Japanese actually adopted that term as well, and within Japanese, it became ***taikun***, originally spelled in English [t-a-i-k-u-n]. But today, that word has a slightly different spelling – [t-y-c-o-o-n]. And of course, in Modern English we use the word ***tycoon*** to refer to a powerful business leader. But it is actually a Japanese synonym for ***shogun***. By the way, the word ***tycoon*** didn't appear in English until the mid-1800s, so that was a couple of centuries after the word ***shogun*** appeared. But again, ***shogun*** and ***tycoon*** once meant the same thing.

Also, the evolution of the word ***tycoon*** from a Japanese ruler to a powerful business person is similar to the development of a word we examined in the last episode. That was the word ***mogul***. You might remember that the word ***mogul*** originally referred to the powerful rulers of India, but over time, it acquired the meaning of a powerful business leader. So today, the words ***tycoon*** and ***mogul*** have similar meanings within English, even though one originally referred to a Japanese ruler and the other originally referred to an Indian ruler.

Now, speaking of India, we saw in the last episode that English traders arrived there first in the year 1612. That was the year before they arrived in Japan. And that proved to be good timing because the Japanese weren't all that interested in the goods that the English were trying to trade, but they were interested in something that was made in India, so India actually provided an important trading link between England and Japan. Let me explain what I mean.

The Japanese weren't all that interested in English wool or linen, but there was a type of fabric produced in India that they loved. That fabric was cotton. Since the English now had a trading post in India, that meant they could buy cotton fabric in India, and then take it with them to Japan to trade there. In fact, that diary maintained by Richard Cocks which contained that first English use of the word ***shogun*** also made numerous references to various types of cotton fabric made in India. The fabric was often used as gifts for Japanese officials.

It actually contains the first English reference to ***cummerbunds***. A ***cummerbund*** was a type of sash worn around the waist, and was often made with Indian cotton. It's a Hindu and Urdu word. Interestingly, in Modern English, especially in North America, it is often pronounced as 'cumber' with a 'b' sound in the middle, so 'cumberbund,' even though the traditional form of the word doesn't have a 'b' sound there. It's ***cummerbund***. But even Richard Cocks put a 'b' in there when he spelled the word in his diary. So English speakers have been adding a 'b' sound for a long time. They may have been influenced by words like ***cumbersome*** and ***cucumber***.

Cocks's diary also makes reference to a cotton fabric called ***chint*** and ***pintado***. Those terms referred to brightly colored fabrics made out of cotton, and they were unique to India. No where else produced anything quite like them. Their popularity in Japan is revealed by another employee of the English East India Company named Richard Wickham. He worked in Japan during this period, and he wrote a letter about the challenges of trading there. He wrote that the Japanese buyers didn't seem to have much on interest in English goods at first. But there was a product that they did like. He wrote that the local Japanese merchants "buy those comodytys that are most rare and at the time when they are most dearest.... So likewise doe they enquire after all sortes of new stuf fantastically paynted or striped, such as are not usually brought heather." That 'new stuf fantastically paynted or striped' was a reference to that brightly colored cotton fabric from India. [*SOURCE: The Cloth That Changed the World, Sarah Fee, p. 94.*]

That cloth wasn't just popular in Japan. It was popular throughout Asia and Africa. In fact, it was in such high demand that it was almost a type of international currency. Traders throughout the East Indies preferred cotton cloth as payment for their spices. They didn't have much use for the heavier English wool, and they didn't rely on gold and silver as much as the Europeans did.

That was part of the reason why the English and the Dutch were so eager to establish trading bases in India. They could buy the cotton fabrics there, and then take them on to East Asia or Africa and use them to barter for goods in those regions.

So why was Indian cotton such a big deal? And how it did shape the English language?

Well, let me begin with a quick linguistic note about the pronunciation of ***cotton***. As you may have noticed, I pronounce the word in the typical American way by dropping the 't' sound in the middle. So /cah'un/ instead of /cot-tun/. Of course, that pronunciation isn't limited to North America. It can be found in other English dialects as well. In fact, the pronunciation of the 't' sound in the middle of words is subject to quite a bit of variation within English. As I've noted before, so-called 'medial T's' are sometimes pronounced as a 'd' sound in American English and some other dialects. So ***butter*** and ***later*** become /budder/ and /lader/. That usually happens when the word ends in [-er]. And sometimes, the 't' sound in the middle is dropped altogether in words like ***cotton***, and ***satin***, and ***Latin***, and so on. That usually happens when the word ends with an 'n' sound. That dropped 't' is sometimes called a 'glottal stop.'

Interestingly, in some dialects of British English – especially around London – we can find these same types of pronunciations in reverse. As I noted, the way that 'medial T' is pronounced in American English usually depends on the sound that follows it. So it often becomes a 'd' sound

when followed by /er/. As I just noted, ***butter*** becomes ***budder***, and ***later*** becomes ***lader***, and ***water*** becomes ***wader***, and so on. But in some British dialects, that other change happens. In those words, instead of pronouncing the 't' as a 'd' sound, the 't' is dropped and becomes a glottal stop. So ***butter*** doesn't become /budder/, it becomes /buh'er/, and ***water*** becomes /wader/, it become /wa'er/.

Now I mention all of this because the word ***cotton*** is going to come up a lot in this episode, and I wanted to acknowledge that the pronunciation of that word varies within English. But I also wanted to mention it because the variations I just described apparently began to occur in the 1800s – a couple of centuries beyond where we currently are in the story of English. There is no evidence of those pronunciation differences in the 1600s. It appears that most people pronounced the 't' in the middle of word as a 't' – so ***cotton***, ***satin***, ***Latin***, ***water***, and so on. But as the pronunciation differences emerged in later centuries, those differences became a quick and easy marker of different English dialects. So we'll keep an eye on that change as we move forward.

So having made that note about the pronunciation of the word ***cotton***, let's consider that basic question about the popularity of cotton in Asia and Africa, and why it was in such high demand in the early 1600s. The simple answer is that the cotton fabrics that were being produced in India were unlike any other fabrics produced in the world at the time, and no one else seemed to be able to replicate that cloth. Everyone wanted it, and India appeared to have a monopoly on it.

