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**A CRITICAL ANALYSIS
OF THE PRESENT SITUATION
OF THE TEXTILE INDUSTRY
IN IRELAND**

by

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INTRODUCTION

My choice of subject for this thesis stems from the fact that my time as an Irish textile student is drawing to a close. However the opportunities presented to me in the way of employment in my own field as a designer in Ireland are virtually non-existent. This prompted my study of what does exist of the Irish textile industry in an effort to realise the potential, if any, of my design skills within that industry.

As a textile designer I am expected to have the ability to virtually predict the future of colour and image in relation to the ever fickle fashion industry and to eagerly forecast the style and pattern of next years furnishing fabrics. In each case examining the past has often provided the key to next seasons trends.

A similar method may apply when attempting to reach an understanding of the textile industry, as past developments and policy changes shaping Irish textiles will inevitably have a bearing on the course of its future evolution. An acquaintance of the history of Irish textiles would thus seem essential to an understanding of the current environment in which textiles is set. However in order to avoid giving too broad an overview my analysis concentrates on the situation since 1950, as serious steps to study and solve the problems associated with the industry have only been taken within the last forty years.

Much of the factual information within this thesis pertains to the textile industry as a whole. However a competent analysis of Irish textiles necessitates focussing on aspects of the industry that display contrasting rates of success and scales of production. For this reason I decided to concentrate primarily on woven and printed textiles. Both are products of individual workshops and larger manufacturing firms, each show differing levels of success, depending on their size, industrial capacity and design levels. Within industry, design and economics are inextricably linked and to provide a comprehensive study of Irish textiles I found it expedient to firstly examine the economic development of Irish textiles since the 1950s.

In the second chapter, to place the Irish textile industry in context, I discuss its situation in relation to the world textile market. I also profile the industry from the viewpoints of a cross-section of individuals involved with the retail sector. In an attempt to give a fully balanced opinion of the present situation of Irish textiles this thesis incorporates some of the opinions, observations and statements of individuals involved with both economic and design aspects of the Irish textile industry.

The third chapter is an analysis of the craft area of textiles. It is my belief that workshop textiles are a valid and vital element of the textile industry and if combined with industry could create a formula that would allow Irish textiles to expand and not just merely exist. An integral part of this chapter is my belief that the development and growth of Irish textiles will correspond

directly with the growth in design awareness of the Irish public.

The final chapter of this thesis is a look to the future for the Irish textile industry. The discussion in this chapter concentrates on the relevance of textile research to the future of the industry and the role that designers should play in that future.

My main aim in this thesis is to examine key questions and the solutions provided concerning Ireland's apparent inability to produce a thriving textile industry. This research does not propose to have conclusive answers regarding the future of Irish textiles but it does seek to provide an understanding of the reasons for its decline and its present position in what could be described as both a design and an economic no-mans land.

CHAPTER 1:

From the beginning of the twentieth century with textiles firmly established as one of the top two Irish industries in terms of output, to the beginning of the nineties with a mere 7,800 people employed in the industry it is obvious that considerable variation in the general environment and performance of Irish textiles has been observed in the course of its evolution. [O'Hagan, 1981, p. 8.] [Industrial Development Authority, 1992, p. 1.]

In describing the development of the Irish textile industry I found it useful to place textiles within the context of the general manufacturing industry. As one of the objectives of this thesis is to analyse the problems that have recently faced the Irish textile industry, I believe that these can only be assessed when related to Irish manufacturing as a whole.

Within this chapter the performance of Irish textiles is reviewed as a complete unit within the manufacturing industry. This is because I am primarily interested in the decisions that affected the direction of the entire Irish textile industry and which have contributed to its decline. I found it expedient to begin my analysis in the early 1950s as it was in this period that Irish industry made concerted efforts to escape its protected background and to vie for a position amongst modern industrialised nations.

This chapter also looks briefly at Ireland's textile industry within the European Community, its present situation and the implications for the future.

Between 1950 and 1955 total manufacturing output in Ireland increased extremely slowly and actually stagnated from 1955 to 1958. [O'Hagan, 1981, pp. 8 - 15.] The international prosperity that typified the post-war fifties failed to break the perennial grip of economic depression in Ireland, thus stretching the Irish state's resources to their limits, in its efforts to appease a post - de Valera Irish society. The immediate post-war years had witnessed the reintroduction and extension of protectionist policies which were deemed a necessary precondition for the growth of the industrial sector. The expansion of the Irish textile industry had actually tended to falter as a result of these inward looking policies. Irish politics had created a shielded industrial structure which in turn was based on small scale production involving outdated machinery, inadequate specialisation and unenterprising management decisions.

By 1955, cracks were becoming particularly evident in Ireland's protected industrial framework and the need to expand manufactured exports was recognised as essential to overcome Ireland's industrial difficulties. The establishment of the Industrial Development Authority in 1955 was one of the more concrete measures taken to assist this reorientation in policy which led directly to the initiation of economic planning. A wide ranging programme of incentives and support services was developed to encourage industry to move into export markets. Protection was to be given to new industries only in cases where it was clear that after a short initial period the industry would be able to survive without protection. According to O'Hagan the Industrial Revolution in

England in the eighteenth and nineteenth century may have had an impact on the Irish economy of the day but it was not until the late 1950s that Ireland was in a position to undergo its own industrial transformation. [O'Hagan, 1981, pp. 10 - 15.]

In fact by international standards the post 1958 system of financial incentives in the form of cash grants and export profit tax was deemed remarkably generous. The Economic Commission for Europe concluded that by the early 1970s the Irish system of incentives went further in encouraging export oriented industries, attracting private investment and in generating export growth than any other country in Europe. Initially the volume of output in the textiles sector increased at a faster than average rate than for the manufacturing industry as a whole, despite the less than average increase in employment. [Industrial Development Authority, 1992, pp. 1 - 7.]

However by the late sixties the employment record in textiles was of particular concern with patterns of stagnation and decline becoming established throughout the sector. Lyons states:

That some at least of the current explanations for the slow growth of Irish industry are all too familiar - it still suffered from a shortage of private capital, it was unable to develop any extensive range of competitive exports, it was still inhibited by the smallness and relative poverty of its domestic market.

[Lyons, 1971, p. 625.]

Other factors also affected the textile industry; textile demands were rapidly changing with the traditional sector of Irish textiles

coming under increasing pressure from the synthetic sector. For example in 1912 Ireland's linen industry contained a million spinning spindles and forty thousand looms driven by seventy thousand employees, but by the 1960s rayon, a synthetic fabric began to take over much of linens traditional garment trade. According to Wallace Clarke, help went in disproportionate measures to attracting to Ireland, manufacturers of synthetic fibres, many of whom proved short lived tenants, with the result by 1980 there were "only some twenty linen businesses, spinners, weavers and finishers left". [Clarke, 1980, p. 15.]

By the early seventies both the woollen and worsted sectors were displaying fairly static performances and by the recessionary period of 1974 to 1975 both of these traditional sectors began to enter a pronounced phase of declination, while synthetics continued to expand. Employment in textiles fell by over three thousand between 1973 and 1978; from twenty three thousand to twenty thousand people. This decline was greater than the decline for the manufacturing industry in general. [Industrial Development Authority, 1976, pp. 6 - 10.]

The Industrial Development Authority's strategy of encouraging the synthetics sector was often at the expense of Ireland's traditional involvement with natural fibres. The entire European textile industry was acknowledged to be suffering from overcapacity in the European market. This was primarily due to the shift in demand towards textile products from developing countries such as Taiwan. Therefore the Industrial Development Authority's solution was to

invest in high technology, high value added and high skill industries. They recognised that Ireland could not compete with the massproduced, cheaper products from the developing countries. Indeed, by choosing the high technology route into the market they ensured that the performance of the synthetic sector would continue to be of critical importance for the development of the textile industry in Ireland.

However I query whether this was the only alternative available to Irish textile manufacturers. Even the Industrial Development Authority recognised the fact that:

Since the start of the decade [1970] the structure of the industry in Ireland has changed considerably with many new textile operations already established and several further major projects announced or in the course of construction. In Europe, on the other hand, the majority of investment has been associated with a re-equipment activity.
[Industrial Development Authority,
1976, p. 11.]

Ireland was adopting the methods and approaches of the European Community's textile industry. European textiles were already technologically more advanced yet still unable to counteract the increasing import penetration of textiles from African and Asian developing countries. I am not suggesting that Ireland should have attempted to take the massproduction route of the developing countries. This would have spelt economic suicide not least because of Ireland's inability to compete with the low wages that are a significant part of the textile success of countries such as Korea and Taiwan.

I believe that a major policy of revitalisation for the existing traditional sector of Irish textiles should at least have ran concurrently with investment into the synthetics sector. With the transition to free trade many of the textile companies involved with traditional areas, such as woollen and worsted found it difficult to survive and many went out of business. Yet when we consider how shielded Irish manufacturing was before free trade and the scale of the government's economic protection of domestic manufacturers through restriction on foreign competitors, it is almost surprising that any did survive. Yet some of Ireland's traditional textile companies did, and continue to survive. The textile firm Magee which was started around 1866 is an example of a traditional Irish company that continues to meet the requirements of a European and World textile market. Therefore it is worth briefly discussing the factors that ensured the survival of this company even when denied protection.

Following the First World War prices were high as demand was great for woven goods. With the result that many weavers were not taking care with the production of their woven goods. Robert Temple, then owner of the Magee firm, decided that in the interests of industry, only high standards of quality should be associated with Magee's fabric products. He therefore decided to cease the purchase of tweed from individual cottage weavers and to enlarge the weaving area in his own premises. The finest quality yarns were used and only competent weavers were given regular employment. The resultant cloth was fully scoured, finished and examined in Donegal. [The House of Magee, 1990, pp. 1 - 2.]

