ALEXANDER THOM

&

COMPANY LIMITED

– A HISTORY OF –

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INTRODUCTION

Printing is a vital part of Ireland's national visual heritage and, therefore, like all the other arts and crafts, its history deserves to be preserved. Ireland has a printing tradition that would make any country proud, one that can be traced right back to the sixteenth century.

Over the last twenty years many changes have been seen within the entire history of printing. So many in fact, that in the space of a single generation all the advances of modern technology have over-shadowed the actual skills and crafts which preceded them.

To aid in the preservation of our printing history, this thesis aims to give a more complete picture of one of Ireland's foremost early printing companies, Alexander Thom and Company Limited. This company, which rose from humble beginnings in the early nineteenth century, went on to become the Queen's printer in Ireland. It survived both World Wars and provided a continually updated and efficient printing service up to the time it amalgamated with the Hely Group in 1962 and became Hely Thoms. This in turn led to the acquisition of Hely Thom by the Jefferson Smurfit Group in 1970. With a history that spans almost a century and a half it acts as the perfect vehicle by which to examine Irish printings as it developed through those years.

There are to date a few sources which trace the company's history until c1936 and these vary in detail. I have attempted to put these accounts in context and give a sound history to this point. This is preceded by a brief outline of the social and economic background of the 1800s.

There are, however, no documents in existence which give a complete account of the firm's output, development and activities between 1936 and 1962 and this is where my thesis hopes to break new ground.

I was fortunate to locate an ex-employee of the firm who began his working life with them as an apprentice in 1935 and was still with them in 1970 when they were taken over by the Jefferson Smurfit Group. This man, Mr Douglas Ewen, has proved to be an excellent source of information on all aspects of the firm and the knowledge I gained from him through various interviews provides the

backbone for most of the material covered. His memory is remarkable. Where possible I have tried to verify the information provided by him with other sources and he has proved infallible.

Mr Ewen's account of his career in the company provides an excellent insight into the workings of the company, as he experienced work in many different departments and held various managerial positions. The supplementary information provided by him on machinery, developments, jobs, clients and the day-to-day running of the firm could not be surpassed by any other source.

The final chapter in the thesis concentrates on Thom's Directory, a tremendous almanac that survives to this day. The contents and structure of the Directory is outlined and reference is made to various articles written over the years (particularly in the late 1800s) about the directory and the esteem in which it has been held since its very first publication in 1844. An attempt has been made to trace its history up to the present day.

CHAPTER I

Table II COMPARATIVE MANUFACTURING EMPLOYMENT
1841-1901. London 1861, 1891
Selected occupations as % of manufacturing employment

	1861		1891	
	M.	F.	M.	F.
Furniture	17.6	5.69	16.8	5.1
Metal Engineering	16.8	0.72	17.1	0.8
Ships	3.7	—	2.0	—
Print and paper	8.56	4.0	13.1	10.0
Precision Inds.	6.67	0.47	7.48	0.85
Tanning	4.3	1.3	4.1	1.98
Food, drink	5.2	1.3	4.97	5.1
Textiles	5.1	8.3	2.2	4.8
Clothing	23.1	74.8	18.8	61.9
Chemicals	3.8	0.5	3.9	1.2
Misc.	5.1	2.8	9.5	8.2

Edinburgh, 1841-1901. Selected occupations as % of total
manufacturing workforce.

	1841	1861	1881	1891	1901
Printing	10.19	14.05	16.42	15.69	17.44
Metal engineering	12.9	13.75	14.12	14.17	17.71
Clothing	47.23	41.33	33.3	32.3	27.66
Furniture	10.99	9.55	9.12	7.19	7.97
Leather	2.38	2.29	2.08	2.00	1.65
Food, drink	8.11	8.53	10.02	12.23	10.89
Paper	0.13	0.65	1.65	2.11	2.99

Sources: Gareth Stedman-Jones, *Outcast London* (Oxford 1971)
R.Q. Gray, *The labour aristocracy in Victorian Edinburgh* (Oxford 1976)

Figure 1.

Variety of factories using steam power[6]

	Total	A	B	C	D
Metal Works	31	15	1	1	14
Brewing & malting	19	16		1	2
Distilling	7	6			1
Corn & flour	5	1	3	1	
Printing	11	4	7		
Chemicals	12	6	5	1	
Coffee mill	1	1			
Saw mill	7	2	3	2	
Animal products	12	8	2	2	
Bakery & biscuits	11	11			
Paper	2	2			
Textiles	1	1			
Bottles	1				

Figure 2.

CHAPTER 1

A social and economic history of printing in Ireland in brief.

When one looks at the social and economic side of Dublin's history from the famine years to the 1930s, one notes that there was a major decline in the manufacturing of luxurious goods, such as household commodities, crafts etc and also a decline - probably due to lack of finance - in the clothing industry. However, we can note that there was relative success within the industries of printing, metal work and engineering and there was also a sudden increase in the food and drink employee scales which was inevitably reflected in the success of the brewing industry.

But Dublin was not alone in the fall of industrial employment at the apparent peak of the Industrial Revolution. London and Edinburgh were also heavily stricken. Co-incidentally, London and Dublin shared a remarkable likeness both in decline and prosperity, each having a drop in the clothing industry and a rise in the printing industry (Figure 1.). (Daly 1984, p.20).

The minority of Dublin's industries were outside the city's boundary, with the main development area cropping up to the west of the city because of the water power facilities from the River Liffey and River Dodder. A report on the city's water supply in 1854 stated:

> 'The principal seat of manufacturing about the Metropolis is between
> Old Bawn and Dublin. Here we have calico printing, iron manufacture,
> cotton spinning, cutlery, paper making, cloth making as well as saw mills,
> flour mills, oil mills etc.'

But within many areas there was little satisfaction to be had from hydro-power and this led to the adaptation to steam power. A report on 'smoke nuisances' put out in 1864 shows us the locations and types of factories using steam power.(Figure 2.)

Total: A (South-West quarter of the city)
            B (South-East)
            C (North-East)
            D (North-West)

(Daly, 1984, p. 22).

The Industrial Revolution was formed on a basis of iron and steam. Both of which were applied to the printing press of the early nineteenth century. A quote from a book on the Typographical Association sums up the introduction of the iron press:

> 'The Earl of Stanhope's iron press (1798) was stronger and more accurate than the old wooden press and allowed a bigger sheet to be printed with less effort. Various 'improved' Stanhope presses, such as the 'Columbian'; 'Albion' and 'Imperial', were brought out in the first quarter of the nine teenth century. The Stanhope press did little however to increase the rate of output, which remained at about 250 impressions per hour.'

(Musson, 1954, Page 15).

The printing industry experienced its first revolutionary development with the invention of a cylinder printing machine driven by steam. It was the experiments of Friedrich König from 1803 - 1814 that gave us the first steam cylinder press (Figure 3.). He followed this in the same year with a twin cylinder machine which was also a perfector (printed both sides of a sheet at the same time). (Tarr, 1949,p.24).

Quickly realising the advantages of this printing press, John Walter II of 'The Times' newspaper, installed two of these machines. On 28 November 1814, The Times was for the first time 'printed by steam'

(Musson,1954,p.15).

The paper industry also utilised the power of water and these firms were located mainly in rural County Dublin. This said though, paper production was on a serious decline around the 1880s and 1890s, with the factory inspector reporting in 1888.

'In 1875 there were ten paper mills operating in the Dublin area, now only six are working' (Daly, 1984, p.45).

By 1895 the number of mills had decreased to five and one was on the verge of closure. A paper manufacturer at this time was quoted as saying:

> 'The price of the class of paper made by him has declined by 55% within the last ten years.' (Daly, 1984, p.45).