Now cotton grows naturally in very warm climates around the world – typically very close to the equator. Most traditional forms of cotton are sensitive to frost. They plants don't mature after they are exposed to frost. So cotton was traditionally grown and cultivated only in very warm climates that didn't typically experience a frost or experienced its first frost very late in the season. That included India and parts of Africa and the warmest parts of the Americas.

But even if you could grow cotton, it was very difficult to work with. The cotton fibers form in the pod where the seeds are. The fibers protect and surround the seeds. And that means that the seeds had to be removed in order to work with the cotton fiber, and that could be a tedious process. Also, many traditional forms of cotton had very short fibers which were difficult to turn into thread and cloth.

But in India, varieties of cotton were cultivated that had longer fibers, and even the varieties that had shorter fibers could be turned into thread and fabrics using specialized techniques that had developed there over the centuries. No one else seemed to be able to turn cotton into a beautiful, high quality fabric like the Indian cloth-makers could. Their skill and ability was almost like a magic trick – and everybody wanted what they produced.

It's also important to understand why cotton cloth was so popular, especially compared to alternatives like wool, linen, and silk. First of all, cotton could be turned into a fabric that was light and airy and cool on the skin. That was why it was so popular in warm climates like Africa , South Asia and the islands of the Far East. It was also very soft and comfortable. It wasn't rough and itchy like some fabrics. *[SOURCES: The Art of Cloth in Mughal India, Sylvia Houghteling, p. 1*] I noted earlier that Europeans usually relied on linen for that type of fabric, and they usually

used linen for underwear and undergarments, but cotton was even softer and lighter and more comfortable. That's why there is good chance that you're wearing some type of cotton as you're listening to me right now. Today, cotton is by far the most popular fabric in the world largely because it is so comfortable.

Cotton was also more durable that some other fabrics. It could be washed over and over without breaking down. And Indian cloth makers had also developed the ability to add color to cotton fabrics with a variety of dyes. Those dying techniques allowed them to produce the most vibrant reds, and blues, and greens, and other colors. Other fabrics could be difficult to dye. Some of them would take some colors, but not others. And in most cases, even if you dyed them, the color would fade with repeated washings. But again, the Indian craftsmen and craftswomen had developed techniques whereby they could apply almost any color to cotton, and make it color-fast so it wouldn't fade over time. They also developed techniques in which they would paint the fabric with elaborate designs, or they would print images or patterns on the fabric. The result was a bright, beautiful and vibrate material that was almost like a work of art. [*SOURCE: The Fabric of Civilization, Virginia Postrel, p. 129-30.*] And that's what Richard Wickham was referring to when he wrote that the Japanese traders wanted that 'new stuf fantastically paynted or striped.'

Throughout Asia and Africa, cotton cloth was used shirts, dresses, robes, turbans, sashes, body wraps, curtains, floorspeads, room dividers, you name it. It people could find a use for it, they did. [*SOURCE: The Cloth That Changed the World, Sarah Fee, p. 8*]

By the way, Chinese silk had some of these same advantages as cotton. It could also be light and comfortable, but it was incredibly expensive compared to cotton. Only the wealthy could afford silk or were even permitted to wear silk under some local laws, but cotton was cheap by comparison, and it didn't have the same kind of restrictions under the law.

Speaking of the silk versus cotton, that was part of the reason why cotton fabrics were so popular in the Middle East and North Africa. Islam prohibited the wearing of pure silk, so cotton was the popular alternative in the Muslim world. Cotton fabrics – and the ability to make cotton fabrics – spread westward with the expansion of Islam during the Early Middle Ages in Europe. That expansion included Spain during the period when it was under Muslim rule. And that's how the word ***cotton*** made its way into English. ***Cotton*** is ultimately an Arabic word. It passed from southern Spain and Italy to northern Europe during the Middle Ages.

The prominent use of cotton in the Arab world explains why several types of cotton fabrics have names associated with that part of the world. One type of loosely woven cotton fabric was made in Gaza in the eastern Mediterranean. That type of fabric became known as ***gauze*** [g-a-u-z-e] from the name of Gaza. Today, we might use gauze for bandages and medical wrappings, but it once had a much broader use.

Another type of delicately woven cotton fabric was made in Mosul, in modern-day Iraq. And that type of delicate fabric became known as ***muslin*** from the name of Mosul. I should note that some sources attribute the name to a different city in India, but most sources seem to go with Mosul. Though muslin was once considered to be very luxurious and expensive, it became more

commonplace over time, and today it is used for things like curtains, bed sheets, quilts and other common items. [*SOURCE: 'Fabric: The Hidden History of the Material World,' Victoria Finlay, p. 85*]

Cotton and silk fabrics were often sold Damascus in Syria. That city was a popular trading center, and one particular type of fabric sold there came to be known as ***damask*** based on the name of ***Damascus***. That term is still used today to refer to a specific type of fabric weave.

The town of Fustat in Egypt was another important trading center. Today, it is basically a suburb of Cairo, but it was another place where a lot of cotton fabrics were sold. And some scholars think that Fustat is the source of another type of cotton fabric called ***fustian***. There is some dispute about the source of that name, but that is one popular theory. And fustian was the first type of cotton fabric to become well-known in northern Europe.

A moment ago, I mentioned that the Arabic word ***cotton*** had made its way to northern Europe in the Middle Ages. By the early 1400s, the word was being used in English, but it wasn't generally used to refer to cloth. The earliest uses show that cotton was used as wicks in candles. It was also used in its unprocessed form as stuffing or padding in blankets and mattresses and other items. But the English didn't weave it into a fine and delicate cloth like was made in India. The only type of cotton fabric that was made in northern Europe was that fabric called ***fustian***.

In order to understand the role of fustian at the time, we have to consider the fact that English weavers struggled with cotton thread. As I noted earlier, they had a problem figuring out how to turn the short fibers into a strong thread, specifically what weavers call a 'warp' thread.