In the 1950s Robert Harris made the enterprising suggestion to Aer Lingus that their hostesses could represent their country better if dressed in native tweed. [Hoad, 1987, pp. 110 - 111.] The order was secured. Imaginative and shrewd management decisions were already an important aspect of Magee's success and when Ireland entered the European Community in 1973, it was recognised that intensification of competition would follow. Therefore power looms, which were capable of weaving double width cloth at speeds up to four times as fast as hand looms, were installed in Magee's production plant. According to Seamus Travers of Magee, it was acknowledged in 1970 that tweed cloth would not survive on the European market simply because it was woollen, woven and Irish. Magee management realised that new dimensions were needed. While some woollen mills made little or no attempts to reassess their products in relation to Ireland's imminent entry into the European Community, Magee expanded into curtaining and upholstery fabrics. [Travers, Donegal, 10.12.1992] Trends in international fashions were analysed and responded to. The importance of the design of the woven product was realised. New weaves and designs were evolved and new colours introduced. Seamus Travers stated that today Magee's executive staff travel all over the world assessing markets and a substantial export business is done to virtually every country in the world, whose climatic conditions permit the use of tweed². [Travers, Donegal, 10.12.1992] In fact research into lighter blends of yarns is seen as a method of widening the future market possibilities for Magee's tweeds. The summer 1993 sports and leisure range of tweeds are particularly light. [See Figure One]

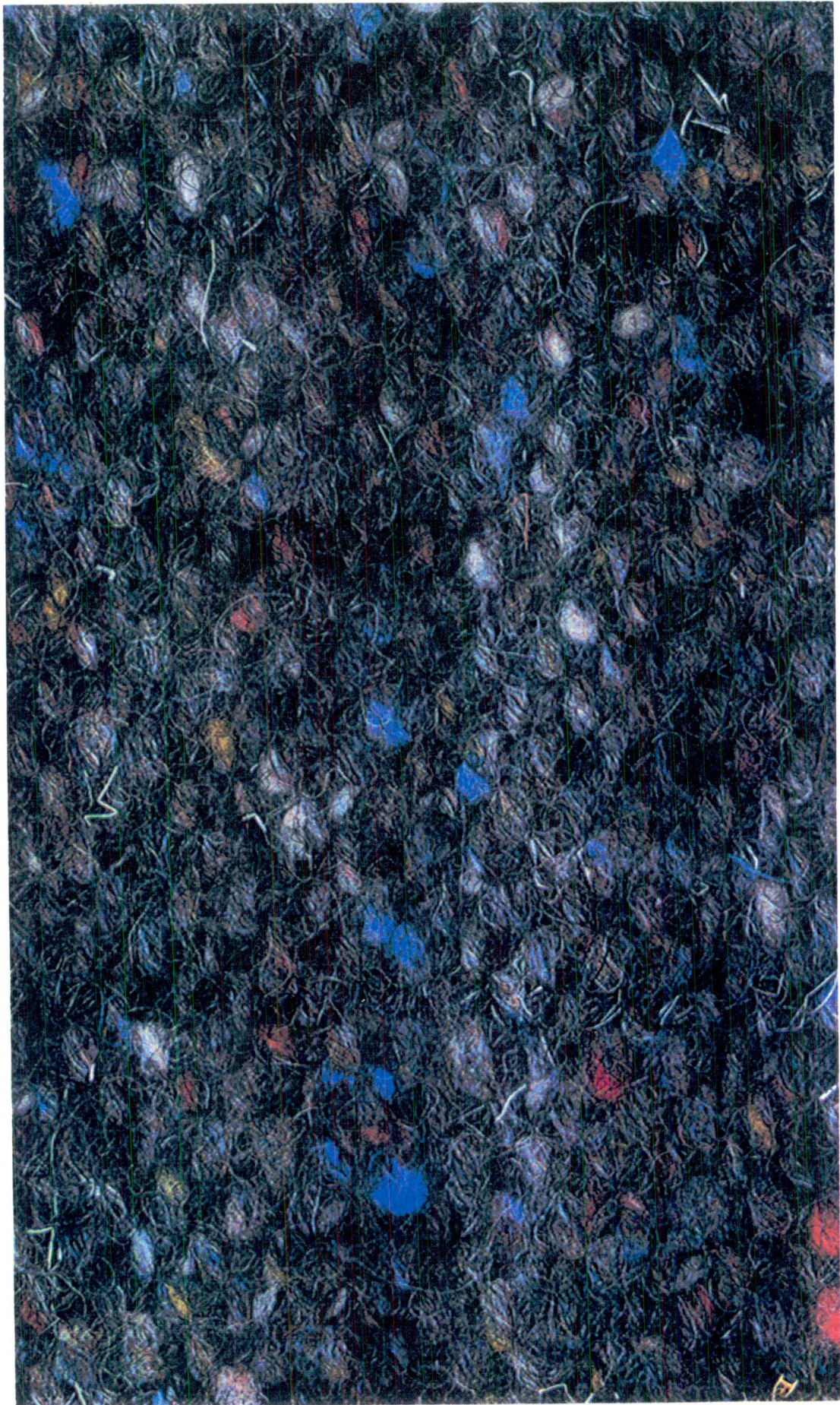


Figure One; Magee's Handwoven Donegal Tweed.

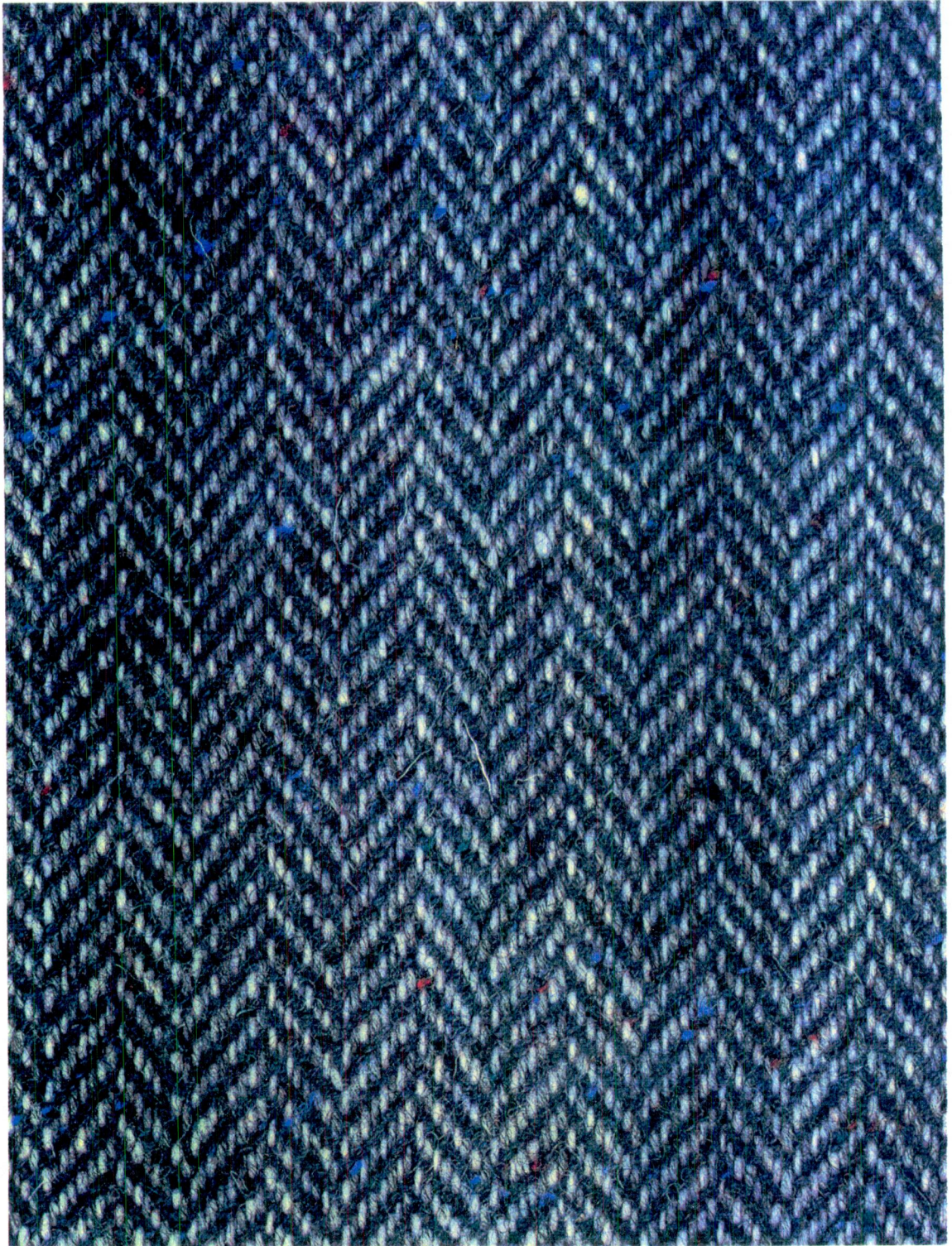


Figure Two; A sample from Magee's latest range of Tweeds.

Magee's Sales Director, Ernie Browne describes this "new sports jacketing in a lighter 300gm weight" as "very suitable for todays market". [See figure Two] [Browne, Donegal, 12.1.1993] Adrian Copeland of Louis Copeland, Master Tailors, states that "virtually all of the tweed that we use is from Magee. It is comparable to any tweed from anywhere in the world in terms of design, handling and price". [Copeland, Dublin, 10.2.1993]

I have brought this discussion of Magee's textiles to the present day, to illustrate the fact that some companies involved with the traditional natural fibres sector of the industry did survive their protectionist background and in fact outlived many of the highly promoted synthetic firms.

Yet, the unpalatable fact is that Magee could be described as an exception and in the early seventies most Irish textile industries were deemed unlikely to make much headway in foreign markets.

At a later stage of this thesis the problems specifically affecting Irish textiles firms on entry into the European Community will be discussed. However the difficulties affecting the Irish textile industry in the context of the Irish manufacturing industry as a whole, are of particular interest in this chapter. For example wages in the Irish Free State were relatively high, high enough to make it unlikely that mass produced goods would be competitive with those of low wage countries such as Japan, also the home market was so restricted that this inhibited the development of business. Basically, as Lyons explains, "the manufacturing industry was geared

to the small protected home market and because of this its costs were too high to warrant any hope of a substantial export trade". [Lyons, 1971, p. 621.]

Yet Ireland did build up an export trade and I maintain that more finance should have been invested into traditional sectors that had managed to survive their protected industrial past. Instead of simply jumping onto the synthetic bandwagon in Irish industries attempts to catch up with Europe and compete in an industry that was already changing direction, the Irish textile industry could have concentrated on contributing to the world textile market something that was individualistic and uniquely Irish. The Scandinavian Design Group elaborated on the idea in 1961:

In our view Ireland has a unique opportunity, denied by circumstances to many more developed countries, of making a great contribution, not alone to her own prosperity and culture, but to the culture of Western Europe.

[Scandinavian Design Group,
1962, p. 4.]