On a better note, the printing industry did not suffer as badly, in fact, it actually thrived and there were large increases in the city's printing firms employment wise. Within these companies, there was no gender discrimination and this is something that has lasted to present day printing and bookbinding firms. Dublin held high a tradition for the print industry and in 1864 there were
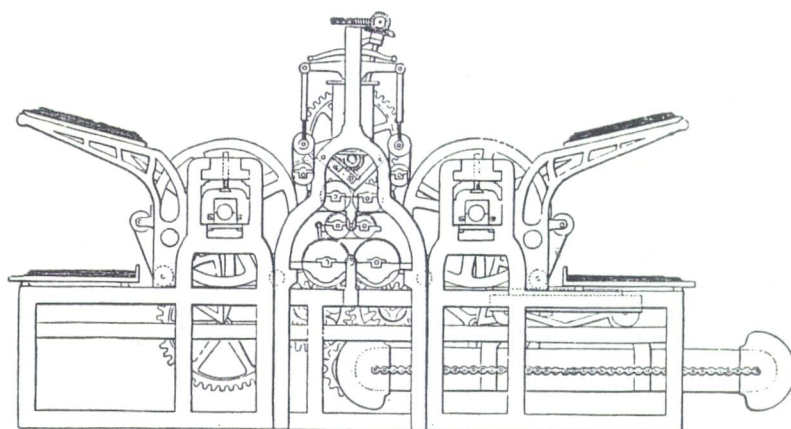
Figure 3.

Figure 4.

eleven factories singled out as print works by Dublin Corporation while surveying industrial resources. All of these print works were now using the quite new technology of steam presses.

In 1870 factory returns showed that there was now an overwhelming 73 printing companies, employing one thousand and sixty-eight workers within the Dublin area. This comprised one third of all printing works in the country, half of all employment and over half of all the machinery used in this particular industry in the country.

With the help of twenty-five binding plants in Ireland, this gave employment to 867 more workers, mainly women. There was relatively no change in employment numbers by 1895 but there was an increase in printers to 2997, the employment of 276 lithographers and a slight decrease in binding workers to 811 employees.

The pre-dominance of women in the binding industry may have been as a result of the perception of needlework as being a woman's skill, and the fact that the work involved was relatively light. Bookbinding mainly involved the gathering of pages, glueing their spines, stitching them together (mechanically or by hand), and then covering them with the required material, leather, cardboard etc.

The illustration opposite (Figure 4.), (Whetton,1946, p.391) shows a woman at work on an industrial sewing machine. A quote from Practical Printing and Binding states:

> 'The skilled hand sewer can average only three books per hour, therefore machines are necessary where quantities are large. The principles involved are based upon hand work with a few modifications involving various stitches which are performed on the machine'. (Whetton, 1946,p390).

The printing trade can be divided into two distinct categories in Dublin. Firstly, companies like James Duffy, M A Gill and others were mainly concerned with the printing of books and pamphlets. Their force was encapsulated in looking after the needs of a mainly catholic nationalist market. M A Gill's firm was founded in 1858 and directed by the Home Rule MP Mr H J Gill. The print works here was described in Industries of Ireland published in 1888 as 'the chief publishing house of the catholic hierarchy, many of the publications being works on catholic devotional subjects.' Some of the main jobs that came out of the firm included Irish poetry, fiction and romance, political pamphlets and his-
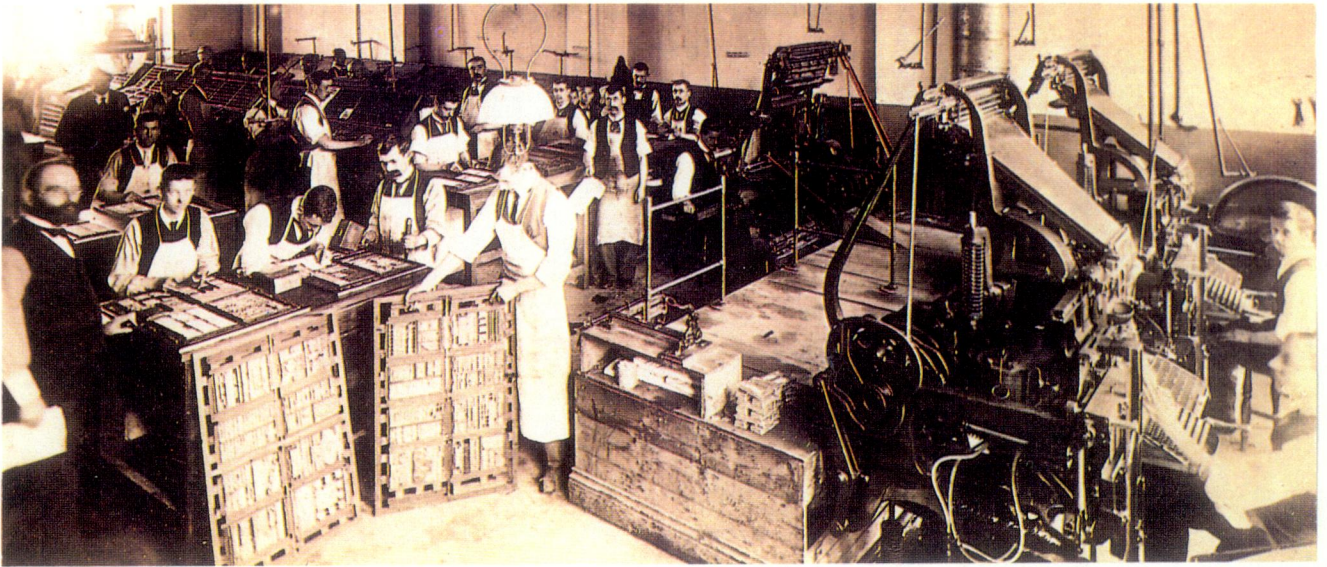
Figure 5(a).

Figure 5(b).

tory, as well as a Catholic magazine called the <u>Irish Monthly</u>.

> The James Duffy company was also heavily influenced by the Catholic religion and race. It once described its working outlook as 'The newest Catholic and national publications, as well as the choicest gems of literature which Irish genius and Irish piety have given to the world'
>
> (Daly, 1984, p. 46).

Duffy's was one of the longest standing publishing houses in Dublin and it was also directed by another Home Rule MP Thomas Sexton. It would have been unthinkable back then to suggest that an English printing firm would have been capable of printing such material, taking into account the differences in political and religious beliefs, but with that in mind, Alexander Thom owed much of his income to the fact that he was the Government Printer and also the Queen's appointed printer to Ireland.

The other category in printing in the 1800s was slightly more reserved and conservative in comparison to the afore one. It made way for the printing of rather miscellaneous items of print such as business account books, commercial billheads for all kinds of emporiums, posters, calling cards, calendars, etc etc. The scope which this area of printing covered was heavily reliant on local and parochial work contracts. It would be wrong to assume that they only supplied the Dublin area - they also supplied printed matter throughout the entire country. Remarkably, a company called H & R Wood, established in 1874, claimed to be also supplying English customers.

The Hely printing firm which eventually went on to amalgamate with Alexander Thom's in 1962, was also a driving force in the production of stationery. In 1888 they laid claim to the employment of 200 people, obviously both sexes, from the reference photographs which I obtained from the National Print Museum. (Figure 5.a and 5.b).

There was also the firm which stood apart because of a difference in employees - this was Cherry and Smalldridge who, specialising in the production of paper bags and trade stationery, were one of the largest sources of female employment in the city for its time.