Now as a child, you may have made a pot-holder or something similar using a simple square loom and some yarn. You probably stretched the yarn from one side to the other horizontally, and then you took some separate strands of yarn and wove them vertically through the initial strands – going up and down – over and under the initial strands. Well, that's basically the way cloth is made – using various types of thread. Those initial strands form the framework or skeleton of the cloth, and those threads have to be really strong so they don't break. They are called the warp threads. The threads that are woven through the warp threads are called the ***weft*** threads – from the same root as the word ***weave*** because that's what you do with them. You weave them through the warp threads. Those weft threads form the skin of the cloth, and they can be thinner and finer than the warp threads.

Since warp threads have to be strong, they are often twisted harder and tighter than the weft threads. This is actually where our modern word ***warp*** comes from. It comes from this sense of tightly twisted threads. If something is 'warped,' it is twisted or bent out of shape. And if you have a 'warped' sense of humor, it's twisted and odd. Again, this comes from the tightly twisted thread used as warp thread. And this is where the English and other northern Europeans ran into a problem with cotton. They could spin it into a thin thread that could be used as weft, but they couldn't figure out how to spin it into a very tight thread that was strong enough to serve as warp. So what they did is they used their normal linen thread as the warp thread, and then they would

weave cotton thread through it. The result was that fabric called ***fustian***. It was a blended fabric made of linen and cotton.

That was really the only type of cotton fabric that was common in northern Europe at the current point in our story in the early 1600s, and it was very different from the delicate cotton fabric of India. Fustian was coarse and rough, similar to modern corduroy. It was a cheap cloth used for work clothes. [SOURCE: The Fabric of Civilization, Virginia Postrel, p. 63]

Now I actually mentioned fustian a few episodes back because it also evolved into a linguistic term and was once used to refer to certain types of speech. The word ***fustian*** technically referred to this linen-cotton blend that was coarse and tough, but it was sometimes used to refer to similar fabrics made of wool, and it came to refer to any thick or bulky fabric. And from there, it came to refer to any kind of inflated or lofty language. So if you spoke fustian, you spoke with a lot of big words, technical jargon and gibberish.

When Christopher Marlowe wrote that one of his characters spoke 'Dutch fustian' and when Shakespeare referred to a 'fustian rascal,' that's what they meant. They meant that the characters used elevated language and spoke in a pretentious way.

I've noted before that the words ***bombast*** and ***bombastic*** have essentially the same history. The cotton stuffing that was used in quilts and clothing was sometimes called ***bombast***. So the word had a sense of something stuffed or bloated and was soon extended to inflated or excessive speech. If someone was ***bombastic***, they tended to use excessive or pompous language. Again, ***bombast*** and ***fustian*** share this similar development. They both originally referred to types of cotton material and then they both acquired the same sense of elevated speech. And that reflects the common view of cotton at the time – that it was something bulky or thick. But in India, cotton fabrics were very different. As I've noted, they were lightweight, airy and comfortable and were the product of skilled artisans who knew how to turn the cotton fibers into thin and delicate threads that could be used as both weft and warp.

The cotton fabrics in India came in several different varieties, often depending on where they were made. Some of them were uncolored or had more of a natural color. For example, the English had arrived in Surat in 1612, and a type of coarse and uncolored cotton fabric that was sold there became known as ***Surat***.

In northern India, cotton was made into light tailored garment called a ***jama***. A jama was usually white or very lightly colored, and it was made with very thin cotton material. It was like a coat or robe that fit closely around the torso and the arms, but then extended down below the knees.

Well, this light material was later turned into a covering specifically for the legs. The word for 'leg' or 'foot' in Hindi and Urda was ***paya***, or some variation of that word. And this specific garment or ***jama*** that covered the legs became known as a ***pajama*** – literally a 'leg garment' or 'leg covering.' In later centuries, the English traders in India found this garment to be so comfortable that they often wore it to bed. And when they took the garment back to England and North America, it became known as ***pajamas***. So the word ***pajamas*** is ultimately a word from

India and South Asia, and in fact, it may have even been derived from a Persian version of the same root words. But it all began as a type of light, uncolored cotton fabric. *[SOURCE: The Art of Cloth in Mughal India, Sylvia Houghteling, p. 35 and p. 48.*]

Another type of naturally-colored cotton fabric resembled the light-brown color of sand. The word ***khaki*** meant 'dusty' or 'dust-colored' or 'earth-colored' in Hindi. The material was later adopted by the British for military uniforms in India, and the word passed into English as ***khaki***. Today, the word refers to any fabric of that color, or to that color in general. And at least in America English, the word ***khakis*** is used to refer to pants or trousers of that color, again, usually made from cotton.

Sometimes the weavers would combine a dyed or colored thread with a white thread to create a fabric with a striped pattern. That type of cloth was made in India and Malaysia, and it became known by the Malay word ***gingan***, which meant 'striped cotton.' The word ultimately passed into English as ***gingham***, and it has come to refer to a similar type of fabric with a checkered pattern rather than a striped pattern. The word is first recorded in English around the current point in our overall story in the year 1615.

Now speaking of striped cotton, another type of cotton fabric produced in India was made in a way so that some of the threads would gather or bunch together. It gave the fabric a wrinkled appearance, and it was often produced with a striped pattern. People in India and Persia loved it because the uneven nature of the fabric meant that it didn't stick to their skin if it was really hot and they were sweating. Since the fabric consisted of a gritty texture on top of a soft smooth texture, the Persians called it 'milk and sugar' because milk is soft and smooth and sugar is gritty. So that combination resembled the fabric. In Persian, the term for 'milk and sugar' was 'shir o shakkar.' That Persian term for this type of striped cloth was then borrowed into Hindi where it was called 'sirsakar.' And the English took that term and Anglicized it to ***seersucker***. Seersucker is still worn to this day. In fact, in the US, seersucker suits are often association with the South for the same reason that seersucker was popular in India and Persia – because it is comfortable even in very hot weather.

