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The Dutch influence in UK peatlands from a historical perspective

Ever since the Middle Ages the commercial use of peat for fuel has been an almost exclusively Dutch affair. Thanks to a comprehensive system of canals and natural waterways vast areas of peatlands could be drained, dredged and dug and turned into vast quantities of black sod peat. Households and industries depended entirely on peat, a situation that lasted until the end of WW I. White peat played no role in this.

In the second half of the 19th century in Germany a commercial use for this fibrous material was developed by turning it into peat moss litter. Dutch companies were quick to adopt this new technique and started investing in peatlands in Lower Saxony and in the UK, partly thanks to British input of capital.

The UK became a major export market for Dutch peat moss by the end of the 19th century thanks to the proliferation of the horse drawn omnibus in all major cities. Thousands of horses were bedded on peat moss. Collaboration with local peat producers and suppliers in England and Scotland were sought by Dutch companies like Griendtsveen.

Out of this industry the modern-day peat substrate sector would develop.

