

Indigo – *a found poem**

The greyish-blue colour
so popular in heavy frieze
and heavy tweeds
came from indigo,
for which the process
was usually quite different
from that for madder.

Mordanting and dyeing
were done together
in one bath,
very much the way
patent household dyes
are used today.

The bath was prepared by
adding a quarter of a pound
of ordinary salt to
four gallons of urine
and heating this mixture
without boiling it
for three or four hours.

The expert knew when it was ready,
then adding two or three ounces of
well-ground indigo. The mixture
was allowed to cool and ferment
for some days – again the expert
could tell when it was ready.

The wool to be dyed was
plunged into this bath,
worked about for a little while
– some seconds to some minutes –
according to the depth of shade required.

When the wool came out of the bath
it was a sickly shade of green, but
when it had been spread out
in the open air to dry and season
it gradually turned the beautiful
blue-grey indigo colour.

Geraldine Mitchell

*from Kevin Danaher, *'That's How It Was'* (Mercier Press, 1984), p.54