Another type of cotton fabric was produced in the city of Dungri, which is located just south of Surat on the western coast of India. So it was relatively near that first trading post established by the East India Company in 1612. The cotton fabric produced there was a coarse fabric that was sometimes made with thread that had been dyed blue. In the same way that the English referred to the cotton sold in Surat as Surat cloth, they referred to the fabric sold in Dungri as Dungri cloth. And over time within English, that word came to be pronounced as ***dungaree***. The word is first recorded in English around the current point in our overall story in 1613. Today, it refers to a particular type of work clothing, and in the US, ***dungarees*** is sometimes used as synonym for blue jeans or denim pants.

And speaking of blue jeans and denim, those terms are also based on the name of cities where a similar type of cotton fabric was made. As knowledge of cotton fabric spread into southern Europe, people there started to make a type of cotton cloth that was similar to dungaree. A similar type of durable, twilled fabric came to be produced in Nimes in the far south of France. It

was called ‘serge de Nimes.’ ***Serge*** was a French word for that type of fabric. So ‘serge de Nimes’ was the serge made in Nimes. But over time, the ***serge*** part was dropped, and it just became known as ‘de Nimes.’ And ‘de Nimes’ eventually passed into English as ***denim***.

Just up the coast from Nimes is the Italian city of Genoa. And a similar type of cotton fabric was produced there. That type of coarse fabric was similar to the fustian cloth I mentioned earlier, and in fact, it was called ‘Genoa fustian.’ In French, the city of Genoa is pronounced as ***Gênes***. So in French, the fabric was called ‘Gênes fustian.’ The ***fustian*** part was eventually dropped, and when the term passed into English, the ***Gênes*** part became ***jean*** [j-e-a-n], or ***jeans*** when referring to pants or trousers made with that type of fabric.

So ***dungarees*** comes from the city of Dungri in India; ***denim*** comes from the city of Nimes in France; and ***jeans*** comes from the city of ***Genoa*** in Italy. All are based on place names where similar types of coarse cotton fabric were produced in the 1500s and 1600s.

Those are just a few examples of cotton fabrics that were being produced in India or the region around the Mediterranean. They were all popular, but they weren’t the ones that were in the highest demand. The most sought after cottons were the painted ones I mentioned earlier. They were thin, lightweight cotton fabrics with elaborate images or designs painted on them or stamped on them with a technique that ensured the images were permanent and didn’t fade. Those brightly colored fabrics were the ones that traders throughout Asia and Africa wanted, and as I noted earlier, they were so popular that they were almost a type of currency in those regions. They were used for clothing, curtains, tablecloths, bedspreads, room dividers, wall hangings and a variety of other uses.

The Portuguese had encountered those painted fabrics in the 1500s, and they had been the first to introduce them to Europe. The Portuguese word for ‘painted’ was ***pintado***, and that was what the Portuguese called those lightweight painted fabrics. This word appears a few times in English documents in the late 1500s and early 1600s, and I noted earlier that Richard Cocks had used that term in his diary that he kept while he was in Japan. He noted that pintados were given to Japanese officials as gifts. For the most part, those painted fabrics were found in India and parts of Asia, Africa and southern Europe. A few pieces of the fabric may have made their way to England by this point, but generally speaking, the fabric wasn’t generally available to English consumers.

Though the Portuguese had introduced the term ***pintado*** to Europe, within India itself, the decorated fabrics were called ***chint***. That term was also used in Richard Cocks’s diary. And that was the term that the English traders picked up and took back to England. The English started using the term in the plural as ***chints*** [c-h-i-n-t-s], and eventually, ***chintz*** spelled [c-h-i-n-t-z] became the generic term for that type of colorful Indian fabric.

Now, to give away part of this story, the English were fascinated by chintz fabric, but they couldn’t make it themselves. Remember they didn’t know how to spin cotton into a delicate thread that was strong enough to serve as the warp thread. But advances in technology allowed them to figure out a method to do that in the late 1700s, and after that, the British factories

produced lots of chintz. At that point, it became a cheap, low-quality material that was easy to obtain. And that sense of something cheap and a bit gawdy led to the word ***chintzy***, which is still in use today. But that was a much later development. In the early 1600s, most chintz had to be imported from South Asia, so it was both exotic and in very high demand.

After English and Dutch traders arrived in India, they realized that the consumers back home in northern Europe didn't have anything like chintz. The fabric had all of the advantages of light cotton fabric. It was thin. It was airy and cool. It was comfortable. The designs on the fabric were like artwork. They contained exotic patterns and elaborate images of things like flowers and trees, and the fabric popped with bold colors that didn't fade with repeated washings. So people at every level of society wanted it and most could afford to buy it.

European demand for the fabric exploded over the course of the 1600s, and the Dutch and English East India Companies began importing as much of the fabric as they could to satisfy the demand. Since England now had a foothold in India, it was much easier to import the cloth from there. So for the first time in England, cotton began to compete with wool and linen.
By the end of the 1600s, cotton fabric from India accounted for about three-quarters of the cargo brought back to England by the ships of the East India Company. About one million pieces were brought to England each year. [*SOURCE: The Cloth That Changed the World, Sarah Fee, p. 12*]

And that wasn't the only thing being brought to England from India. Words were also starting to make their way to Britain. We still find ourselves in the year 1613, and in that year, an English cleric named Samuel Purchas completed a work about cultures around the world, including their religious practices. It wasn't based on his own personal experience though. He gathered the information for traders, and pilgrims, and other people who had traveled to various places around the world. Like many works of this period, it had a long title. It was called 'Purchas His Pilgrimage: or Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages and Places discovered, from the Creation unto this Present.'

This is the book that contained the first use of the word ***fetish*** in English, which I mentioned at the beginning of the episode. Remember that it originally referred to various charms and amulets found in places like West Africa. But it wasn't just the word ***fetish*** that was recorded for the first time in the book.

This somewhat obscure book is notable because it contained the first known English use of many words from various parts of the world, including several from India. Interestingly, it contains the first known use of the word ***Sanskrit*** in an English document. We are at a point where English scholars were starting to get their first knowledge of the ancient Indian language and its importance in Indian law and religion. Of course, at the time, there was no knowledge that Sanskrit and English were actually related, both being descended for the original Indo-European language spoken several thousand years earlier. That knowledge came later.