In fact by the early eighties some flaws in the synthetics promotion policies were beginning to surface. A report by the Sectoral Development Committee states: ".... a number of recent and large investment projects on man-made fibres are proving unprofitable and are a cause of concern". [Sectoral Development Committee, 1962, p. 12.]

Indeed the Industrial Development Authority's continued expansion of the synthetic fibres sector deviated from the stated policy

objectives of the European Community of easing problems of over capacity by limiting the activity of and arrival of new firms into the European textile industry.

Since the early sixties the European Community accounted for a decreasing proportion of world production of textiles and by the mid seventies excess capacity in European man-made fibres industries was estimated at around a third of world produce. [O'Hagan, 1981, pp. 18 - 24.] Obviously the development potential of the Irish textile industry was greatly influenced by what happened at a European level and prospects for the eighties were poor. In fact by the early eighties there was evidence of an increasing reluctance on the part of the Industrial Development Authority to continue to develop textile production in Ireland. This was illustrated by a declining fixed asset investment in textiles in comparison to manufacturing as a whole. As this type of grant is related to machinery and new equipment as well as the actual premises, it was a strong indication that the future development potential of Irish textiles was thought to be limited. [Sectoral Development Committee, 1983, pp. 7 - 15.] The Industrial Development Authority actually issued a report in 1980, in which fears pertaining to the expansion of the textile industry were expressed:

The Textiles Federation are extremely concerned that planned investment in textiles might continue to decline in relative importance. The Federation feels that investment in the sector should at least continue to reflect its relative importance in manufacturing industry.

[Industrial Development Authority,
1980, p. 18.]

Therefore concern about the level of commitment to the Irish textile industry was already articulated by the end of the seventies. In fact the Textiles Federation requested a more balanced programme of investment and requested that the synthetics sector should not be developed at the expense of the traditional areas within the textile industry: "... The Federation does not feel that it is possible to develop one individual sub-sector without promoting satisfactory programmes for the other sub-sectors within the industry". [Industrial Development Authority, 1980, p. 11.]

In fact the entire textiles sector rose in output in 1981 but then fell continuously until 1987, recovering slightly in 1988. By 1988 the textile sector was exporting 72.2 per cent of its output compared to 63.1 per cent in 1980. However the woven materials industry continued to export only somewhat more than half of its output, during the 1980s. Unfortunately import penetration rose from 67 per cent to 77 per cent for textiles as a whole over the period. Also, there was a sharp decline in employment in all sub-sectors of textiles during the eighties. [Fitzpatrick, 1989, pp. 5 - 12.] In 1978 there was twenty thousand employed in the Irish textile industry. [O'Hagan, 1981, p. 23.] A decade later this number had almost halved to a figure of ten thousand six hundred employed in Ireland's textile industry. It should also be stressed that this employment decline is a continuation of a trend established after Ireland's entry into the European Community in 1973. [Fitzpatrick, 1989, p. 5.] I shall focus on Ireland's entry into the European Community at a later stage in this thesis. For the moment I am concerned with the result that Ireland's entry has

had on the textile industry's present situation.

As a result of Ireland's membership of the European Community, two interrelated sets of international forces had definite bearing on Irish textiles. These took the form of both internal and external impacts on the industry. The internal impacts included harmonisation of taxation and technical standards and the removal of intra-European community border barriers. As far as Ireland is concerned the issue of transport costs and speeds is especially crucial. As a peripheral island economy, Irish exports often have to cross more national frontiers to get to their ultimate European market than many other countries within the European community. Therefore Ireland should enjoy large gains from the abolition of border controls. There are at present very few national level technical product standards which limit intra-European Community trade in textiles. Examples include the British law on the flammability of upholstered furniture and prospective Dutch regulations concerning the flammability of childrens nightwear. While these standards could be considered barriers to trade they are not considered to have significant protectionist impact. [F.A.S., Dublin, 14.1.1993]

The European Report regards the external impact on textile sector as arising from the possible incompatibility of the relatively unstable situation of the Irish textile industry and the growing possibility of free circulation of goods between the European Community and ultimately the world. The Multi-Fibre Agreement is the international agreement which regulates imports of textiles from

low-cost, mainly developing countries into western industrialised countries including the European Community.

The Multi-Fibre Agreement operates under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. In outlining what the Multi-Fibre Agreement is, it is also important to acknowledge what it is not. Firstly, it regulates imports into industrialised countries from low-cost producers, it does not regulate trade in the opposite direction. Secondly, it does not deal with trade between developed countries such as trade between Ireland and the United States of America. The General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade seeks to phase out these restrictions and to accelerate the liberalisation of world textiles. The European Report states that there is no doubt that international trade in textiles will become less restricted. This process, albeit on a limited scale has already occurred - the Agreements negotiated by European Community Member States under the Multi-Fibre Agreement in 1986 were more favourable to developing countries than those previously in existence. A surge of low-cost imports from developing countries could still obviously pose a serious threat to what remains of Ireland's textile industry. [Fitzpatrick, 1989]

At later stages in this thesis I shall analyse how Irish textile firms could respond to this threat from mass-produced fabrics in terms of design and in terms of management strategy.

My intention in this chapter was to isolate and discuss factors that have had what I perceive as the most influence on the Irish textile industry over the last forty years. I believe the decision to

concentrate most of the available financial resources on synthetics often at the expense of the industry's involvement with natural fibres has had considerable bearing on the insecure situation that the Irish textile industry is in today. Brian Callanan, Director of the Textiles Federation clarified the present economic position of Irish textiles. He stated that the Market Development Fund, which Irish textiles are dependent upon is due to expire in March 1993. When in fact, the textile industry requires this fund to be doubled if the industry is to achieve a minimum of growth. [Callanan, Dublin, 26.1.1993]

In the following chapter I will focus on Ireland's position within the world textile market and examine Irish textiles prospects for expansion.

Endnotes for Chapter 1:

1. I acknowledge that the linen industry was concentrated in the North of Ireland and therefore could be deemed as irrelevant to Ireland's economy in 1960. However this example adequately displays the effects that synthetics were having on the natural fibre sector of the industry.
2. According to Pascal Donnelly, Hickey's did stock Magee tweed, but considers it too expensive to stock and believes that it only appeals to the tourist market. [Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1993]

CHAPTER 2

The reasons for Ireland's inability to play a significant part in the European and indeed the World textile market is an aspect I hope to examine further in this chapter.

My study in this area evolved through an initial analysis of the position of Europe in the larger global textile arena and the primary changes that have occurred within that context.

Growth in output of synthetics initially took place in the early sixties when firms in the United States, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom began to establish high technology and capital intensive firms. The large scale of investment into synthetics directly resulted in a period of decline for natural fibres such as flax and cotton. However the decline of natural fabrics such as linen merely reflected the increasing pressure being felt by the entire textile industry. In the context of World Trade the share of textiles in manufactured trade had more than halved from 10.6 per cent in 1955 to 4.8 per cent in 1977.

The situation was further exacerbated when European producers of synthetic fibres were acutely affected by the onset of world recession which was rooted in the oil crisis of 1973 to 1974¹.

Prior to this synthetic producers had anticipated a reasonable level of growth in demand and consumption for synthetic textile products. As a result when market growth faltered in 1972 and virtually stagnated in 1974 serious overcapacity emerged. [Industrial Development Authority, pp. 5 - 16.] This problem was further compounded by substantial changes in the relative importance of the traditional major trading areas. This shift in emphasis corresponds to the changes in destination of textile exports of the industrialised countries. The share of these exports going to other industrialised countries has steadily risen over the last four decades while the share of textile exports going to developing countries has fallen. In direct contrast to this, by 1963, exports to industrialised countries already accounted for over half of the textile exports of developing countries, compared to just over one third in 1955. [Industrial Development Authority, 1980, pp. 13 - 30.] The pattern had thus been established with developing countries continuing to increase the share of their exports going to industrialised countries. They developed to such an extent that by the mid eighties many of the developing countries had or almost had

positive trade balances in textiles with industrialised countries. The implications for the European Community was and continues to be negative. As the European Community is responsible for a sizable proportion of the trade in world textile products it obviously has a major stake in the industry. The trend towards negative trade balances with developing countries was increasingly evident in the late seventies when developing countries had steadily become the European Community's major trading partner in textiles. [Industrial Development Authority, 1992, pp. 12 - 15.] It seems ironic that the acquisition and enjoyment of luxury products in the materially advanced cultures is recognised as being closely linked to and dependent upon a pattern of exploitation of third world labour and materials by the industrially advanced countries. This has eventually resulted in a backlash effect upon the European textile sectors with mounting pressure coming from low cost imports which started in the sixties, intensified in the seventies and by the late eighties had disastrous implications for the Irish textile industry and the European Community as a whole. Pascal Donnelly who is a senior buyer for Hickey's made the ironic observation that Ireland was possibly fortunate not to have had a large textile industry as there was less to lose. "For every ten mills that closed here, about two hundred closed in Italy in the late eighties".

For the retailer involved in the lower to middle ranges of the textile market, cheap mass produced fabrics from developing countries appear beneficial as they enable these retailers to keep their prices down. However as Pascal Donnelly explained, chainstores such as Dunnes Stores and Pennys are also able to sell garments on the Irish market that originated in the developing countries. These clothes retail cheaper than the Irish consumer could make the garment for. This necessitated Hickey's expansion into furnishing fabrics in the mid eighties. Pascal Donnelly claims that this is a situation that Hickey's would not have envisaged twenty years ago. But he now realises that without the furnishing fabrics Hickey's would be out of business. [See Figure Three and Figure Four] [Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1993]

The general move to free trade which was initiated in the sixties provided access to European markets for the less developed economies, principally Hong Kong, Taiwan and South Korea. This enabled them to exploit their advantage of cheap labour. Ireland which operates a fixed tariff agreement with its European community members found itself inexorably tied into this movement. Control of trading agreements is vitally important as industrialisation continues to take place in countries such as South Korea and Taiwan. The 1974 Multi-Fibre Agreement was the first most notable attempt to control trade and in particular to control the level of import penetration into the European market. However by the time this came



Figure Three;
Hickeys Fabrics,
Henry Street, Dublin.



Figure Four;
A sample of Hickeys'
interior fabric.

into being, the industrial progress of the developing countries had already impinged upon the poorer and less developed regions of the European Community. [Confederation of Irish Industry, 1980, pp. 12 - 22.] This in turn exacerbated the differences in income between regions such as Ireland and the stronger more developed regions such as France and West Germany.

