



18th Century Italian Corded Quilting waistcoat
© Leeds Museums and Galleries.

Mosaic Hexagon Patchwork (reverse) showing paper templates made from hand-written notes and letters. © Quilters' Guild of the British Isles.

When did quilting begin?

The word quilt comes from the Latin word 'culcita', meaning stuffed mattress or cushion.

No one is exactly sure when quilting began, but from evidence found in the Temple of Osiris at Abydos, Egypt. It seems that people wore quilted clothing as many as 5000 years ago.

In England we can trace quilting back to the 13th Century, when people wrote about quilting in protective clothing to wear under or over armour and chain mail.

In the 14th and 15th Centuries wealthy and important figures made quilted 'doublets' fashionable outerwear.

From written evidence we know that British people certainly used bed quilts, under and over a mattress, from the 15th Century but we cannot be sure what they were like because the quilts have not survived.

How can we know when a quilt was made?

Most historic quilts, made to keep someone warm and not for display, do not have a name or date on. This means we have to look for clues to help work out when the quilt was made.

We look at:

Fabric; colours; quilting patterns; the way it was made; condition; symbols or motifs; other similar quilts and any written evidence or drawings.