The book also contains the first English use of the word ***guru***, meaning 'a Hindu teacher or priest.' The word ***guru*** gained popularity in English in the 1960s with the increased interest in

Indian religion and spiritualism that occurred during that decade. The word ***yogi*** meaning 'someone who practices or teaches yoga' is also recorded for the first time in the book.

The book refers to Indian merchants as ***camel-men***. And it also contains the first known English reference to a ***pariah***, which was a member of a low caste in the highly structured caste system in India. Within English, it came to refer to someone who is shunned or despised, or someone who is an outcast. So if you refer to someone today as a ***pariah***, it's ultimately a Tamil word from southern India and refers to the Indian caste system.

Beyond India, the book also contains initial references to other places. We find the first English use of place names like ***Cambodia***, ***Nicaragua*** and ***Jamaica***. It gives us the first English use of the word ***Sahara*** for the large desert in northern Africa. Given the first appearance of ***Sahara***, maybe it isn't surprising that we also find the first English use of the word ***oasis***. The words ***mullah*** and ***caliphate*** also make their first English appearance in the book.

The references aren't just to Asia and Africa though. The book also contains the first English reference to a ***moose*** found in northern parts of North America.

It also contains the first reference to Batman [b-a-t-m-a-n]. Well, it wasn't a reference to the super hero. It was the word ***batman*** (/BAT-mun/) – a unit of weight used some parts of Eastern Europe.

If you and a friend ever 'take turns' doing something, you should know that the phrase '***to take turns***' is recorded for the first time in the book. And if you describe something as being 'beyond all description,' that phrase '***beyond all description***' is also found here for the first time. And if you do something '***on your own terms***,' that phrase is also recorded here for the first time.

If you slept out in the open at night, it was once common to say that you '***slept at the sign of the moon***.' That phrase is derived from a French phrase, but first recorded in English in this book.

So this somewhat obscure book about travels around the world contains a lot of new words and phrases, or at least words and phrases not found in English prior to 1613. That was partly because English speakers were coming into contact with new cultures and learning more and more about life in distant places around the world.

Now since we've brought the story back to England, let's take a look at what was happening there at this same time – specifically the year 1613. It was during this year that the daughter of King James married a nobleman from the region of modern-day Germany. James's daughter was named Elizabeth, and her new husband was Frederick V from a region called the Palatinate. Modern Germany didn't exist yet. The region was still a collection of various territories, and provinces and city-states which were part of the larger Holy Roman Empire. And Frederick was from one of those regions.

Now that marriage is notable because a major war was about to break out in central Europe. The war came to be known as the Thirty Years War, and Frederick played an important role in the early stages of that war. But I'll deal with those developments in an upcoming episode.

The other reason why Elizabeth's marriage is Frederick is notable is because their direct descendants are the current royal family of the United Kingdom. Somewhere along the way, you may have heard that the British royal family are actually of German descent. Well, that's actually true thanks to Elizabeth's marriage to Frederick V. When the main line of Stuart kings and queens came to an end in the early 1700s, Elizabeth and Frederick's grandson was brought over from Germany. His name was George, and he became George I. He was from the German House of Hanover, and he therefore became the first Hanoverian king of England. And all of the subsequent kings and queens of Great Britain were descended from him, including the current king Charles III. So all of the British monarchs since 1714 have been direct descendants of Elizabeth and Frederick. And that's why I wanted to make note of their marriage in 1613.

Now about four months after that marriage, another important development took place in England. In June of 1613, a Shakespeare play called Henry VIII was performed at the Globe Theatre. This particular play was one of Shakespeare's final plays, and was the last of his history plays. It isn't highly regarded, and in fact, it is generally accepted that Shakespeare co-wrote the play with another playwright given that the language in part of the play is not really consistent with Shakespeare's normal poetry and prose. There has been some speculation over the years as to the identity of the co-author. Back in 2019, a Czech researcher used a computer algorithm to identify language patterns in the writings of the various other authors who were suggested to be the co-authors. And the analysis determined that a fellow member of Shakespeare's acting company named John Fletcher wrote about half of this particular play. He apparently wrote part of Act I, and most, if not all, of Acts 2 and 5. The study suggested that Act 4 might have been written a third author who couldn't be identified. Beyond this particular play, it is generally agreed that Shakespeare worked with other writers on the last few plays of his career. A play called The Two Noble Kinsmen was published after Shakespeare died, and Fletcher and Shakespeare are specifically listed as the co-authors on the title page of that play. And an entry in the Stationer's Register from the same general time period indicates that Fletcher and Shakespeare also worked together on a play called Cardenio, which has been lost to history. Together, those mark the last of Shakespeare's plays.

Well, of those three plays I just mentioned, only Henry VIII was included in the First Folio of Shakespeare's works published after he died. So it is the most notable of the three plays. And as I mentioned, it was being performed at the Globe Theatre in June of 1613. Well, near the end of Act I in the play, Henry VIII meets Anne Boleyn for the first time at a feast. In the performance, Henry's arrival was announced by firing a cannon. That part went off without a hitch, but an ember from the cannon floated up and reached the thatched roof of the Globe. The roof immediately caught fire, and soon the theater was engulfed in flames. Within an hour, the entire structure had burned to the ground. Miraculously, all of the audience members – about 3000 in all – managed to get out alive. Though the theater was re-built the following year, the fire was still a devastating blow for the acting company. Not only was the theater destroyed, but most of the props and costumes were lost along with it. And it's possible that manuscripts of unknown

plays were also destroyed in the fire. There may very well have been other Shakespeare plays that were lost to history that day.

That really marks the end of Shakespeare's career. In fact, he had effectively retired with the completion of Henry VIII, and it appears that he didn't write any additional plays after the Globe burned to the ground. Three years later, in 1616, he died. Shakespeare's death brought an end to one of the most important periods of the history of English. Since we know relatively little about Shakespeare's personal life, it is quite fitting that we also very little about his death. All we know is that he was buried on April 25 of that year at Holy Trinity Church in Stratford. There is no death certificate or other document that lists a specific date of death or cause of death. There is a legend that he died after a night of drinking with a couple of fellow writers, but there isn't really any evidence to support that claim.