In fact Ireland's textile industry already faced a number of difficulties that were unresolved before Ireland's entry into the European Community in 1973. Over diversification of products had resulted in many Irish textile firms being unable to contribute a valid product to the European market. This lack of specialisation was coupled with low design standards and deficiencies in entrepreneurial ability. Many Irish textile firms were unequipped for marketing in continental Europe. There was a tendency to regard design and marketing as secondary management functions. Of course many small firms simply did not have the resources to effectively market their goods, especially when their actual production units were in need of modernisation. To a certain extent these problems were neglected whilst grants were given to the development of the new synthetics sector. Admittedly The Committee on Industrial Organisation was established to make a critical appraisal of measures that might have to be taken to adapt Irish industry to conditions of more intensive competition in home and export markets. Yet the Committee's recommendations which proved to be a catalyst for many policy changes regarding industry failed to improve what was in fact a steadily worsening Irish textiles situation. [Industrial Development Authority, 1980, pp. 27- 32.]

Pascal Donnelly stated that in the seventies many Irish textile firms did not employ even one designer but simply copied existing fabrics. By contrast, countries such as Japan understood the need to provide modern and original fabrics so they received the bulk of Hickey's fabric order in the seventies. "Then it was Korea but now Korea are becoming too expensive so it will be a different developing country next year". According to Pascal Donnelly the textile companies in the developing countries have a "few resident designers working with a huge team of copiers". They are capable of directly copying or changing one small element in the base design to create a complete range. "This keeps costs down and production high". [Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1993]

Margaret Mooney of Hickey's illustrated this point further by indicating fashion fabric which she described as having an "English look to it but is in fact from Korea". [See Figure Five] She stated that even twenty years ago the developing countries were purchasing half yards of fabric from the top fabric stores in Europe and then directly copying the patterns or, as Pascal Donnelly explained, changing an element within the pattern. [Mooney, Dublin, 4.2.1992] Irish textile firms were utilising similar methods but lacked the capital, the cheap labour or the scale required to succeed. However a large proportion of the fabrics stocked by Ascots Interiors are also from Korea and Taiwan. These fabrics are mainly printed and although accuracy of registration and depth of colour are of a very high standard, I feel that many of the designs lack originality and freshness with some of the floral fabrics looking particularly outdated. [See Figure Six]



Figure Five; A sample of Hickeys' fashion fabrics.



Figure Six; Ascots Interiors, furnishing fabrics.



By European standards the Irish textile industry was always considered small. It had the lowest turnover of any national industry in 1976 and only the Danish textile industry employed fewer people. Even today if we increased our textile output by 50 per cent this would only increase the European Community's textile production by 0.08 per cent and world textile production by 0.07 per cent. With figures such as these, it is possible to become dismissive of the Irish textile industry as a whole. However what is often ignored is the fact that in terms of its importance as a source of employment in national terms only the Belgian textile industry accounted for a higher proportion of national manufacturing employment in the 1980s. Therefore the impact of the penetration of low cost yet relatively high quality fabrics from the developing countries cannot be overstated. [Irish Textile Federation, 1976, p. 22]

In fact Ascots Interiors do not stock any Irish fabrics. Myles Williams, the manager of Ascots Interiors believes that there is a demand on the home market for Irish textiles but that the quality does not match this demand. He commented that even Kildare furnishings are in fact woven in the United Kingdom. He maintains that Irish management are to blame:

Youghal didn't do cut lengths. They sold by the roll which effectively put them out of the competitive market. No-one can afford to have a lot of fabric sitting in stock yet that is what Youghal was expecting retailers to do. As a result the fabric end of Youghal couldn't survive.

Williams, Dublin, 12.12.1992]

Sharon Hobbs of Kevin Kelly Interiors Ltd. believes that the scale of the home market is also a factor in the inability of Irish textiles to expand. She maintains that even if Irish firms were producing quality fabric "they couldn't afford to liberally sell it around the Dublin market as it would lose its exclusivity". Thus indicating that Irish firms need to have only limited runs on their designs which is uneconomical. Kevin Kelly Interiors stocks mainly British and European fabrics "which are aimed at the middle to upper class in the forty plus age bracket". [Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993] The fabric designs are displayed to their best advantage. Many of the designs cover chairs and sofas around the shop. [See Figure Seven] While some of the designs could be considered particularly innovative, the fabrics are of the highest quality in terms of materials and manufacture. The fabric designs are very elegant yet retain their modernity. Stripes appear to predominate. Kevin Kelly Interiors Ltd. stock a range of Donegal tweeds. Unfortunately these are the only Irish fabrics stocked and Sharon Hobbs stated that the tweeds will not sell on the home market:

Perhaps it works on a foreign market in the same way a Spanish marketing campaign of a rich colourful print might work here, however it just doesn't appeal to the home market².

[Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993]

Pascal Donnelly stated that Ireland used to have some semblance of an industry and even though Ireland was never particularly noted for printed fabrics there were some companies worth purchasing from, such as Galway Textile Printers.



Figure Seven;
Kevin Kelly Interiors Ltd.,
selection of furnishing
fabrics.



"Now barely 2 per cent of our fabrics are Irish Basically with so many companies going to the wall Irish firms have to export 80 per cent of their fabric and if they are lucky they'll get paid for 70 per cent of that. Then, if they have enough money being pumped in to keep them going they might survive".

[Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1993]

Yet even with more financial assistance from the Industrial Development Authority Galway Textile Printers could not survive in the present economic climate³. [Geraghty, Dublin, 14.12.1992]

"We really have been of our fabric and
then... But mainly with a very...
to be able to tell them that...
to get some of their fabric and if they are
lucky they'll get paid for 70 per cent of
that. Now, if they have money, money being
needed to keep them going, they might
survive".

[Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1934]

1934-1935 - The first financial year of the...
...and the...
...and the...

1935-1936 - The second financial year of the...
...and the...
...and the...

The first financial year of the...
...and the...
...and the...

Endnotes for Chapter 2:

1. By-products of the petrochemical industry were used in the manufacture of some synthetics. Many of the production parts were dependent on power, generated by petrochemicals. Therefore the impact the 1973 oil crisis had on synthetics was huge in terms of rocketing prices and difficulties in obtaining the required petrochemical.
2. This is a similar comment to that made by Pascal Donnelly regarding Magee tweeds. [See Endnote¹, Chapter 1] Perhaps Irish textile companies should rethink their management strategies in relation to their home market, but, considering the size of the Irish market many companies may not consider it worthwhile.
3. Galway Textile Printers went out of business in the early eighties.

CHAPTER 3

Within this chapter, the position of handcrafted workshop textiles are examined in relation to the Irish textile industry as a whole. I do not intend to draw comparisons between workshop textiles and the larger scale of industrially manufactured fabrics. Instead I acknowledge this handcraft as an alternative manufacturing process that does not belong in a bygone age but which in fact could combine with industry to become a viable route for the future of the Irish textile industry.

However an essential element in the success of this proposition shall be the acceptance of this craft design by the Irish public. I suggest that the textile industry could be promoted by raising the general level of design consciousness among Irish consumers and I explore some of the possible methods that craft based textiles could utilise to become more accessible to the Irish public. Also explored are reasons for the possible failure of some of those proposals.

While I acknowledge that the craft route into industry was previously suggested by the Scandinavian Design Group in 1961 with the now defunct Kilkenny Design Workshop being the indirect result, I maintain that the future of Irish textiles could lie in the union between craft and industry.

This discussion focuses on the role that organisations, such as the Crafts Council of Ireland is playing in support of workshop textile printers and weavers and indeed of design graduates, who must be recognised as a vital element in the future of Irish textiles.

I also discuss the invention of tradition that many Irish textile workshops are finding is an essential part of the marketing of their products. I analyse the detrimental effect that the association of often regurgitated, stereotypical Irish symbols with craft textiles, may have in the minds of Irish consumers. I elaborate on this point by focussing on the Educational Building Society's Craft Awards which are vital in the promotion of the entire handcraft industry, yet in 1993 may be guilty of denying new textile designers the opportunity to extend their influence into new or alternative markets. In doing so they have denied the Irish public the chance for advancement and development of their design knowledge. Thus re-emphasising my argument that the Irish textile industry can only develop all of its sectors if it expands in conjunction with the design awareness of the Irish population. I have deliberately avoided discussing gallery textiles as my main interest is the role that workshops may have in the expansion of the Irish textile industry.

An immediate priority of Irish textile manufacturers must be to increase competitiveness both at home and abroad and the quality of design will obviously be a vital element of this economic success. However this could imply that the most important attribute of design is its ability to generate business. As design innovation may involve considerable financial risks for the textile manufacturer, much of the printed and woven fabrics that are sold to the public often bear a striking resemblance to the fabrics of last season and of many seasons before that. Although it is understandable that both the consumer and manufacturer are sometimes more influenced by economics than by design quality, this may result in very similar fabrics decorating our homes, work and leisure places and in an overabundance of repetitive fashion fabrics.

If we take the notion of design as being an integral part of daily life and not merely an element of industry and business, it follows that design appreciation would need to penetrate all levels of society. By increasing public awareness the general standard of design should improve. Perhaps the situation I am describing appears more utopian than practical yet it is one that the Scandinavians dealt with successfully. Jenny Trigwell a textile designer and design consultant emphasised the fact that the Scandinavians did not always have a visual tradition. In fact they deliberately educated the Scandinavian population so that today even primary school children are aware of the importance of design to virtually every aspect of their lives. [Trigwell, Dublin, 22.2.1993] In fact the invited Scandinavian Design Group recognised

the problem of Irish manufacturers who, while perhaps willing to experiment with new products are deterred from doing so by the existence of an unresponsive public.

[Scandinavian Design Group, 1962, p. 35.]

The Design Report proposed that Ireland's design success was inextricably linked with the education of the Irish public and suggested that this could be achieved with the aid of the media and through a series of exhibitions of the best of Irish and international design, which could be held in easily accessible locations such as major department stores. [Scandinavian Design Group, 1962, pp. 35 - 38.] This proposal was never responded to on a scale large enough to make an impact with the Irish public. The result being that there is still to a large extent a lack of design appreciation in this country. This has evolved into an ambivalence amongst many Irish consumers in the fostering, supporting and buying of well designed Irish products. Furthermore, an overexposure to design as perceived noteworthy by the media in the forms of imported magazines, television and newspapers have compounded this.