> In the adjoining tables a more detailed breakdown of the male and female employment figures is given for that time (Daly, 1984, pp. 50,51).
>
> (Figure 6.a and 6.b).

Thom's operated an apprenticeship scheme employing young boys with a strict

DUBLIN MANUFACTURING EMPLOYMENT, MALE AND FEMALE 1841-1911. Table I

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
Male Manuf. workers	20,110	20,992	20,192	18,580	17,628	16,751	17,755	18,067
% M. workforce	33.4	28.5	27.2	25.2	23.9	22.8	20.95	20.47
Metal workers	2,918	3,130	3,088	3,287	3,153	2,751	3,217	4,065
% Manuf. Empl.	14.5	14.9	15.29	17.69	17.88	16.4	18.3	22.49
Tanning	1,247	1,268	972	758	491	360	194	164
% Manuf. Emp.	6.2	6.04	4.8	4.07	2.78	2.14	1.1	0.9
Furniture	2,513	2,575	3,216	2,663	2,139	1,993	2,112	2,133
% Manuf. Emp.	12.49	12.26	15.92	14.3	12.13	11.89	12.0	11.8
Carriages etc.	1,133	1,120	1,051	1,193	1,061	1,099	1,402	1,238
% Manuf. Emp.	5.63	5.33	5.20	6.42	6.01	6.56	7.97	6.85
Textiles	1,749	1,350	1,086	942	547	406	273	308
% Manuf. Emp.	8.69	6.43	5.37	5.06	3.10	2.42	1.55	1.70
Food Drink etc.	1,102	1,592	1,339	1,411	1,870	2,250	2,472	2,234
% Manuf. Emp.	5.47	7.58	6.63	7.59	10.6	13.43	14.06	12.36
Printing	1,007	1,279	1,563	1,841	1,899	2,176	2,154	1,950
%	5.0	6.09	7.74	9.9	10.77	12.99	12.25	10.79
General Manuf.	185	167	265	383	846	1,019	1,576	1,950
	—	—	—	—	—	—	8.96	10.79

Figure 6(a).

Table I Cont.

	1841	1851	1861	1871	1881	1891	1901	1911
F. Manuf. Workers	13,940	16,968	17,977	16,543	14,744	14,389	14,007	14,250
% F. workforce	34.4	34.4	35.7	35.8	32.24	34.5	31.23	31.75
Furniture	185	428	957	795	770	688	733	517
% Manuf. Emp.	1.32	2.52	5.32	4.8	5.22	4.78	5.23	4.03
Paper	21	9	79	256	429	433	457	486
	—	—	—	1.54	2.9	3.00	3.26	3.79
Textiles	1,276	1,507	1,056	910	908	606	608	705
%	9.15	8.88	5.87	5.5	6.15	4.21	4.34	5.50
Dress	10495	13,024	14,324	11,835	10,339	10,308	9,198	7,400
%	75.2		79.6	71.5	70.1	71.6	65.6	57.73
Printing	176	330	549	720	712	857	854	764
%	1.26	1.94	3.05	4.35	4.82	5.95	6.09	5.96
Food	233	343	425	336	366	514	673	866
%	1.67	2.02	2.36	2.03	2.48	3.57	4.8	6.75
Gen. Manuf.	449	38	12ᶠ	1,081	927	738	1,296	1,735
%	—	—	—	6.53	6.28	5.12	9.25	13.5

Figure 6(b).

regime, this will be discussed in greater detail at a later stage. This is the back-drop against which Alexander Thom and Company Limited grew in the 1800s.

CHAPTER II

A FAMOUS
IRISH PRINTING HOUSE
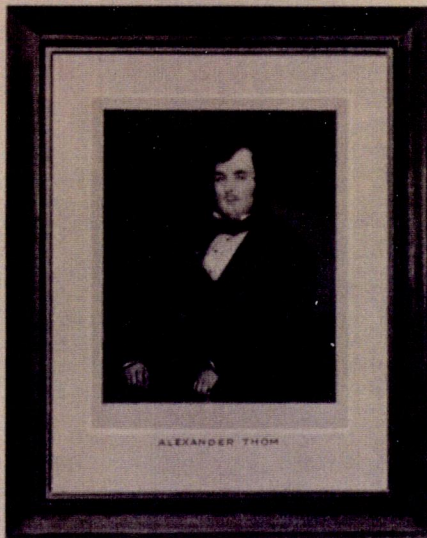
ALEXANDER THOM

ALEX. THOM & CO., LTD.
1825 —————————————— 1936

Figure 7.

CHAPTER II

A history of Alexander Thom and Company Limited from 1812 to 1936

Alexander Thom (Figure 7.)was the son of a Scotsman Walter Thom who came to Dublin in 1813 to edit the Dublin Correspondent. Shortly afterwards he took over the editorship of Faulkner's Dublin Journal, a Government subsidised evening paper issued tri-weekly and printed and published at 15 Parliament Street. He was handed the proprietorship of the newspaper in 1819 and held its editorship until his death in June 18, 1824. Walter Thom had attained a reputation as a miscellaneous writer on historical and statistical matters before leaving Scotland and these interests were obviously passed on to his son who later became a respected statician and the founder of the most comprehensive almanac ever printed.

There is some doubt as to the date Alexander Thom was brought to Dublin. This is mentioned in an article titled 'The Founder of Thom's Directory' printed via the Dublin Historical Record, Vol VIII No 2, March - May 1946 by Joseph W Hammond p42.

> 'His friend Dr W N Hancock stated in the year 1880 that Mr Thom came over to assist his father in or around 1820. Mr. Carse, the present editor of Thom's Directory, tells me that he can recall Mr. Thom himself stating that he wrote out a manuscript poster announcing the victory of Waterloo in 1815 and pasted it on the wall of his father's house in Parliament Street.'

Hammond goes on to suggest that the latter statement was probably correct, as he felt the young man would not have been left as his books for long in Edinburgh as he did not appear to have a definite career in mind.