Of course, Shakespeare is renowned in part for his massive vocabulary and the large number words that he used in his plays. He documented many words and phrases for the first time, so perhaps it is fitting that around the time he died in 1616, the second dictionary of the English language appeared. This particular dictionary was compiled by a physician named John Bullokar. He was the son of William Bullokar, who compiled the first grammar of English, which we examined in a prior episode. This work by John Bullokar was called 'An English Expositor.' Back in Episode 179, we looked at the text that is considered to be the first monolingual English dictionary. In other words, the first comprehensive English dictionary to define English words with English definitions. It was published twelve years earlier and was called 'A Table Alphabeticall.' Well, Bullokar's dictionary is considered the second such dictionary, and it contained about twice as many entries at that earlier dictionary.

It's always interesting to peruse the words in these early dictionaries because they were not intended to be comprehensive lists of all the words in the language like modern dictionaries. Instead, they were intended to define words that were a bit more obscure and words that people might not understand if they encountered them in a book or other text. Those were sometimes fancy Latin or Greek words that were not widely used at the time, or Old English words that had largely fallen out of use, or slang terms that needed a general definition.

In that last category of slang terms, it is interesting to see which words he included and how he defined them. For example, I noted in an earlier episode that the word ***cousen*** meant 'to cheat or defraud.' That was the word that people used in the 1500s. They didn't really use the word ***cheat***. ***Cheat*** was derived from an old legal term from the feudal era – originally ***escheat***. It was what happened when a landholder defaulted on a payment to his lord, and the lord reclaimed landholder's property. It was subject to so much abuse and fraud that the word ***escheat*** came to refer to a taking by deception or fraud. But in the early 1600s, the word ***cheat*** was only starting to pass into popular use. In fact, Shakespeare is really the first known writer to use the word ***cheat*** with its modern sense.

So John Bullokar included the words ***cheat*** and ***cheating*** in his dictionary because he apparently felt that people might hear those words and not know what they meant. He defined the word '***cheate***' as "to cousin; to deceive." And he defined the word '***cheating***' as "cousenage." But

interestingly, he didn't bother to define the words ***cousen*** or ***cousenage***, apparently because he assumed that everyone knew what those words meant. Of course, today we would probably do the opposite. If we were compiling of dictionary of hard or obscure English words, we wouldn't include the word ***cheat*** because it is so common in the language, but we might include that old word ***cousen*** since it is old and not really used anymore. So we would include ***cousen*** and define it as 'to cheat,' whereas Bullokar did the opposite. He included ***cheat*** and defined it as 'to cousen.' And that is a good example of how these old dictionaries capture words that were on their way out, as well as words that were on their way in.

Sometimes Bullokar's dictionary is very explicit about the changing meaning of words. For example, he includes the word ***magike*** – spelled [m-a-g-i-k-e]. But the modern meaning of the word was just emerging during the early 1600s. For the definition of ***magike***, he wrote, "At first this word signified great learning or knowledge in the nature of things; now it is most commonly taken for inchantment and sorcerie."

The word ***talent*** is defined as "a certain value of money." And that may seem odd to us today because if we think of a 'talented' person, we usually think of their unique skill or ability. But that modern sense of the word was only beginning to emerge in the early 1600s. The original Greek and Latin meaning of the word was a 'unit of weight' or a 'unit of money.' What apparently happened is that a very rich or successful person was said to have a lot of talent, meaning a lot of money or wealth, and then from there the word was applied to a successful person who was very skilled or gifted. That person was also said to have a lot of talent, but in that case, the word referred to his or her special abilities. Again, Bullokar's dictionary shows us that that modern meaning was only beginning to emerge because it didn't include it as a separate definition.

The older meaning of certain words is reflected in words like ***animate***, which he defined as "to encourage; to hearten on." And ***animositie***, which he defined as "courage." And ***egregious***, which he defined as "notable, excellent." And ***enormous***, which he defined as "wicked; very bad."

Some of his words have largely disappeared from the language, or are rarely used today. For example, he included the word ***angust*** [a-n-g-u-s-t], which meant "streight, narrow," and ***egritude***, which meant "griefe of mind or paine of bodie." Today, we have the word ***omnipotent***, but Bullokar included the word ***armipotent*** [a-r-m-i-p-o-t-e-n-t]. It had essentially the same meaning as ***omnipotent***. He defined it as "mightie; strong."

Bullokar's dictionary also has some interesting things to say in relation to the overall theme of this episode. First of all, Bullokar routinely uses the word ***India*** to refer to things associated with Asia in general, and even to things associated with the Americas. It's a good reminder that the word once had a much broader meaning in English. For example, ***yuca*** refers to a plant found in South and Central America. The word was relatively new to English, so Bullokar included it in his dictionary, but he defined it as "An herbe in India, wherewith they vse to make bread." He also included the word '***armadilio***,' which is an animal that the Spanish had discovered in the Americas. Again, Bullokar defines it as "A beast in India of the bignesse of a young pigge,

couered ouer with small shels like vnto armour; for which cause he is called Armadilio, to wit, an armed beast."

There are many other examples of this broad usage of the word ***India***, but it is worth keeping in mind that the related word ***Indies*** had a similar application. South and East Asia were the 'East Indies,' and the Caribbean was the 'West Indies.' And of course, as I noted last time, the word ***Indian*** referred to inhabitants of both South Asia and the Americas.

The dictionary also included terms for various types of linen fabric, like ***naparie*** for table linens, ***diaper*** for a specific type of linen that usually contained a diamond pattern, ***sindon*** for a type of fine linen cloth, and ***pleget*** for a wad of linen cloth used in medicine to clean or cover a wound. But there are no terms that relate to cotton. And again, that's because cotton wasn't a common fabric in England at the time. Outside of fustian, which isn't mentioned in the book, the various terms for cotton cloth that I mentioned earlier in the episode were either just starting to enter the language, or would enter the language in the future.

