Case Study: Schofield Dyers & Finishers

A textile company based in Galashiels in the Scottish Borders, established in 1958, Schofield Dyers & Finishers provide services to textile manufacturers to clean and treat their woven fabrics. A workforce of over 55 people work together to meet their customers’ needs, which can vary from dyeing hundreds of metres of fabric to match a colour sample, making upholstery textiles stain or flame resistant, or finishing luxurious cashmere scarves. Woven material comes to Schofield’s factory from weaving companies across Scotland, the rest of the UK & Ireland. The company processes over 30,000 metres of textile fabric a week!

After fabric is woven on a loom it needs to be washed to remove any dirt, dust or weaving fluid, and then dried and pressed, this process is called scouring. The woven fabric can also feel harsh or itchy, have stray threads, creases or not have the surface needed for making the final product, finishing involves mechanical and chemical methods to make the textile fabric suitable for what the customer wants to do with it.

**Scouring**

Working with 360 metre loads, the textile operatives twist the fabric into rope form and pass them through scouring machines to wash them in a detergent at 40°C. Water is then removed by hydro-extraction machines (giant clothes dryers). A scuffer opens out the ropes into open width (flat) before the fabric enters the tenter, a machine that keeps the fabric stretched out flat as it passes through a series of gas ovens to dry completely.

**Dyeing**

‘On tenterhooks’ is an expression that is thought to come from textiles. In the factory laboratory, dyes are mixed to a recipe that will meet the customer’s requirements, for example colour-fast or light-fast. Customers supply a sample of the exact colour they want, and a sample of the wool, cotton, linen or alpaca fabric to be dyed. Computers do some of the work but much of the colour-matching is done by eye and relies on the textile colour technologist’s experience of working with textiles. Fabric is dyed in rope form in machines called jets, or flat on open width jig dyeing machines.

**Finishing**

A decatisser steams wool fabric under pressure to a temperature of 130°C to break down molecular bonds in the fibres. When cooled, the bonds are set in a different structure, this sets the ‘memory’ of the fabric and prevents shrinkage. When you hear the word ‘Teflon’ you may think of saucepans or frying pans but it is also a finish that Schofield’s can apply to fabrics to make them stain resistant, important for fabrics that may be used on couches, chairs or even kilts that are worn regularly! Some technology has remained the same for centuries, because, despite experimentation and new innovations, it remains the best way to do it. Many companies use Schofield’s for their traditional teazle raising and paper pressing services. Teazle raising is a process of brushing the surface of the textile fabric with seed heads of the teazle plant, done gently it produces a soft ‘nap’ or surface (on a lambswool or cashmere scarf for example), or repeated many times it produces a long haired/furry surface like on a mohair blanket.

**Innovation**

Digital printing on cotton is growing rapidly and Schofield’s have developed a unique treatment using live enzymes that ‘eat’ the top layer of the fabric, to create a smooth flat surface perfect for printing on. This ensures any digital design will print clearly on the fabric. Recent developments to protect the environment mean that there are many rules that companies using chemicals must obey. Schofield’s work hard to make sure they are using the best methods to reduce waste and are frequently inspected by organisations such as SEPA to make sure they follow the rules. The company recently invested in a hermetically sealed chemical scouring machine that no gas or liquid can escape from. It recycles the solvent (a very strong chemical cleaner) so that it can be reused again and again, this benefits the environment and saves the company the cost of buying new solvents regularly.

There are many different job roles in textiles, leather & fashion in Scotland and each person’s skills are important to create the highest quality products. Visit [www.textileskills.com](http://www.textileskills.com) to discover more about careers in textiles and the skills you could learn.

Website: [www.schofield-df.co.uk](http://www.schofield-df.co.uk), visit [makeworks.com](http://makeworks.com) to see inside the factory.