The son of the publisher showed a flair for copywriting, text setting and printing and it was not long until he was playing an important role in his father's publishing office. Alexander Thom's enthusiasm helped to build up a reputation and workload second to none for the small publishing outlet and after his father's death he moved to a larger premises at 21 North Earl Street in 1825. On page III of an article in Progress in Irish Printing 1936 Alexander Thom, Dublin by Albert Ffrench,(Figure 8.a and 8.b), this new premises is said to have been a 21 North Earl Street, however in Mr Hammond's article in the Dublin Historical Record p44, the new premises is cited as being at 139 Mecklenburgh Street. This article seems much better informed and researched than that
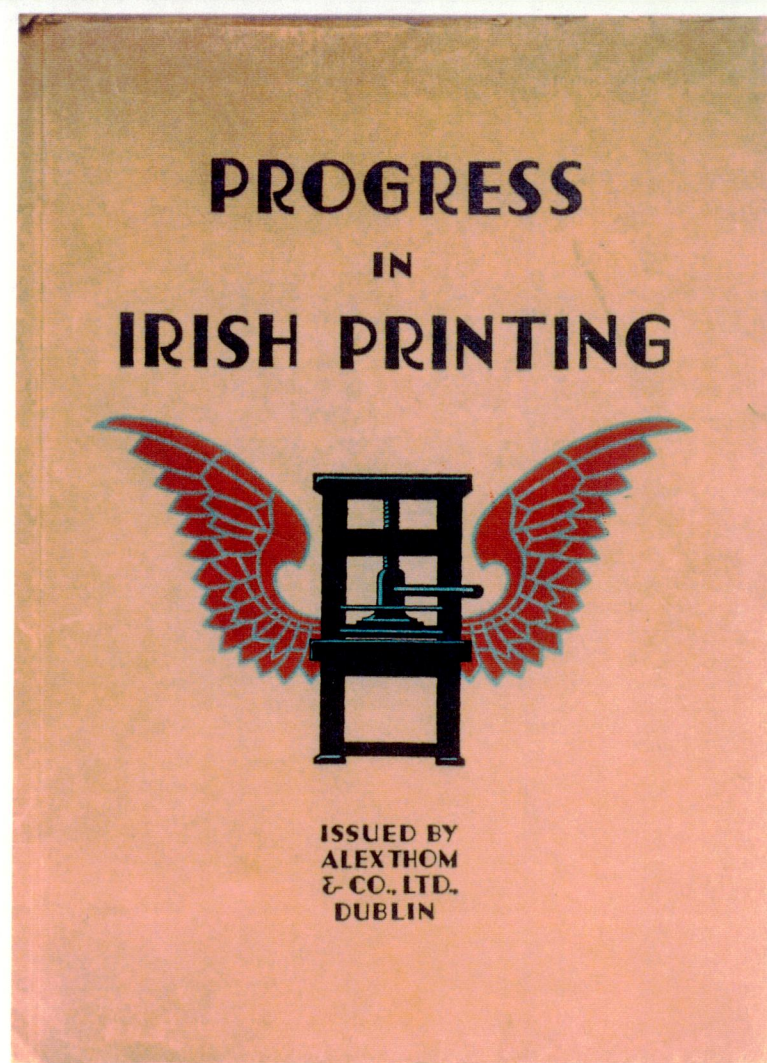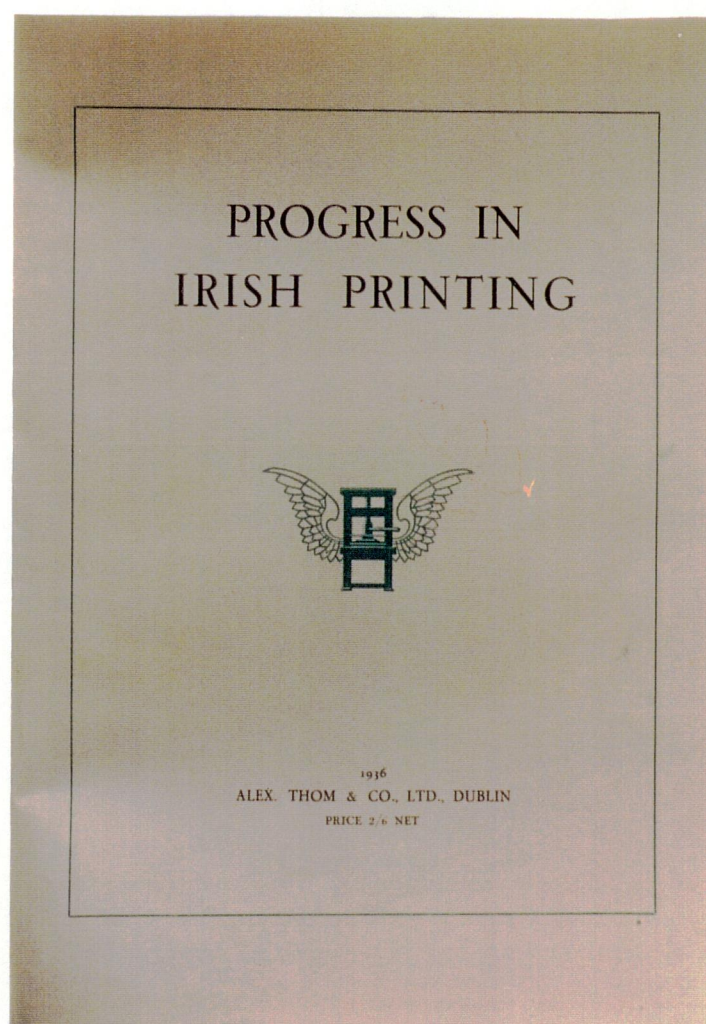
Figure 8 (a).

Figure 8 (b).

appearing in <u>Progress in Irish Printing</u> which is disturbing as the latter was actually printed by the Company in question. Mr Hammond claims that:

> 'After three years of drudgery at Mecklenburgh Street in 1828 he removed to more central premises at 21 North Earl Street and opened a shop there as printer, stationer and bookseller'.

Alexander Thom became partner with a man named Johnson who taught Thom the art of printing. Mr Hammond got this information from the son of Johnson who became a compositor for the firm. This man also gave him an insight into working conditions of the time:

> 'This old printer had delightful tales to tell of Thom's printing office back in the early Victorian period, revealing a simplicity of mind among craftsmen absolutely foreign to the mentality of present day workers. According to his testimony the working hours in Mr Thom's early days were from seven in the morning to seven in the evening, and men rarely grumbled, because 'they regarded labour as a divine ordinance' to earn their bread by the sweat of their brow.

It is interesting to note that Johnson is not mentioned in <u>Progress in Irish Printing</u>.

Great differences occur between the two accounts of young Alexander Thom in <u>Progress in Irish Printing</u> 1936, p41:

> 'The budding astuteness of this young printer was quickly recognised in Dublin. His organising powers were directed towards the rapid expansion of his trade'.

While in Hammond's article p45 - 46:

> 'The leading Dublin printers of that period were long established and well connected, and there was small scope left for young Thom, who was comparatively unknown in the city. Not only had he to go in search of orders himself but also, when he got them, to help setting up the type, printing it off and delivering the work to the customer.'

He did do some work for small city publishers who had no printing presses of their own but was apparently still badly in need of remunerative orders and thus he searched further afield to Sir Robert Peel who had given his father the editorship of the <u>Dublin Journal</u>. Through Peel's influence the London Stationery office in 1833 gave him the whole contract for the Post Office printing in Ireland, the greater part of which had been executed in London since
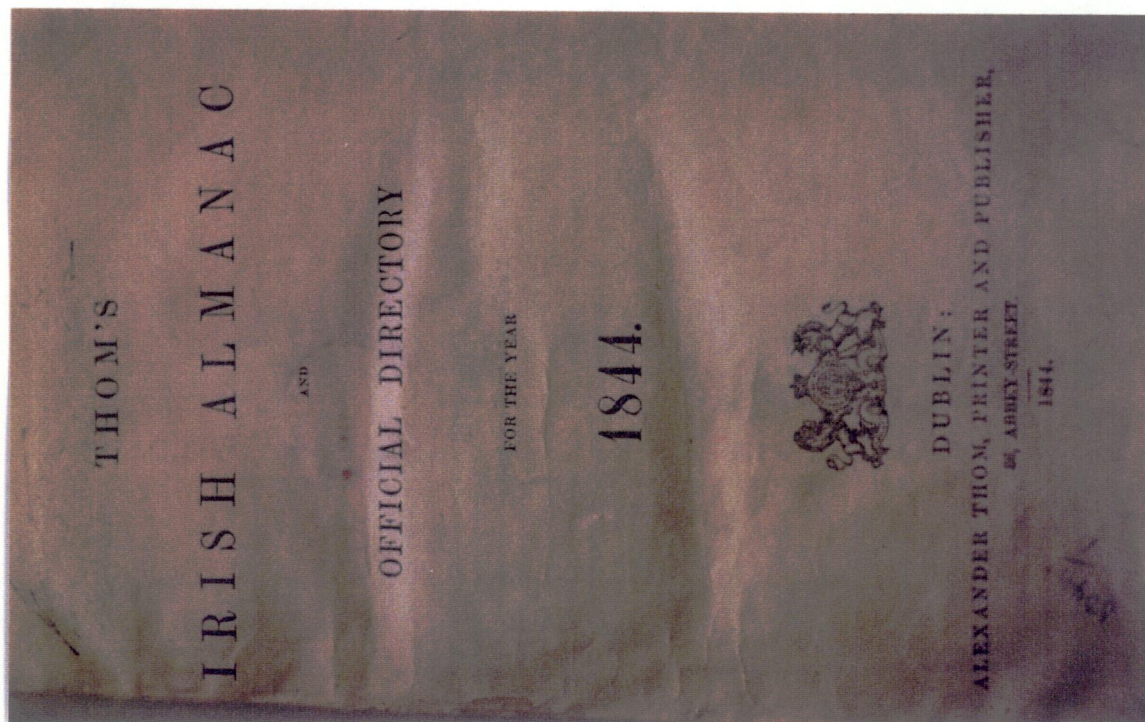
THOM'S

IRISH ALMANAC

AND

OFFICIAL DIRECTORY

FOR THE YEAR

1844.