The result of this bombardment was exemplified in the early seventies when craft possessed a much lauded image which was perpetuated by the media. Yet as Jenny Trigwell explained much of the admiration for some of the craftwork was unfounded and merely served to undermine the authority that craft - design of significance and substance held. [Trigwell, Dublin, 16.12.1992] The media's influence was further illustrated in the eighties when the emphasis on a personal and corporate image lead to a dismissal of much that was recognisably handcrafted. The current position of craft textiles in

the context of the Irish textile industry as a whole is unclear¹. It could be said that preoccupation with small scale, time consuming, somewhat antiquated production processes are of little relevance to a fast paced nineties existence. This would indicate that the industry has little bearing on the life of the average Irish consumer. However if we pursue the notion of design as being relevant to every aspect of living this implies that there are no average consumers because there are no average products, just a well informed public availing of whichever textile process satisfies their particular needs. Possibly the strongest argument in favour of workshop textiles is that it entails a first hand involvement with the textile qualities of the materials and therefore enables the designer to anticipate every aspect of the final product. John Daly a workshop weaver maintains that much of his work is unappreciated because much of the Irish public has little comprehension of the difference between a handcrafted piece and an industrially manufactured fabric:

.... many people have no concept of what a handloomed item entails in terms of quality of materials, labour and cost. Only a small percentage of the public realises what they are purchasing, the rest would sooner buy from a chainstore.

[Daly, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

Sharon Hobbs is an interior designer who works exclusively with Kevin Kelly's Interiors Ltd. in Dublin. She explained how:

the power of marketing comes into play with many of our customers buying British interior design magazines. Our clients have since the early eighties arrived into our shop knowing exactly what they want and often with a picture of the 'look' they want.

[Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993]

Although the customer is justified in employing an interior designer to recreate the 'look' they have found within the pages of a magazine, I believe they are losing an invaluable opportunity to make a personal commitment to their surroundings. Instead of purchasing fabrics from the British firms 'Designers Guild' or 'Osborne and Little', they could commission an Irish weaving or print workshop to create something innovative and original which could incorporate elements of the clients own personality. The expense involved is relative to the fact that the interior is completely unique.

Perhaps workshops could sell a limited range of fabrics through the more exclusive furnishing fabric shops which could provide a craft based printer or weaver with a wider market than commission work provides. Sharon Hobbs explained from a retailers point of view the reasons for avoiding workshop textiles:

.... there are complications. As the fabric is hand painted by the yard it is difficult to quickly obtain some for a client. The expense is also a problem. In order to make it worth the designers and our time we may have to retail it at seventy to ninety pounds a yard. Generally our customer will settle for a hassle free print from 'Designers Guild' instead.

[Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993]

Another difficulty may be quality control. Hand painted or printing by its very nature has no definite measures to ensure that a motif or colourway is precisely the same as a length of fabric that may have been designed and painted or printed some months previously. Similarly if weavers dye the yarns themselves it is virtually impossible to eliminate the possibility of some differences in tone

or shade. Often this may add to the handcrafted feel of the fabric yet this may not be appreciated by the consumer or the textile retailer.

These factors could indicate that workshop textiles should not attempt to compete with large textile manufacturers but I believe that the Irish consumer and the textile industry can benefit from craft design and that workshop textiles should not be regarded as a poor relation of industry or alternatively an elitist pastime. John Daly is adamant that as we move into a post-industrial society craft will become increasingly important as a means of production in its own right. He argues that in the worlds declining industrial economies craft will appear as a viable alternative to the mass production of textiles. John Daly claims that:

America is going through a huge craft revival right now and I don't think it is a fad. It is because mass production is just too costly and wasteful A time will come when the long industrial run of fabric will be impossible to maintain because of a lack of demand and a lack of funds.

[Daly, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

Jerry Trigwell also expresses the opinion that in the near future we will witness an increase in the amount of one off garments and textiles and a diminishing amount of mass produced items. She believes that this shift in direction is corroborated by the state of flux that many of the recent international fashion collections appear to be in. [Trigwell, Dublin, 22.2.1993] The concept of Ireland moving into a post-industrial era would of course indicate that Ireland had an industrial age to begin with, a notion which

Aidan Geraghty of the Industrial Development Authority disputes. He believes that the term 'post-industrial' is neither relevant nor applicable to Ireland but affirms that the world's industrial requirements are changing rapidly and will continue to do so. Aidan Geraghty explained that the Japanese are spearheading this change and compelling other countries to look at their own industries from alternative angles.

The Japanese were the first to link designers with manufacturers. They realised the value of designers within the industrial process and even this is something that many Irish manufacturers have yet to achieve.

[Geraghty, Dublin, 14.12.1992]

Perhaps Irish textile manufacturers should similarly initiate a reassessment of the textile industry. If Irish textile manufacturers evaluate the industry with a fresh perspective they may succeed in creating a formula that would allow the Irish textile industry to expand and not merely exist. For example Irish textile manufacturers should acknowledge that considering the entire European textile industry's difficulties in competing with low priced, mass produced fabrics from countries such as Taiwan and Korea, it follows that Ireland should not even attempt to contend for this market². Although the economic pressures affecting the European textile industry may not herald a craft based industrialisation of the world, as John Daly suggests, but it will possibly result in a shift in emphasis away from mass production on the vast scales that exist today. By that stage the Irish textile industry could and should have evolved into a competent industry utilising the best of our designers and craftspeople. Within the

workshop the designer must deal with production costs and overheads ranging from raw materials to machinery and must still manage to design, create, market and sell the finished piece of work. A designer with this type of experience could be invaluable to the Irish textile industry.

In fact as early as 1961 the Scandinavian Design Group asserted that if Irish industry turned towards craftspeople more positive results for industry in general would be achieved. They believed that many Scandinavian industries had derived great profit from co-operation with skilled craftsmen who had started their own workshops and had been able to transfer their experience and ideas over to the greater production of a factory. [Scandinavian Design Group, 1962, pp. 41 - 43.]

The Irish Export Board indirectly responded to this recommendation when it envisaged "an organisation which would have a pervasive and lasting influence on industry and on the Irish people generally", an organisation that would be indicative of the reawakening of Ireland to her role as a modern nation. [Marchant, 1985, p. 9.] Thus the Kilkenny Design Workshops came into existence in 1963. it was staffed with Irish designers and craftspeople and where needed specialist international designers and consultants. Kilkenny Design Workshops deliberately placed emphasis on craft based industries during its formative years which followed the Scandinavian Design Reports belief that this is where innovation starts, where a country's cultural characteristics show themselves and where the standards for manufacture are set. [Marchant, 1985, p. 19.]

According to Jerry Trigwell, who worked with the Kilkenny Design Workshops as a textile designer and consultant for almost twenty years, the textile department initially succeeded with "three designers in print and weave looking after thirty-two companies". [Trigwell, Dublin, 16.12.1992] The equipment of the textile department included tappet and jacquard looms, a fourteen metre print table and silk screen making equipment. [Marchant, 1985, p. 37.] Many small scale items such as placemats and teatowels were woven and printed on the premises. Anything that required a longer print run of fabric was commissioned out into industry. The services of the textile department were in constant demand during the sixties and seventies. Much of the departments early work for the textile industry was in finding new applications for the products, skills and plant of firms that were in decline and through design help them to respond to new market opportunities. However by the mid eighties "the industrial end of things had really taken off coupled with the economic downturn", which resulted in a dwindling number of textile companies". [Trigwell, Dublin, 16.12.1992] When this was combined with the derogatory effect of the American offloading of cheap seconds into the market, we realise some of the basic factors that spelt the end of textiles in Kilkenny Design Workshops. Also, much of what was achieved was with firms that were already in a state of decline. The textile department leaned heavily in the direction of firms whose design needs were greatest, rather than ones that could make the most substantial contribution to the Kilkenny Design Workshops' earnings. Nick Marchant stated that this criticism may also be levelled at other departments within the Workshops:

Kilkenny Design Workshops may in retrospect be criticised for failing to appreciate that it is by leading a nations industry from the front rather than by pushing it from behind, that the best results are likely to be achieved.

[Marchant, 1985, p. 67- 70.]

Yet Jenny Trigwell is adamant that the decline of the textile department, in the late eighties, was inevitable considering the economic difficulties the textile industry was experiencing in every country. [Trigwell, Dublin, 16.12.1992]

Whatever the proposed reasons for its decline, the Kilkenny Design Workshops did succeed in having a positive affect on Irish industry and its craft route into industry should not be discounted because of its inability to sustain these effects.

The Crafts Council which was founded by the Kilkenny Design Workshop in 1971 to take responsibility for the non-industrial handicrafts are now willing to be the link between craft and industry that Irish textile designers need. Leslie Reed of the Crafts Council believes that: "the way of the future for textile designers will be a lot more freelancing combined with commissioning industry to make designs into marketable products". Leslie Reed described the situation of an Irish textile print designer who avoids the costly overheads of a workshop by commissioning industry to print her designs onto fabric and then has the cloth made up into the required product. At the moment her designs and finished products are appropriate for childrens nurseries. This designer not only avoids a middleman who would attempt to drive her price down but the

designer also avoids the dictations of a manufacturer as she designs what she wants for the niche in the market that she herself has selected. Leslie Reed regards this direction as a new and innovative one which more young textile designers are beginning to utilise:

What has been an interesting phenomenon of the last few years is the likes of Tim Roberts, a craft based weaver who is weaving for high fashion. This is a new direction for a workshop to take and this work is very much designer led at both an Irish and international level. Some of his customers now include haute-couturists.

[Reed, Kilkenny, 17.12.1992]

Juxtaposing industry with what was originally the domain of workshop design is also a new direction for the Crafts Council to take and Valerie McGurdy, a workshop printer maintains that the Crafts Council could offer more guidance to small workshops which she feels are basically small industries. She believes that:

the Crafts Council could be of more assistance to craft based businesses With the Crafts Council veering towards more gallery types of textiles and the semi-state bodies such as the Industrial Development Authority supporting larger textile companies I feel that small businesses like mine are very isolated and lacking in support.

[McGurdy, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

As we have seen the Crafts Council does not focus entirely on gallery textiles. In fact when the Kilkenny Design Workshops closed at the end of the last decade the Crafts Council became responsible for both industrial and non-industrial design. There have been doubts expressed as to whether the Crafts Council has the organisational ability to succeed where Kilkenny Design Workshops

did not³. The promotion of design awareness among the whole population I have already described as a means of providing conditions conducive to the improvements of standards in industry. Yet it is impossible to even consider educating the Irish public, until the very association that is to be involved in this process has clarified the role that it is to play in assisting the developing of design in the workshop and industry.