Interestingly, Bullokar includes the word ***warp*** in his dictionary. He defines it as "the thread that goeth in the length of the cloth." He doesn't mention the word ***weft*** for the thread that runs over and under the warp. It isn't clear why he included the word ***warp*** and felt that it needed to defined, but there it is, and it reflects a general interest in weaving and fabrics at the time.

Speaking of fabrics, he included the word ***fabric*** as well, but you might be surprised by his definition. First of all, he spells ***fabric*** [f-a-b-r-i-k-e]. So that shows that spellings still weren't completely standardized. And he defines ***fabric*** as "a frame; a building." You probably saying, what? What does fabric have to do with a building? And notice that he didn't say anything about cloth. Well, this is another one of those words that once meant something quite different.

The word ***fabric*** was borrowed from French in the 1400s, and the original meaning of the word was indeed 'a building or other large structure.' But let's dig a little deeper. While the limited sense of the word was a building, it could also mean something that was built or constructed by skilled workers. So there was an element of building or constructing something. Think about the word ***fabricate***. It comes from the same Latin root as ***fabric***. In fact, Bullokar included the word ***fabricate*** as well. He defined it as "to frame; to build." So ***fabric*** meant a building just as John Bullokar defined it, but around the same time that Bullokar's dictionary was published, the meaning of the word started to merge with the meaning of ***fabricate*** to refer to something built, or assembled or constructed, usually due to some element of skilled workmanship. And about a century after that in the mid-1700s, the term ***fabric*** was specifically extended to cloth that had been assembled and woven from various threads. So in that regard, the process of making a piece of cloth – or 'fabric' – was connected to the process of 'fabricating' a building. They were both the product of skilled artisans. And that's how the word ***fabric*** evolved within English. It also reveals that ***fabric*** didn't really have its modern meaning until the mid-1700s.

Bullokar also included the word ***staple***, and he had an interesting definition for that word. He defined staple as "Any towne or citie appointed for merchants of England to carry their Wooll, Cloth, Lead, Tinne or such like commodities vnto, for the better sale of them to other merchants

by the great." So this is a reference to a trading post like the ones the English East India Company had just established in Japan and at Surat in India. That type of trading post was originally called a ***staple***. Over time, the word ***staple*** came to refer to the commodities sold at such posts, and then it came to refer to the primary commodity or good sold in a particular place. For example, earlier in this episode, I said that wool cloth was an English staple. And cotton was an Indian staple, it comes from this original sense of the word ***staple*** as a trading post.

Around this time, a ***staple*** – or trading post – was also called a ***factory***. Again, this was an earlier meaning of the word ***factory*** before it came to mean 'a place where things are made or assembled.' The original sense of ***factory*** comes from the term used to refer to a trader or merchant at one of those trading posts. Those people were ***factors***. A ***factor*** was an agent who bought or sold goods for someone else – or in this case, bought or sold goods for the East India Company. Bullokar included the word ***factor*** in his dictionary. He defined it as "He that buieth and selleth for a merchant, or that looketh to his buisinesse." Over time, the place where the factor conducted his business came to be called a ***factory***, and that why those trading posts – or staples – were also called ***factories***.

The word ***factor*** was borrowed from French where it really had two meanings. It had this original English meaning of 'an agent who buys or sells goods,' but it also had a separate meaning as 'someone who makes or creates something.' That secondary sense ***factor*** survives in a term like ***manufacture***, which literally means 'to make by hand.' It was that secondary sense that later became the more common meaning in English and overtook the original English meaning of 'a trading post.' That modern sense of the word ***factory*** as 'a place where goods are made or assembled' first appeared in English around the current point in our overall story in the second decade of the 1600s.

Again, John Bullokar's dictionary was published in the year 1616 – the same year that William Shakespeare died. And there was one other development in that same year that I wanted to mention. And at first glance, it may not seem very important. In that year, the English seized a tiny island call Run in the Spice Islands of modern-day Indonesia. The island was taken from the Dutch, who had become the dominant European power in the region. As we've seen, the English and the Dutch were in constant competition by this point. The English held the island for four years before the Dutch eventually took it back. But the English retained a claim to the island.

Now you may be wondering why I am telling you about this obscure island called Run in the Far East. Well, over the next few years, the English would expand their territory in North America, gradually reaching the point where they were able to take the territory of New Netherland from the Dutch. In the end, the English and the Dutch agreed to settle their competing claims to various territories in North America and Asia. The Dutch agreed to release their claim to New Netherland and the island of Manhattan, and in exchange, the English agreed to release their claim to this small island of Run. So the English got Manhattan and the region of New York and the Dutch got this largely desolate island in the Spice Islands. In retrospect, the English seem to have gotten the better of that trade, but the Dutch were happy with the deal at the time because the spices acquired at Run were so valuable. [*SOURCE: Napoleon's Hemorrhoids And Other Small Events That Changed History, Phil Mason, p. 5.*]

I told you about the little island of Run because it's a good example of how a seemingly minor and obscure event in history can have very important long term consequences. It also brings us back to North America where we began this episode.

And it's here that we find the final important development of this episode. In the year 1619, an English privateer ship sailing under the Dutch flag arrived in Virginia with cargo so sell to the settlers at Jamestown. That cargo included people. The Portugese were actively involved in the transatlantic slave trade, and several months earlier, the Portuguese had acquired about twenty slaves from West Africa. They were placed on a ship headed for South America, but the English intercepted the Portuguese ship, and the English took possession of the Africans. The captain decided to head to Virginia where he thought he might be able to sell the captives as slaves or indentured servants. And in August of 1619, he did just that, and that is the considered to be beginning of the English slave trade in North America. Now that's not to say that they were the first slaves in North America. The Spanish had taken African slaves to Spanish Florida in the prior century, and the English settlers had taken indigenous people as slaves in prior years. But this event in 1619 was the first time that African slaves arrived in an English colony in North America. [*SOURCE: The Dutch Moment, Wim Klooster, p. 159*]

This is obviously an important development for many reasons. And we'll explore those consequences in future episodes. But a major part of the story of slavery in North America is its connection with the overall demand for cotton – a demand that had been sparked by the English discovery of fine cotton fabrics in India around the same time that those first slaves arrived in North America. So I want to conclude this episode by explaining how cotton fueled the transatlantic slave trade and shaped the Western world over the next few centuries.