DUBLIN:

ALEXANDER THOM, PRINTER AND PUBLISHER,
86, ABBEY STREET
1844.

Figure 9 (a).

Five Thom ex-employees—standing, left to right, M. ENRIGHT, case room, retired, 65 years; WILLIAM PHILLIPS, case room, deceased, 46 years; P. LALOR, bookbinding, retired, 57 years; sitting, left to right, HENRY REID, office, deceased, 58 years; PATRICK ALLARD, case room, deceased, 61 years. Total years of employment 287.
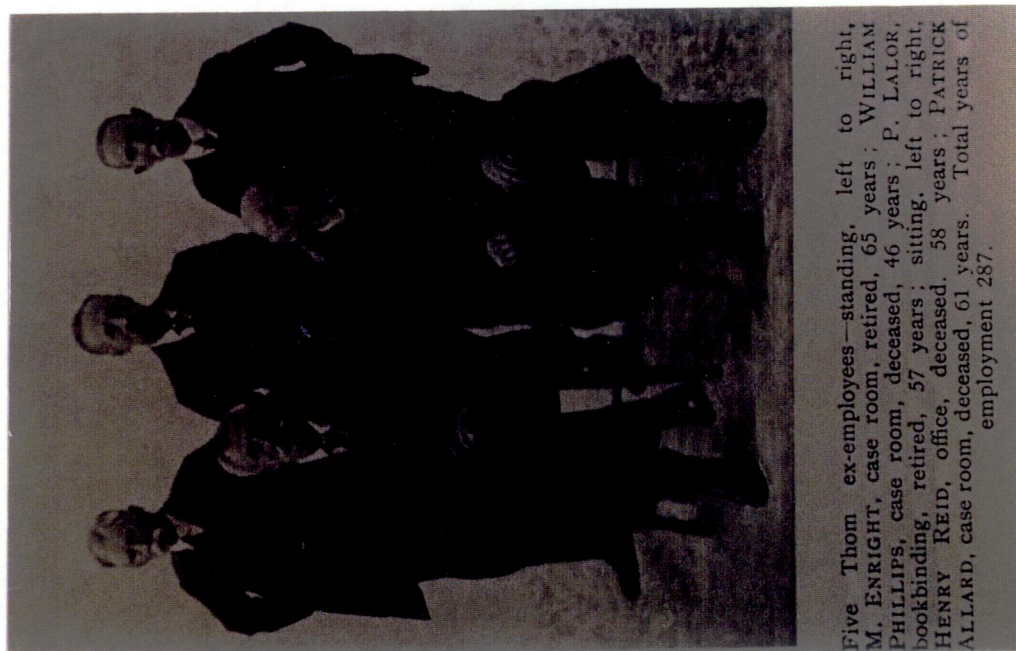
Figure 9(b).

1801. At the time Thom was not in a financial position to undertake such a big contract but he managed to get the capital required from a friend and then began to prosper.

Mr Hammond stresses at this point that it is important to note that:

> 'Alexander Thom was the first Dublin master printer to make any move towards getting back to Dublin all the Government printing contracts for the Irish administration that had been taken away to London after the union of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801.' p46.

Up to the 1830s thousands of pounds worth of Government printing had been done in London which should have been executed in Ireland. Having satisfied the Post Office he bravely looked for more work of this nature and managed to secure for himself the printing contract of the Irish Railway commission, in 1838. More importantly however he rescued for Dublin the entire printing of all future Royal Commissions in Ireland which had hitherto, been executed in London by a Mr. Spottiswoode, the King's printer in England.

Hammond regards the serving of the Post Office contract and his ability to execute it, as leading to a Renaissance of the Dublin printing industry, of the 1830s, 'it spurned on older established firms to greater efforts in other directions.'

Circa 1838, the company moved to a larger premises on Abbey Street, and in the ensuing years Thom's grew to be one of the leading firms in the printing trade in Ireland. It was the only printing house operating its own type foundry in the Dublin of that day. Mr Hammond notes that Alexander Thom's 'first big stride into the limelight of universal publicity' occurred in January of 1844 when he published 'Thom's Irish Almanac and Official Directory'(Figure 9.) which will be discussed at length in a later chapter. The Directory's success was immediate and was hailed by the press:

> 'As the most complete and valuable work of reference and miscellaneous information that has yet appeared in Ireland in the shape of an annual handbook'. (Hammond, 1946,p48).

Albert Ffrench's article in Progress in Irish Printing describes Thom as follows:

> 'A man of large ability, clear judgement, great strength of character and the loftiest and sturdiest uprightness'.

It was through such character in its founder that the company gained enor-

mous respect from all who dealt with it. Even an amount of respect was shown by his rivals. From the Government he gained confidence that was the most important part of his business and he printed everything for them from acts of Parliament and indictments to common summons' and pedlar's licences. He also printed a very famous run of school books called 'The Iona Series'. These books were used in every English speaking country in the world.

Indeed these textbooks can be credited with educating the foremost members of society.

One case in particular is that of Lord Snowden of Ickornshaw. In the Lord's autobiography he reflects upon his childhood and his learnings at Ickornshaw village school where, fascinated by mathematics, he found himself practicing arithmetic, from 'well-thumbed little black arithmetic books published by Thom's of Dublin'. The books were so long used that 'the lesson became not a reading lesson, but a recitation we knew by heart.' There might even be some truth in the thinking of Lord Snowden as a Dublin educated Chancellor. Alex Thom may have slipped up there by not advertising his run of books as 'Buy our books of arithmetic and become Chancellor of the Exchequer!'

Alex Thom was a fair minded person and while he socialised with the upper-end of Dublin society in his day, he was also the sort of man that never lost contact with reality, a man that exuded a down to earth attitude. Every day Thom would walk the working floors of his firm and be there for his workers to suggest a change of typeface, a new approach to a problem or whatever. Alex Thom was described back then as a low-sized stout man with a betasselled velvet smoking cap half hiding his curly white hair. Yes, Alex Thom was regularly seen within the depths of the compositor's rooms sorting out typographical problems, sharing a laugh but always giving the commanding hand, that necessary touch of approval.