I reiterated Valerie McGurdy's criticism to Leslie Reed of the Crafts Council and he explained their position on textiles in general:

We can't search out those who need our help, the facilities are there waiting to be used. For example we have a fully equipped print workshop here in the Crescent Workshops which has remained untouched for the last two years. Actually as far as I remember only one person has used it in the last four years and we were thinking of winding down the area until two graduates began working there this year.

[Reed, Kilkenny, 17.12.1992]

Lorraine Bowen is one of these graduates. She explained that the workshop will provide her with the opportunity to design, manufacture and generate an income which in turn will probably become air fare. [Bowen, Dublin, 18.12.1992] Lorraine Bowen graduated from the National College of Art and Design in 1992 with first class honours, yet has found it impossible to secure enough employment to consider remaining in Ireland. Obviously the experience of carrying her designs through to a finished product will be invaluable but the Crafts Council could be accused of simply providing graduates with the means to emigrate. The result being

that a foreign employer will reap the benefits. Also the workshop experience is an expensive opportunity. Although the Crescent Workshops are equipped with print tables, silk screens and steaming facilities they lack an exposure unit. This necessitates transportation of the screens from Kilkenny to Dublin for processing and of course transportation back in order to print. When we consider that the graduates will provide the material; which will probably be silk, and their own dyes; which in many cases have to be ordered from England. The Crafts Council is undoubtedly aware that the facilities are limited and that their use may be considered a luxury rather than an opportunity for many graduates. In spite of this the Crafts Council proposes closing the print area because of what is described as a lack of interest in the existing facilities. When we consider the financial burden placed on those graduates who decide to use the workshop before they ever attempt to sell their products, their reluctance is understandable. The financial obstacles which I have just described did have a bearing on Lorraine Bowen's decision to use the workshop, but her lack of alternative options ultimately dictated. If the Crafts Council is to offer any kind of service to textile producers surely it should be a comprehensive one instead of a last resort.

Support is received from other sources but as John Daly commented, "the assistance we receive appears to be less every year". [Daly, Dublin, 17.12.1992] the industrial Development Authority assists financially at all levels of industry but Jerry Trigwell stated that small businesses have been known to suffer while funds were pumped into larger textile companies that eventually went into decline anyway. [Trigwell, Dublin, 22.2.1992] The removal of the

Industrial Development Authority's fixed asset grant has also meant hardship for some of the larger textiles firms. Training schemes are also deemed unsuccessful. According to John Daly:

F.A.S. would give me a grant to take on an apprentice weaver but although this is economically profitable in the short term, eventually I am sending out another weaver to set up another workshop to compete against mine.

[Daly, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

For this reason John Daly believes this scheme needs reassessment; consideration of the lack of career prospects for the trainees and the relatively small market that the workshop textile producer is aiming his product at. He stated that "while I am training an apprentice it means I have a bigger output but not necessarily a bigger demand". [Daly, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

Unfortunately the co-ordinator of the textile department of An Coras Trachtala refused to comment on the level of aid they provide for any area of the textile industry. Thus compounding the fact that more support is needed in terms of both finance and information.

John Daly's reference to the small scale of his supply and demand is quite descriptive of the market he is aiming at. He states "what I have is a niche market and no desire to get too big or too diverse for it". He describes his main export market as American and even his home market is dependent on tourism. His business thrives on its reputation and its sense of history, which appears to have more relevance to his product than any new fashion trends. Although in terms of design, the colours and patterns are neither new or

particularly different to much of the woven products available on the market, but the quality of handle, appearance and packaging is undeniable. In fact the marketing of his woven goods emphasises that he is offering ethnic Irish products more than any specific motif of the items themselves. The scarves, blankets, cushions and shawls have an undeniably Irish feel to them. This is implied by the colours which are recognisably reminiscent of Irish countryside rather than any direct reference to typically Irish motifs such as shamrocks and harps. [See Figure Eight]

This link between Irish culture and craft was particularly well utilised in Kilkenny Design Workshops in the seventies. It resulted in a wide range of Celtic related images, embellishing teatowels and even long print runs of fabric. [See Figure Nine] My initial reaction was one of surprise that the Kilkenny Design Workshops should enter the domain of what I have always viewed as that of tacky souvenirs and regurgitated kitsch. Nick Marchant claims that Kilkenny Design Workshops were actually attempting to stop the scandal of cheap Irish souvenirs by offering the tourist access to well made Irish products that were not decorated with leprechauns or shamrocks but with well chosen images such as motifs from the Book of Kells. [Marchant, 1985, p. 121.]

Jenny Trigwell elaborated on this invention of tradition. She explained that as the home market was so small the only other easily accessible market was that of the tourist. In order to maximise on this recognizable shapes were simply essential to appeal to the foreign visitor. [Trigwell, Dublin, 16.12.1992]

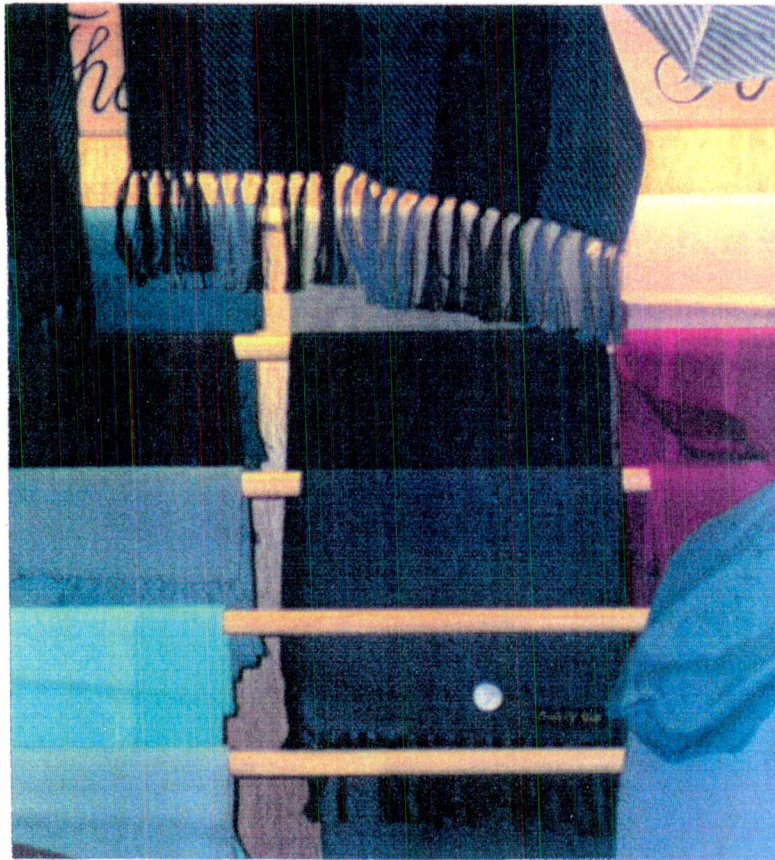


Figure Eight;
 "Crock of Gold" - John Dalys display of woven products
 at the 1992 Mansion House Christmas Fair.

Again we return to the notion of educating the public and while I am not suggesting that we attempt to educate the tourist I believe that we could upgrade their perception of what, if anything, typifies Ireland. Economically I understand that we should supply what is in demand but this may be very disheartening for Irish designers. Valerie McGurdy commented:

I was once requested to print a range of scarves with donkeys on them carrying turf until I am better established this type of cliched Irish imagery sometimes has to be printed. There is little point in printing a selection of wonderful innovative fabrics if the demand, not to mention the price is just not there.

[McGurdy, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

For trade fairs Valerie McGurdy combines her own taste for abstracts and geometrics with a range of Celtic inspired fabrics. The patterns on scarves, waistcoats and cushions that she had on display at the 1992 Mansion House Fair were mainly of an abstract nature. [See Figure Ten] She explained that virtually all her scarves that had ever vaguely Irish symbols printed onto them had already been sold. Valerie McGurdy claims that feeling forced to design for the tourist market has a detrimental effect on the standard and originality of her design work. [McGurdy, Dublin, 17.12.1992] I believe it is also at the expense of her credibility as an innovative textile designer. Leslie Reed commented that the use of Gaelic imagery was very much part of the seventies craft era and that nothing noteworthy is being printed or woven at the moment that incorporates traditional Irish motifs. [Reed, Kilkenny, 17.12.1992]



Figure Ten;
Valerie McGurdy's display of printed and handpainted
fabrics at the 1992 Mansion House Christmas Fair.



Whether considered commendable or not this link between workshop textiles and traditional Irish imagery is being sustained simply because the tourist market is virtually the only market where small scale Irish textile producers are finding an appreciative economic outlet. I believe that this results in an unfortunate backlash affect on Irish textiles as it possibly conditions the Irish public to associate Workshop textiles with tourists. In addition, the motifs and images that ornament these products draw heavily from the past thus perpetuating the idea that workshop textiles have little relevance to the Irish consumer of the nineties.

The Educational Building Society's 1992 Crafts Awards illustrate this point. By firstly providing a basic background to these awards I shall be able to clarify the pertinence of this discussion.

In 1967 the Royal Dublin Society initiated a crafts competition which was to:

provide an opportunity for new artists to have their work assessed by national and international judges to encourage craft workers, both amateur and professional to develop their craft.

[Educational Building Society, 1992, p. 1.]

In the early eighties a decline in support for the handcraft industry in Ireland was recognised and the Royal Dublin Society decided that a "commercial sponsor was needed to support the Awards scheme and therefore the handcraft industry". [Educational Building Society, 1992, p. 3.] The Educational Building Society became that sponsor. The Crafts Awards are now a major part of the Horse Show

at the Royal Dublin Society each year with all award winning items, and entries of a high enough standard displayed on a self contained crafts stand. Eveline Grief, Arts Administrator of the Royal Dublin Society commented that the competition is unique in Ireland and its importance should be judged by the fact that its demise would definitely lead to the decline of crafts in Ireland. [Grief, Dublin, 5.1.1993] In 1992 the Royal Dublin Society suggested that selection of the craft entries should compose the Educational Building Society's 1993 calendar. [Educational Building Society, 1992, p. 2.] This suggestion has resulted in a particularly attractive calendar which is an excellent advertisement for both the organisers and those whose work is displayed within it.

