

WOOL — A PROUD HERITAGE



People have been using wool for clothing and textiles for thousands of years.

Sheep are not native to Australia and the story of their introduction starts in England.

During 1331 King Edward III encouraged the settlement of Flemish weavers in England. They and their descendants went on to establish Britain's reputation as a manufacturer

and exporter of fine woollen cloth in the 14th and 15th centuries.

The British wool industry expanded internationally and towards the end of the 17th century, six Spanish Merino sheep arrived in South Africa, destined for the Dutch King.

It was two years before these sheep left South Africa for Holland. By then, many of the offspring from these original six Merinos were left behind.

the suit when first introduced to King George III.

In 1829, one of the Reverend's rams produced a fleece, which London wool buyers said 'was the softest and finest fleece of wool'.

The early years

Many of Australia's early settlers were keen to increase the size of their flocks. With few rams available, most settlers crossed Merinos with meat breeds, which produced large cross-bred animals with coarse wool.

Captain Macarthur concentrated on producing fine wool, by continuing to breed pure Spanish Merinos and he is often recognised as starting the Australian wool industry.

Fast facts

- The first Merino sheep arrived in Australia during the late 1700s.
- By the mid 1800s wool had become Australia's main export.
- There are more than 40,000 modern wool-producing businesses in Australia and more than 70 million sheep.
- Modern woolgrowers are highly-skilled managers who use the latest technology to run their businesses.

Bound for Australia

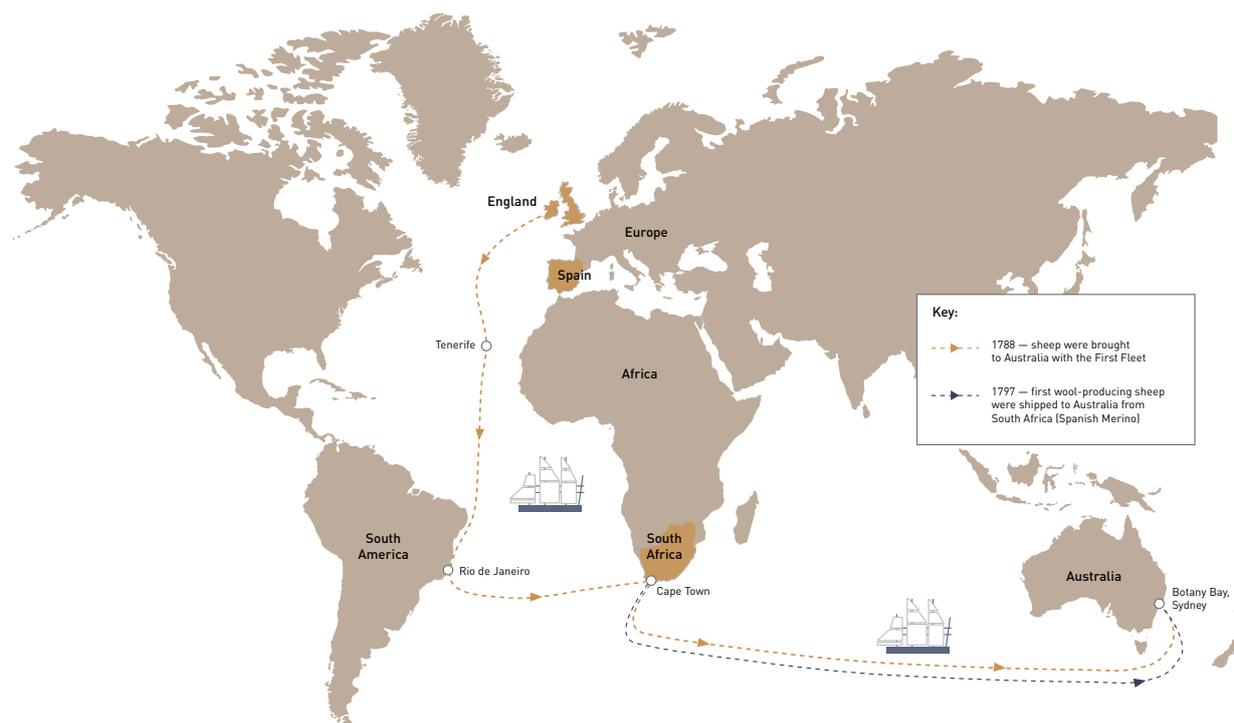
During 1797, Merinos were sent to Australia from Cape Town, South Africa. These sheep were shared between early settlers, including Captain John Macarthur and Reverend Samuel Marsden.

The Australian wool trade was established in 1807, with the first bale of Australian wool sent to Britain with the intention of commercial sale.

At William Thompson's mill in Yorkshire in 1808, Australian wool was woven into a piece of cloth from which a black suit was tailored. The owner of the wool, Reverend Marsden, wore

Did you know?

- The first Merinos in Australia produced about 1.5 kilograms of wool per fleece but selective breeding has produced sheep that can grow a fleece of more than 8kg.



Origins of wool: Merino sheep were first sent to Australia, via England and South Africa, in the late 1700s to provide a source of meat and wool for the early European settlers.

As sheep numbers grew, settlers moved inland from the coastal settlements to find more land to graze their stock.

The wool industry grew quickly, and by 1838 wool was Australia's main **export commodity**.

The early wool industry was very different to the modern wool industry we see today.

In the early days, shepherds watched sheep across large areas of land

as there were no fences to contain the stock.

Shearers removed the fleece using large hand shears, much like scissors. Today's shearers use electric handpieces that look similar to hair clippers.

Bullocks and carts transported wool from the shearing sheds to the wharves for shipment to Britain, where it was processed and made into clothes and furnishings.

These days, large trucks transport bales of wool to warehouses where it is auctioned (sold) to buyers from around the world.

The modern wool industry

Today there are about 40,000 wool-producing businesses in Australia. Most wool producers have about 3,000 sheep — but some larger properties have more than 100,000 sheep.

Sheep numbers change depending on the seasons and wool prices. When pasture is plentiful and prices are high there tends to be lots more sheep. When there is a drought or wool prices are low, producers often keep less sheep.

Most of Australia's wool businesses are owned by families. Many have been producing wool for generations.

Australia's woolgrowers are highly-skilled managers who look after their animals and the environment carefully to keep them healthy and productive.



Modern production: Australia's modern wool industry is built on a tradition of family farms, where families have been producing wool for generations.

Glossary

Export commodity — a product, such as wool, wheat or coal, that is produced in Australia and sold to overseas customers.

Fine Wool Pioneer

ELIZA FORLONGE (1784-1859)

Eliza Forlonge of Scotland was another pioneer of Australia's wool industry.

Early in the 1800s she introduced fine Merino sheep and wool production skills from Europe to Australia.

During 1827, Eliza and her two sons travelled to Saxony (Germany) where some of the best fine Merino sheep were.

The Forlonges learnt about the wool industry and travelled long distances

for Eliza to choose fine Merino sheep to bring back to Australia by ship.

Eliza's fine-wool sheep were sought after by early Australian woolgrowers.

The Forlonges set up several wool properties and their sheep resulted in today's superfine Saxon sheep.

There is a memorial in the shape of a wool bale near Eliza's grave at Euroa, Victoria and another in Campbell Town Tasmania.



Woman of wool: Eliza Forlonge is one of Australia's wool-producing pioneers.

More information

For more information about the history of wool in Australia go to:

- learnaboutwool.com

- Beyond the Bale: beyondthebale.wool.com
- woolmarklearningcentre.com