An excerpt from the article on Alexander Thom's in the 1936 issue of Progress in Irish Printing, tells of Mr Michael Enright (caseroom overseer) describing the follies and duties of the compositors at work: 'They came to work dressed in tall hats, frock coats and carrying umbrellas. Before work began each tall hat was duly hung under a covering to avoid factory dust, and in its place the worker wore a paper substitute during the day'. In those days all the type was hand set and Mr Enright elaborates by saying that during work the compositors would keep their mouths busy by chewing on a quad of tobacco which, he also goes on to say, often carried an ounce of dust. Mr Michael Enright retired
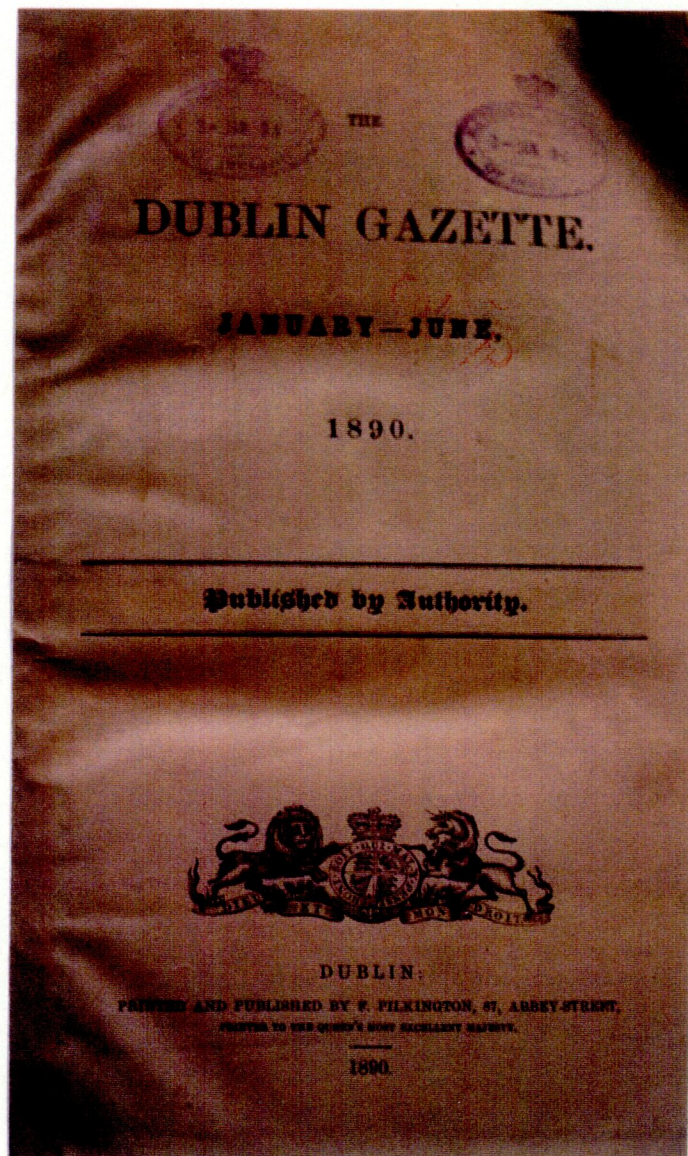
Figure 10.

on pension in 1934 at the age of 81. He had been employed by Thom's for 65 years.

Alexander Thom had more going for him than just plain simplicity in the handling of his staff etc. He was actually a very shrewd man with a most interesting human manner, the kind of manner that today would be put down to marketing. Thom strengthened his business by adding his good will to his customers and instilling an air of confidence in his staff.

I have been unable to ascertain the family of Alexander Thom in any great detail, there is reference to this through in <u>Progress in Irish Printing</u>, which states that Thom had a second marriage, yet the name of his new wife or indeed his previous wife are not mentioned. Nor is the date given for this second marriage. Thom's only other reference to family appears in both sources which refer to Frederick Pilkington, his son-in-law, who was the Government book binder and whose bindery adjoined Thom's premises on Middle Abbey street. This obviously implies that Thom had a daughter, but her name and date of birth are nowhere to be found and the existence of other offsprings is never mentioned. It is unlikely in my opinion that he had any sons as they would undoubtedly have been involved in the family business. Of the four Thom families listed in the present Dublin 'phone directory, none claim any relation to the printer.

Through the contacts of his second wife Alex Thom was introduced to a journalist by the name of Lefroy. This in turn led to the introduction of Lefroy to Thom's factory in the position of manager.

Alexander being the founder and innovator of his own business affairs, was the sole controller of his company since its birth. But now Thom's had an innovation within itself with the introduction of a manager. Needless to say, Alexander remained in charge of his entire company until within a few months of his death which took place on December 22, 1879 at his residence at Donnycarney, Co Dublin.

For a relatively short length of time afterwards, Lefroy continued to manage Thom's entire firm until it was eventually and inevitably passed on to Frederick Pilkington (Figure 10, The Dublin Gazette printed and published by F. Pilkington). In 1887 Thom's became a Private Limited Company and around 1890 F C Pilkington, son of Frederick, floated it as a Public Limited Company. F C Pilkington, as much an entrepreneur as Alex Thom, was applying his busi-
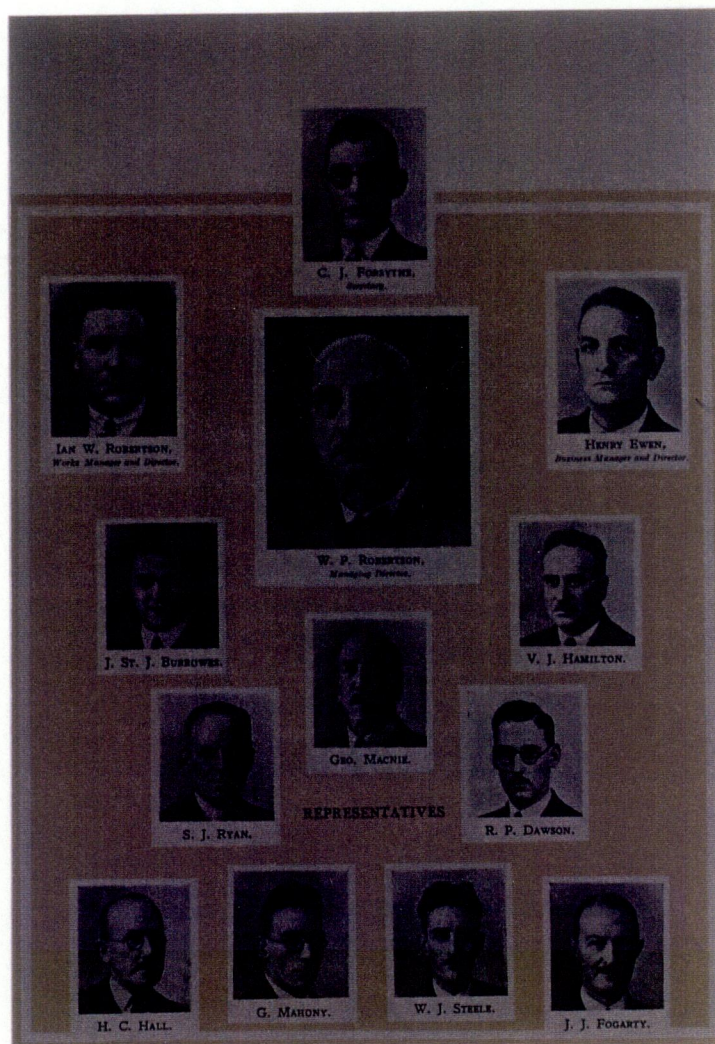
Figure 11.

ness initiative in other circles. He retired from Thom's company in 1903 and became Governor of the Bank of Ireland. E P Morgan took over as Chairman of Directors until George Bryers took charge in 1906. Like many things that happened in Alex Thom's, Bryers had already been amalgamated with the firm through Thom's taking over of Healy, Bryers and Walker, and from that had worked his way up the ladder.