The standard of textiles displayed at the 1992 Crafts Awards was impressive. Particularly affective, fresh and much admired was the work of Lorna McCrave and Lorraine Bowen both of whom won awards for their printed and handpainted fabrics. Equally impressive was the prizewinning, innovative woven work of Milyana Fuscardi. However none of these prizewinners are represented in the calendar. Actually there is no reference whatsoever to the fact that much of the textiles section in the Crafts Awards consisted of new inventive and highly imaginative interpretations of the print and weave process.

Adrian Tahery, Head of Marketing in the Educational Building Society explained their reasons for choosing a particularly traditional aspect of textiles for the calendar. [See Figure Eleven] He explained that it was decided that the Irish public and particularly



Figure Eleven;
Selected from the Prizewinners of the Textiles section of the E. B. S. Crafts
Awards for use in the Educational Building Society's 1993 Calender.

the rural population would not understand or relate to the "more modern textiles" and obviously the Educational Building Society does not wish to alienate their existing or potential customers.
[Tahery, Dublin, 7.1.1993]

The Educational Building Society is not a design related organisation but this decision has denied creative textile designers access to a huge audience. The Irish public has also unwittingly been denied an invaluable opportunity to extend its knowledge of what new Irish designers are creating today.

This calendar which separates twenty five years of the Crafts Awards could have been a definite step towards increasing the design consciousness of the Irish consumer. By purposefully limiting this access to new and original textiles, I believe the entire Irish public's abilities to be educated in design have been underestimated and ignored.

Irish culture has developed a distinct leaning towards literature and the spoken word rather than the visual arts yet this is not an entirely unique position. It is similar to the situation Scandinavia found itself in earlier this century. What is different is that the Scandinavians have succeeded in developing their visually creative skills.

However as long as this literary inclination and the preservation of the Irish language takes precedence over the development of the Irish school child's design skills we will continue to have

generation after generation who are only partially visually aware.

This uncomprehension of design and its benefits does not create an easy link between the consumer and designer. It creates a situation where the consumer does not see good design as relevant to them personally or their surroundings. I believe that the Irish public's attitude to handcrafted work is a prime example of this. If the Irish consumer can learn to realise the intrinsic value of small scale processes, such as workshop textiles, then the Irish manufacturer will be forced to do likewise. Obviously I acknowledge the importance of workshop textiles as an end in themselves, but I maintain that the union of craft, design and industry could mean the expansion and not simply the existence of Irish textiles.

Endnotes for Chapter 3:

1. I found it difficult to obtain recorded, factual information on the current position of craft textiles in Ireland.
2. I do not suggest that they invest into synthetics either, I propose that Irish textiles realise Ireland's economic limitations and concentrate on producing highly specialised fashion and furnishing fabrics. The small size of this peripheral island could thus become part of our marketing strategy instead of a hindrance to our development.
3. Industrial designers have requested what they describe as basic information regarding industrial design. The Crafts Council response was that the information was indefinitely unavailable.

CHAPTER 4

In 1976 the Irish Textiles Federation provided target figures for the textile industry. They predicted a rise in employment from 22,000 in 1974 to a figure of 44,000 in 1986. [Irish Textile Federation, 1976, p. 25.] These projections were undoubtedly optimistic, hardly accurate and were certainly never achieved. In fact the current employment figure for the textile industry is 7,800. [Industrial Development Authority, 1992, p. 1.] These employment figures indicate exactly how drastic the decline of the Irish textile industry has been. The 1992 figure as quoted by the Industrial Development Authority is far from impressive but if in the next decade Irish textiles could maintain this employment figure then this could well be regarded as an achievement.

By consulting various organisations involved with the promotion of the Irish textile industry I will attempt to clarify the directions that the industry could take. However as both F.A.S., The Training and Development Authority, and The Textiles Federation are awaiting the publication of reports on the present situation of the industry, I have been requested not to directly quote my sources but where necessary I shall refer to the relevant organisation as having supplied the relevant information.

Within this chapter I initially discuss the relevance of research to the Irish textile industry. I subsequently analyse the importance computer aided design will have for both the print and weave

industry. I concentrate primarily on the print industry as this has been identified as an area of possible development for the coming decade. Finally I discuss the role of the designer in the future of Irish textiles and the importance that design must have in the manufacturing process if Irish textiles are to expand their markets.

If Ireland is to survive in a competitive environment with industries using advanced technology, consideration must be given to developing a policy of high level capitalisation with back up support being provided by access to existing research and development activities. I concede that the technology base of the textiles sector has already benefited from significant levels of investment and new entrants to the textile sector, which have occurred over the last three decades. [Sectoral Development Committee, 1983, p. 21 -25.]

But as I have previously stated investment was primarily in new industries, usually synthetics with government grants to new firms substantially exceeding the adaptation grants to traditional industries. These adaptation grants were essential to the traditional textile sector to assist them in modernising their premises and equipment and therefore improving efficiency. The high level of grant aid to the new textiles sectors was only justifiable if it had ran concurrently with an intense policy of revitalisation for the traditional textiles sectors. In fact by the early nineties with increasing domestic labour costs and an increasing rate of import penetration from developing countries, efforts to improve the level of innovation, efficiency and expertise in every area of

Irish textiles has become a necessity. Finally this is being realised and a spokesman for the Irish Textiles Federation recently stated:

Today research is not merely confined to the man-made fibre part of the industry but is also based in natural fibre products. The emphasis on research into the traditional sectors of the industry is admittedly a new and recent direction that the industry is taking but we believe will have increasing importance in the coming decade.
[Irish Textiles Federation, Dublin, 12.1.1993.]

Yet this is a nineties solution to what has been an integral part of Ireland's competitors textile industries for many years. With the result that even the Irish textiles that were always recognised for their quality are finding it increasingly difficult to retain a foothold, even in the home market. Pascal Donnelly, senior buyer with Hickey's commented:

Now barely 2 per cent of our fabrics are Irish and those that are, are mainly for the tourist market; Americans looking for tweed or linen. Having said that we used to buy Moygashel linen but found Italian linen was not only cheaper but met modern requirements. It is washable and comes in bright colours and also doesn't crease as much as Irish linen.

[Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1993]

Government aid to research in the textile industry is generally provided through the form of assistance to specialised institutes. However this aid can only stretch so far and its benefits to date have been limited. Myles Williams, manager of Ascot Interiors explained that some of the problems are of a very basic nature. He commented that Youghal did wool jacquards and damasks for the

furnishing market but their fabric puckered when machine sown. "Basically Youghal hadn't solved the problem while other foreign textile firms had". [Williams, Dublin, 12,12.1992] Even Irish tweeds which have always been considered noteworthy are deemed by some to fail modern requirements. Sharon Hobbs, an interior designer who works exclusively with Kevin Kelly Interiors Ltd. commented that in a space of four years she has never sold any Irish tweed. She commented that the tweeds do not feel particularly user friendly and are more suited to offices than homes. [Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993] Thus Irish tweeds through lack of research into softer blends perhaps, are effectively losing an invaluable position in the large home furnishing market.

I consulted F.A.S. The Training and Development Authority which is involved with supplying aid for textiles at both workshop and industrial level about the dilemma facing the traditional natural fibres sector's inability to succeed in the modern market. A spokesman stated that the pressures that exist and that are having a detrimental affect on the textile industry in Ireland and indeed Europe are going to intensify over the coming decade.

If the research and development that is made in any area of textiles is small but significant then we will weather the storm, but that is all we can hope to achieve.

[F.A.S., Dublin, 14.1.1993]

Research is seen as a possible method of establishing a competitive advantage over the textile industries of the developing countries. yet with much of the research being executed outside the industry but applicable to it surely the developing countries are also in a

position to avail of the relevant research information. In fact this could explain the high level of technology in some developing countries that has become more evident over the last decade. If access to fibre research is combined with positively low wage rates, developing countries have a tremendous ability to penetrate the developed and industrialised markets, as the retail sector has testified. This situation will become even more exacerbated in the coming decade with the possibility of world trade liberalisation. Therefore the F.A.S. stance of making small but significant research development could be tantamount to economic suicide.

I suggest that Ireland avails of European fibre research and utilise the grant aid for the implementation of this research. Thus raising the amount of finance available for adaptation grants which would enable our natural fibres sectors to expand and not merely, weather the storm, as F.A.S. suggests.

However the Textile Federation disagreed with this approach on the basis that Ireland is already behind in research and would only succeed in falling even further behind with development of that research. [Irish Textile Federation, 12.1.1993]

I maintain that this is precisely the mistaken attitude that prevailed in the sixties when Ireland concentrated on investing into synthetics at the expense of the natural fibre sectors. When Ireland initially invested huge sums of money into synthetics, Europe was already realising that high technology man-made fibres was simply not enough to stem the flow of cheap mass produced

fabrics from developing countries. European textiles were already searching for another alternative in the late seventies and early eighties. Almost a decade later Ireland is still trailing after Europe.

Leslie Reed of the Crafts Council clarified exactly how basic the difficulties are that the Irish textile industry is facing.

Botany Weaving Mills produce a fairly upmarket furnishing fabric yet they have to import the yarns, weave them here, send them to England for finishing and then they are brought home again. Consider how difficult it is to make a profit after that Consider how incredible it is that nowhere in Ireland finishes cloth. Only recently the International Wool Secretariat identified the major problem of the Irish weave industry as being a lack of development in finishing techniques.

[Reed, Kilkenny, 17.12.92]

Even on a workshop scale the problems are of a similarly fundamental nature. John Daly, a workshop weaver commented that it is ironic that the colours he uses have a very Irish feel to them when in fact they are all pre-dyed and bought in from England or America. He stated that only one or possibly two companies are now dyeing Irish wool in Ireland. Ennis Dyers are an example. According to John Daly even the quality of the imported yarn is often better, definitely softer and finer. [Daly, Dublin, 17.12.1992]

Irish textiles cannot hope to develop competent research facilities into fibre blends whilst such fundamental necessities as a finishing plant are lacking.

Ironically F.A.S. identifies the natural fibres as being a potential area for development:

If any growth is likely to take place it is likely to be in the woollen sectors Lighter fabrics are becoming increasingly important with research into blending fibres such as wools and linens leading the way. It is imperative that Ireland researches these areas where we have a historically respected background.

[F.A.S., Dublin, 14.1.1993]

I agree with the above proposal but I believe it is unfortunate that the potential of Ireland's indigenous textiles was not realised in the early sixties when there was a prospect for growth.