As I noted earlier, fine cotton fabrics from India were essentially a type of international currency in the 1500s and 1600s. That was true throughout South and East Asia, but it was also true in Africa. African sellers wanted those same cotton fabrics. The coolness and comfort of lightweight cotton clothing was in high demand in the African heat. And like everywhere else, the people loved the brightly colored fabrics. So cotton was often used by the Spanish and Portugese to purchase a variety of African products. And it was also used to purchase slaves from the slave traders in West Africa. [*SOURCE: The Art of Cloth in Mughal India, Sylvia Houghteling, p. 25*]

Those slaves were then taken to the Americas where they were sold to work the land. The slave merchants would then take part of the money they acquired from selling the slaves and use that money to purchase more cotton in India, and then return to West Africa to buy more slaves. And after 1619, that trading circuit was extended to the English colonies in North America. [*SOURCE: The Cloth That Changed the World, Sarah Fee, p. 13*]

But at this point, cotton was not a common crop in the region that would become the United States. The dominant crop in Virginia was tobacco, and later, rice would become common in the colonies further south. Since cotton required a frost-free environment to mature, it was difficult to grow in most of the region. And slavery wasn't the major institution that it would become later. Initially, the English colonies relied more on indentured servants than African slaves.

Though slavery expanded over the next century and half, the overall number of slaves was relatively small compared to later centuries. [*SOURCE: 'Inhuman Bondage,' David Brion Davis, p. 124 and 'American Slavery: 1619-1877,' Peter Kolchin, p. 10-11*] What triggered the increase in slavery was cotton – specially two developments in the late 1700s.

The first development occurred in England. Remember that the English – and most other Europeans – struggled to make lightweight cotton cloth. They couldn't make cotton thread that was strong enough to be used as warp thread. But in the mid-to late 1700s, a series of inventions in Britain made it possible to turn cotton into warp. [*SOURCE: The Fabric of Civilization, Virginia Postrel, p. 65*] It took mechanical devices to mimic what Indian artisans had been doing for centuries, but once the machines were in place, it was a game changer – and it literally changed the course of history.

England soon built large factories to produce cotton cloth. Of course, the word ***factory*** had fully acquired it modern sense by then. Many of those factories were built in northern England and Scotland. And those cotton factories were really the beginning of what we know today as the Industrial Revolution. It was a revolution spurred in large part by the desire to produce cheap cotton that was comparable to the types that had to be imported from India.

With those factories, the English now needed large amounts of cotton to be turned into cloth. But again, it was difficult to grow cotton in the new United States. Outside of Florida and some of the other coastal regions of the South, it wasn't really possible to produce large amounts of cotton. But then the second development occurred.

In the early 1800s, Americans came across a type of cotton near Mexico City that ripened earlier that most other varieties. In fact, it ripened so early that it could avoid the late frost that occurred in most of the southern US. So this new variety of cotton from Mexico was brought to the southern states, and it flourished there. [*SOURCE: The Fabric of Civilization, Virginia Postrel, p. 21-2*] The only problem with that new variety is that the seeds were hard to remove, but Eli Whitney's cotton gin had just been invented, and it provided a mechanical way to remove to the seeds. [*SOURCE: Fabric: The Hidden History of the Material World, Victoria Finlay, p. 110*] So for the first time, American cotton could now satisfy the demands of the English cotton mills.

In the three decades after 1793, American cotton exports to Britain increased from less than a million pounds to 250,000,000 pounds. [*SOURCE: Fabric: The Hidden History of the Material World, Victoria Finlay, p. 112*]

To cultivate all of that cotton, states in the southern US relied largely on slave labor. So as the production of cotton exploded in the US, so did the institution of slavery. The demand for more and more land to grow cotton led to conflicts between the northern and southern states as the country expanded westward. And of course, all of that ultimately culminated in the American Civil War. [*SOURCE: The Cloth That Changed the World, Sarah Fee, p. 197*]

So the Industrial Revolution, the transatlantic slave trade, and the American Civil War were all fueled by cotton, or more specifically, they were fueled by the demand for cotton and the desire to satisfy that demand and to profit from it.

Those events allowed Britain to produce lots of cheap, factory-made cotton fabrics. That's when the word ***chintz*** for colored Indian cotton started to evolve into the modern word ***chintzy*** referring to something cheap and common.

Along the way, cotton replaced other fabrics, and gradually emerged as the most popular fabric in the world. It replaced linen for most shirts and other common clothing. In fact, we use terms like 'bed linens' and 'table linens,' which refers to the fact that those items were traditionally made out of linen. But today, 'bed linens' and 'table linens' are mostly made out of cotton – so we should probably call them 'bed cottons' and 'table cottons.'

The British cotton industry was so large and so dominant in the international marketplace that British fabrics actually began to displace Indian fabrics within India itself. And that had negative economic consequences for the region that had given birth to the cotton craze several centuries earlier. [*SOURCE: The Cloth That Changed the World, Sarah Fee, p. 200 and The Art of Cloth in Mughal India, Sylvia Houghteling, p. 213*]

These are just some of the consequences that flowed from the arrival of English traders in India in the early 1600s. It was a cascade of events that shaped so much of the world that we live in today. And that brings us to the title of this episode.

Despite the worldwide popularity of cotton, its dominance was threatened in the 1960s and 1970s with the rise of synthetic fibers like nylon and polyester. American cotton producers experienced a major decline in their market share. So in 1970, they decided to create a marketing campaign to win customers back. The result was a new catch phrase.

['The Fabric of Our Life' Clip]

I hope you've enjoyed this look at how cotton shaped our history – and shaped the English language.

Next time, we'll turn our attention to that book on English spelling and phonetics that I mentioned at the beginning of the episode. We'll examine the overall state of English spelling and pronunciation in the early 1600s. And after that, we'll be able to track how the language changed on the following centuries as English spread around the world.

So until then, thanks for listening to the History of English Podcast.