On the work of amalgamation, it is worth noting that Alex Thom gave a start to many Irish printers, and a lot of these set up their own enterprise in the same field. Alex Thom, in turn, absorbed most of these to build on the strength of his own company. For example, the printing house of Humphrey and Armour was swept up by Thoms in 1916. Included in the many firms that merged into Thom's were the likes of Sullivan Brothers, the educational publishers, and John Falconer, a most important and popular legal literary publishing outlet.

All of the subsidiary companies, with the exception of John Falconer, were housed at the firm's headquarters - Alex Thom and Co Ltd 85 - 90 Middle Abbey Street, Dublin. One of the few companies not to join with Alex Thom was the Dublin Steam Printing Works.

An important event took place in the company around 1907 when a Mr. W. P. Robertson (Figure 11.) was appointed Managing Director of the company. The sub-divisions of the now complex Alex Thom, and the diversity of operations within had now reached an all time high. New improvements and regulations in business now called for new methods of activity.

It was now necessary for Thom's to sort out its complications and have clear communications between factory services, production, etc. Not only did the firm rise to this order and even include a cleverly constructed policy to cater for any future emergencies but it also now had a man of clear foresight and ability to tackle the hardest financial tasks in the person of one W P Robertson in 1907.

Robertson, who exuded energy, and an ever so necessary control capability for the business world, had built a company second to none in Ireland's printing industry. With the covering of new ground on the printing and publishing field and the successful exploration of new business opportunities, Thom's company had become a somewhat unassailable force.

Unfortunately within ten years of the appointment of Robertson - a man not totally unlike Alexander Thom himself, the restless efforts put in by all employ-

Figure 12 (a).

Figure 12 (b).

ees alike crumbled to a pile of ash and molten metal in the fires of the 1916 Rebellion. The premises of Alex Thom were completely gutted leaving nothing but the smouldering company files and records and tangles of scrap iron.

It was now that the true romanticism and back bone bravery shone through for all involved in the building of the old Alex Thom firm. For it was in only a short space of time that the company had secured a new premises at Crow Street and began to develop a plant that had the immediate capacity to handle almost any of the printing requirements. Not ignoring the fact that politically these times were some of the most trying for anyone from Dublin, the printing industry also had it hardships but nothing could hold back that desire to succeed, the same seed that must have been planted by Alexander Thom the first day.

Out of the disastrous consequences - whatever they may have been - of Thom's being levelled to the ground, came a sort of liberation that showed in the spirit of the workforce. No longer was Alex Thoms tied to a certain plot or place of production that might have inhibited expansion. It was now the obvious choice of all in direction of the firm to build a new factory. Quick thinking on the feet of the management led to the acquiring of a twelve acre site at Glasnevin in 1920. At the site work was quickly underway with the building of a modern edifice large enough to house the most modern of printing and binding machinery for its time.

Alex Thom's monogram of a phoenix rising from its ashes was more than just symbolic of the ideals that infected Alex Thom and his employees, but it also typified the complete loss, destruction and sub-sequent re-creation of the company. With the opening of the new factory at Botanic Road, Glasnevin in 1922, the firm continued to advance. Not to far into the future Thom's saw themselves back at the forefront of the printing industry and on no less than three occasions they had to erect adjoining buildings to cope with the increase and turnover.

At this time Alex Thom was issuing every imaginable item of printed produce with the most up to date machinery. (Figure 12.a and 12.b). Aside from the regular Thom's work of - large numbers of weekly, monthly, quarterly and annual publications; volumes included the famous Thom's Directory, printing contracts with the Government, Public Bodies, Banks, Railways, Universities, Public Companies and Business firms; binding for Trinity College, the Law Library, and King's Inns Library. The Company had also built up a reputation

as being printers of fine colour work for most commercial purposes both in letter press and lithography and also in the fast developing techniques of off-set work. Alex Thoms had also been handling a number of carton printing and manufacturing jobs during this time and it was pluses like this that had Alexander Thoms still at the forefront of print in Ireland.

Alexander Thom's was one of the cornerstones in the building of industrial life in Ireland in its day and any surviving members of the workforce or recipiants of a job undertaken by the firm would more than likely put Thom's success down to dedication to his art, remaining at the level of the people that you are conducting business with and lastly, never giving up the struggle to succeed in something that you believe in.

The majority of the preceding information was extracted from an article in <u>Progress in Irish Printing</u> on Alex Thom and Co. (Ffrench, 1936,)

CHAPTER III

CHAPTER III

Case Study: Douglas Ewen

An account of his working life with Alexander Thom and Company Limited from 1935 - 1980.

The original aim of this chapter was to give a personal insight into Alexander Thom and Company Limited through the eyes of various ex-employees, thus recording the unfinished history of Thom's since 1936.

I intended to send questionnaires to the ex-employees and to follow this with the necessary interviews. However after relentlessly following up contacts and being confronted by death, senility and unco-operative persons, I uncovered one of the key cogs of Thom's industrious wheels, a Mr Douglas Ewen. Few people have, in their life times climbed the proverbial ladder to success in their company, but Ewen is one of the finest examples. From the humble placement of storekeeper to the head sales executive, he completed the vital ground work necessary to gain a profound understanding of his firm, that which no executive employee should be without.

I interviewed Ewen at length on numerous occasions on all aspects of his career with the company, and thus gained an indepth understanding and appreciation of Alexander Thom and Co Ltd. At times the account becomes very factual but still retains that personal element and insight that one could not hope to grasp from secondary sources.

I am confident that the quality of the information that follows proves the validity of this method of historical research.

Ewen was born in Dublin in 1917, into a family that had already been involved with the printing industry for many years. His father, a previous manager for the Hely Printing Group in the late 1800s, moved on to take up a position as Business Manager and Director for Alexander Thom and Co Ltd at the beginning of this century. Henry Ewen became the cornerstone for his son to build his printing career upon.

In January 1935 Ewen began his career working for Alex Thom and Co. Ltd. in the paper and cardboard stores at the company's 'then new' factory premises at

Botanic road, Glasnevin, Dublin where he stacked and accounted for all incoming papers and boards and spent long hours sorting qualities, weights and sizes, not to mention the arduous counting of sheets.