Interestingly F.A.S. identifies printed textiles as being an area for possible development in the coming decade. They regard print as being previously undervalued in Ireland and perceive the huge home furnishings market as presenting print companies with potential growth opportunities. [F.A.S., Dublin, 14.1.1993] Jerry Trigwell disputes this claim, believing that the vast capital necessary to undertake such a venture will make it impossible for any new print firms to establish themselves in Ireland and that existing print firms financially could not adequately respond to the challenge of the home furnishings market. [Trigwell, Dublin, 22.2.1993] One of the largest printed textile firms in Ireland currently in operation is Texprint in Dublin.

A spokeswoman for Texprint explained that in order to achieve growth in the textile market the firm prints onto an increasingly wide range of products; from T-shirts to long print runs. The company

maintains that it is not to make an impact on the home furnishing market at any level was beyond the capital or equipment of most Irish print companies. [Texprint, Dublin, 18.1.1993] The present economic recession exerts a further constraint on the print industry.

In the 1970s a survey estimated that about 70 per cent of fabrics were dyed, 25 per cent were sold as white and only 5 per cent were printed. [Holme, 1982, pp. 30 -31.] Therefore perhaps the direction the Irish print industry could take is in developing new markets or expansion into areas that are not readily recognised as being the domain of print. For example simulated woven affects can now be created with the aid of computers. The computerised reproduced woven image can have any design or pattern placed over it, thus creating a weave look alike, but with the definition of print. In the past advances in textile printing from a design viewpoint have come from finding novel ways of applying colour and form to material. In the future advances in accuracy of dyeing and registration and grater image reproducibility will be possible because of computer technology. However because of the lack of training and expertise the rapid progress of technology has not yet been matched by an equal development in the ability of Irish designers to exploit it as a creative tool. Integrating design and manufacture through computers overcomes the old problems of accuracy whilst also being very efficient. In terms of design Richard Stoyles claims that:

we are seeing multicolour blending, stylised forms, rhythmic designs, environmental patterns, superimposed design patterns applied to texture and trompe l'oeil designs.
[Stoyles, 1991, p. 13]

Similar benefits are of course available for weave, with greater accuracy in dyeing of yarns or in the creating of patterns only the beginning of possible applications. Computer aided design is an easily accessible method of developing the Irish textile industry from both the manufacturers the technicians and the designers viewpoints. As yet there are no comprehensive computer design courses for textile designers in Ireland and training in computer aided design will become increasingly essential over the coming decade if Irish textiles attempt expansion.

These developments are a sample of the processes that are changing the role of the textile designer for the future. This would indicate that as future professional designers textile students need to be adequately equipped. This necessitates the filtering of computer research through to Irish design colleges faster than has been the norm. I realise that the workload of textile designers is shifting rapidly because of the computer. With the result that colleges cannot financially keep up with this technological metamorphosis. Therefore textile courses must educate students to develop a broad view of how their work is applied, whilst also having very specific skills. Aidan Geraghty of the Industrial Development Authority believes that there will be great opportunities for designers in the future but not in the old context of a designer behind a drawing board. As a large company in Ireland

is small by international standards, Irish firms often find it difficult to justify employment of a designer. Therefore it is the designers themselves who will have to diversify.

Aidan Geraghty believes that Irish designers should form consultancies, giving their assistance to perhaps ten companies at once.

With experts in different areas of textiles working together, perhaps with a graphic designer also. Every design demand of the company could be met by the one consultancy.¹
[Geraghty, Dublin, 14.12.1992]

This would imply that textile manufacturers will also have to be educated as they will need to know precisely what is available on the market. Unfortunately Irish management has not been known to possess a great understanding of design. Pascal Donnelly of Hickey's stated that twenty years ago Irish textile companies were slow to realise the importance of keeping with trends. He believes that Irish industry's protectionist, insulated background could have contributed to its inability to recognise outside influences. Since the late sixties the Irish consumer was bombarded with images of what they could obtain. Many Irish companies did not even have their own designers, they simply copied existing fabrics. [Donnelly, Dublin, 16.1.1993] Sharon Hobbs has a similar criticism of the standard of Irish fabric design. She described a Moygashel print as being predominantly floral which is always in fashion yet the Moygashel design was dull and old fashioned in comparison to the originality and vibrancy of some floral fabrics from British firms. [Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993] It seems that Irish textile firms jeopardised themselves by cutting back on designers or in fact never established any design base at all. Irish manufacturers need to realise that many of our best graduates are inadequately employed in

as well by interaction. I believe, this is the only way to justify employment of a designer. I think it is the only way to justify employment of a designer. I think it is the only way to justify employment of a designer.

When I say this, I believe that I am saying that the designer is not a technician, but a person who is able to create a new design.

It is not in the field of design that the designer is a technician, but a person who is able to create a new design. It is not in the field of design that the designer is a technician, but a person who is able to create a new design.

There is a very real danger that the designer will be seen as a technician, and this will lead to a loss of his creative freedom. The designer is not a technician, but a person who is able to create a new design. The designer is not a technician, but a person who is able to create a new design. The designer is not a technician, but a person who is able to create a new design.

this country and that our foreign competitors are often extremely quick to exploit this under used resource. Many Irish textile companies of the previous few decades appear to have assumed that design is something that is added rather than an integral activity that should have affected every area of their work. Creative design is not a clip on extra but a fundamental necessity. It appears that Irish designers, whether within companies or in consultancies, will have to convey the obvious message that the success of our textile manufacturing depends on the quality of its design product. According to the spokesman for F.A.S. Irish textiles will have to be intensively marketed as unique Irish products if they are to succeed on the world market. [F.A.S., Dublin, 14.1.1993] However as Sharon Hobbs pointed out, marketing alone will not be sufficient to convince either the home or the foreign market that Irish textiles are worth purchasing. [Hobbs, Dublin, 4.1.1993] I firmly believe that Irish designers and craftspeople with government and industrial support could competently redirect Irish textiles and assist in the production of textiles that are worth purchasing.

This chapter has attempted to evaluate the prospects of the Irish textile industry. It has analysed the contribution textile research could make to the future of the industry while also discussing the role that computer aided design should play in the development of Irish textiles. This shows that these factors will be important elements in the continued existence of Irish textiles. However a key factor will be the participation of Irish designers in the process.

Contemporary textile designers are all too aware that successful design practice requires the capacity to define and analyse problems and to conceive solutions while anticipating consequences. Unfortunately it appears that Irish designers were given scant opportunity to be little more than cosmetic stylists or technicians. The Irish textile industry cannot persist in ignoring the need for a definite design base within the industry if the industry is to expand or even continue to survive.

Endnotes for Chapter 4

1. Judith Hoad recommends a similar direction for designers and craftspeople to take.

If a group of spinners and weavers with some help from a dyer and some sales assistance could pool their resources there is a high priced market waiting for them.

Hoad, 1987, p. 125.]

Notes for Chapter 1

Within each document a similar structure for language and

orthography is used.

If a group of documents is available with
some help from a typist and the other
assistance could pool their efforts
there is a high chance of getting
for them.

Long, 1957, p. 111

CONCLUSION

The primary economic policies and decisions which have had depressing effects on the growth and development of the Irish textile industry over the last four decades were discussed within this thesis as a background to the current situation of the industry. The subsequent examination of the Irish textile industry, within the context of the European and World textile market, was intended to further clarify the reasons for the stagnation of this industry. As a direct consequence of this information I attempted a reassessment of Ireland's situation with a view to locating a possible route forward for the industry. The resultant discussion related to the main factors which I perceive will have a significant bearing on the success rate of Ireland's future in the production of textiles.

In compiling this information I found that many commentators belittled the Irish textile industry. This dismissive attitude is understandable. However even preceding the 1950s and the industry's rapid decline, the relative stability of Irish textiles related directly to its protected industrial background. Therefore the high levels of investment into synthetics, at the expense of adaptation grants to the traditional textile sectors, coupled with Ireland's entry into the European Community resulted in economic disaster for much of what remained of the textile industry. Yet, the decline of much of this industry was essentially the decline of textile companies that did not possess even a semblance of a design foundation, nor even recognised the need for a strong design base

within industry. Even today, design in the Irish textile industry is often confined to a specialist function and not considered an integral part of the entire production and marketing process.

It is my belief that the strength of design will ultimately decide the rate of growth of the Irish textile industry and that the development of the design consciousness of the Irish consumer should correspond directly to this growth. I maintain that industry should turn towards Irish craft textile producers for assistance as it is here that the creative aspects of textile design are being utilised¹.

If Irish textiles are to make an economically viable contribution to the European and World textile markets, the training of competent, creative designers will become increasingly important². The future of Irish textiles will also be dependent on research into fibre blends and the integration of new finishing processes into production³. With increasing pressure coming from the potential liberalisation of world trade and even as recent as near to home as the February 1993 Budget⁴, the key factor that will differentiate quality Irish textiles from those of European and World textiles will be the promotion of unique, specialised and individualistic Irish textiles that are specifically Irish⁵. As Tarlach de Blacam states:

We have either strayed too far from our roots or have not been adventurous enough. Customers have said we are too Italian or too English and we have paid the price. We have sold the product badly⁶.

At a menswear show in Paris during February 1993 there was a French stand under the banner 'l'Irlandais' - sports jackets, trousers, sweaters, belts and scarves portraying the Irish country look. According to Tarlach de Blacam: "It amounted to the Irish story in total look and done much better than anybody from Ireland had done it, and all made in France". [Tarlach de Blacam, 1993, p. 15.].

It is my belief that Irish designers, craftspeople, industry and the government have to choose : Irish textiles could be considered unredeemable, as De Blacam's statement would suggest, or this motionless position of Irish textiles could become the fresh starting point for a new and innovative phase of textiles in Ireland.

Endnotes for Conclusion

1. A spokesperson for Blarney Woollen Mills stated that European demand for Irish designed hand crafted products has dramatically increased this year. [Head to Toe, R.T.E., 23.2.1993]
2. Computer aided design could obviously be of great assistance to Irish textile designers and the future of the industry.
3. Paul Costelloe's 1993 summer range used Irish linen yet the linen was finished in Hong Kong.
4. According to Lord, the ".... 5 per cent budget increase could lead to loss of 10,000 jobs" in the clothing and textile industry.
5. A spokesman for F.A.S. recommends Irish textile designers to utilise elements from Ireland's heritage but to avoid the traditional cliched Celtic look.
6. Tarlach de Blacam is the owner of Inish Meain Knitwear.

Indicators for Conclusion

1. The advertisement for British Overseas Airline, which was designed for the London office, had a very different character from the advertisement for the same airline which was designed for the London office. The advertisement for the London office was designed for the London office, and the advertisement for the London office was designed for the London office.

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