In October of 1935, Mr Ewen was accepted as an apprentice lithographic printer and made history in printing circles by being the first outsider to break into the industry. By this we mean that his father and grandfather were not lithographic printers. Ewen started off working as a transferer on original stones and plates in the makeready for the printing process. The accepted design, indicating size, style of lettering, colours etc had to be separated by the transferer for the printing of each colour separately. First a keyline would be drawn around the complete image areas to show positions of colours to be printed from the stone. There was a lithographic stone used for each colour. For each colour there was a print taken of this keyline, dusted with a purple dye and transferred onto the lithostones. This in turn would show the outlines in a non-printing colour. On each stone the artist(s) would fill in the required colour as indicated by the key outline which would also have printed registration marks to allow for over printing in the proper position. When the image had been strengthened the required number of transfers would be taken with transfer ink. These were then positioned (one sheet for each colour) called 'patching up.' All of the transfers of course were on one sheet and each sheet of transfers was then transferred to a large stone and prepared for the machine. The process back then used to print yellow first then blue then red and black last. It still hasn't changed up to today, except in name. Now we know the litho process colours as yellow, magenta, cyan and black.
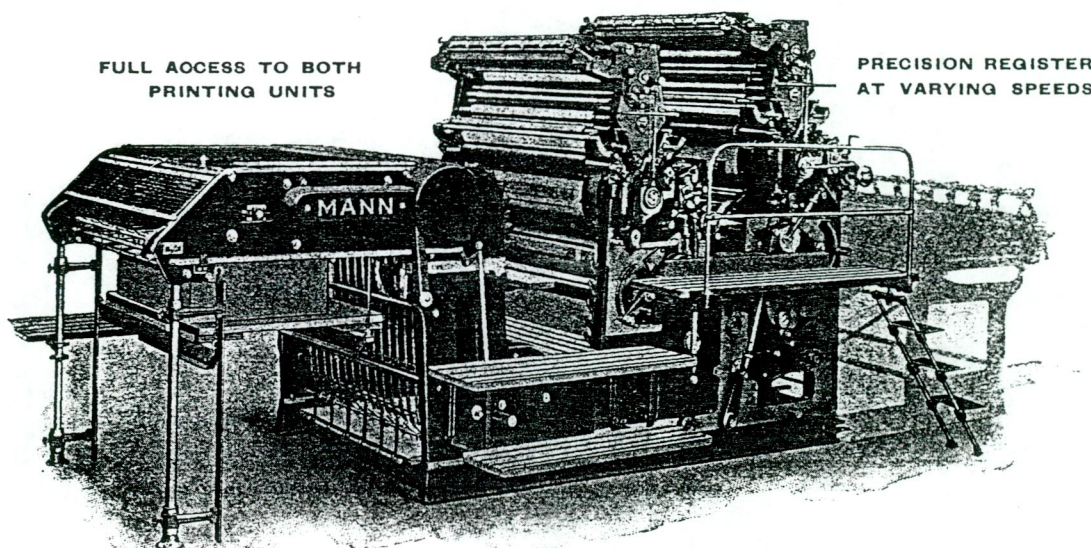
Throughout 1936 Ewen came to grips with the working of flat bed machinery printing from stone to paper and accomplished an amount of work such as single colour headings, cheques, copy book headings etc. His restless effort to gain sufficient knowledge about his work led to his quick advancement into off-set lithography work where he ran full colour printing presses. The flat bed machines at this time would have been capable of 500 impressions per hour whereas the slowest rotaries would do three times that.

In 1936 a man called Ernest Garrett came to Alex Thom and Co from a company by the name of Norberry Natzzio. With a position as foreman at Thom's, he was responsible for the updating of all the printing machinery. He threw out all flat bed machines except for a flat off-set one and installed Double Demy Mann off-set machinery. The whole idea was to get all of the printing machines up to Demy size printing. There wouldn't be a great difference in size but

Figure 13.

Denny was larger than Crown and therefore had greater capabilities.

Ewen elaborated on the machinery that had been used up until around 1937:

1   2 colour Roland Press: Quad Demy size printing 35 x 45 inches

2   Mann 2 colour press with the capability of being a perfector (printing both sides of a sheet at one pass). (Figure 13.)

3   2 single colour machines: Quad Crown Size 30 x 40 inches

4   A Crabtree machine also Quad Crown size (Figure 14.)

5   Crabtree machine: 2 colour: Double Demy size 25 x 35 inches

6   Waite and Saville: Single colour: Crown size: 20 x 15 inch

7   Single colour Crabtree: Small size

8   3 flat bed machines (either stone or plate onto paper)

(a)   Double Crown 20" x 30"
(b)   Quad Crown 30" x 40"
(c)   Double Demy 25" x 35"
        Flat bed off-set

The machines from numbers 1 - 7 are known as Rotary machines.

1936 also marked the development of carton making within Thom's, an essential asset to any printing firm that hoped for success in the print packaging line. A Belfast man by the name of Bill Scarlet came from the Clealland Company and knew everything that was involved in the making and manufacturing of cartons. Without doubt this man was the main developer of carton making in Ireland. Scarlet left Thom's a few years later to start up his own printing firm, the successful Marchmont Press.

In October 1937, Ewen was sent by Alexander Thom to the London School of Photo-Lithography to learn the workings of the printing process so that Thom's would further update its plant and keep ahead of the competitors in Irish printing. He stayed in London for a year and finished up demonstrating photo-litho

Figure 14.

processes there. (Figure 15.)

October 1938 marked the start up of the photo-lithography department at Alexander Thom in the Iona Works Factory on Botanic Road. Ewen had full charge of the photo-process and was responsible at the time for printing plates for a job for Carroll's Tobacco Company. Not only did he make plates for Alex Thom but he was also employed to plate make for Irish Carton Printers, a local Dublin print shop. Douglas Ewen recalled coming back from London with an excellent knowledge of the photo-litho process but being unable to apply it correctly for over a week of constant trying. In the end it was a simple matter of allowing for the different kinds of water between London and Dublin and he eventually got the chemical mix right.

Ewen was still involved with the print end of the industry four years later when in 1942 he was appointed assistant foreman in the litho department under Mr Ernest Garrett.

Between 1946 and 1947 Ewen became foreman of the litho section. This was a particularly memorable year for him with the landing and losing of a major job for Thom's company. At this time Brown and Nolan's printing firm based in Dublin, was a subsidiary of the English printing firm Herbert Delarne who were bank note printers. Brown and Nolan being inundated with work, sub-contracted bank note work to Alexander Thom's Company for the Central Bank of China. The note to be printed was 500 Yuan. When one side of the note had been printed successfully a few thousand times, a visiting overseer of the job declared Thom's insufficiently secure, which resulted in every single note being accounted for and sent back to England with all the other necessary materials that had been sent to Thom's. He remembers a method of printing called 'rainbow printing' that had to be used for printing the notes. Several colours of ink were set up on the one roller to print just one line of text, giving a rainbow effect.

Around this time Alexander Thom and Company Ltd had the printing of the National Sweepstake tickets. These were printed on a Mann perfector, with five colours on the front and one on the back. Another innovation in Thom's at the time was threadless binding - wire stitch binding was coming into vogue.

It was towards the end of 1947 that Alex Thom took credit for printing the first Kelloggs Corn flakes boxes. At the time a firm called Browne and Polson were producing wheat flakes and these were packaged in an unbleached cardboard
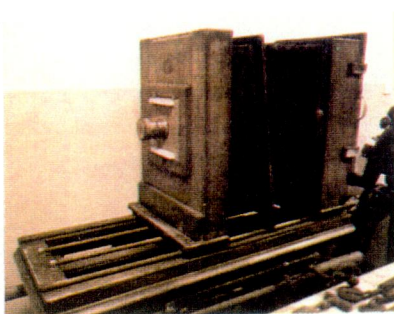
Figure 15.

Figure 16.

box which was firstly printed white and then had two colours printed on top of that, a two colour design. Thom's were printing this job for this firm all through the second World War years, from 1939 - 1945. After a while Browne and Polson got a contract from Kelloggs and with Thom's reputation, they got the printing of the job. the very first series was for cut-out masks for children and many more package offers followed like holidays, bicycles, etc. Thom held the printing for a number of years until Browne and Palsons contract died. J. St John Burrows was the representative for Thoms that was responsible for getting the Kelloggs job from Browne and Polsons. (Figure 16.)

Ewen informed me of another celebrated job undertaken by Thom's during this period. Cadbury was the company, and it spent a few years in the hands of a printing firm by the name of Hely's until the early 1960s when Thom's took over because of their carton making capability. Cadbury's left the job with Alex Thom's even through the takeover by a different company and amalgamation with another. In 1972 Ewen recalls the Cadbury order being worth £300,00.00 a year to Smurfit Print and Packaging Limited.

In 1952 Ewen was appointed Art Works Manager and in 1963 had graduated to the level of works Manager for the firm. He was moved to the head office in Crow Street to undertake various jobs in 1954. Between this time and 1958 he was sent back and forth to Iona works, undertaking the estimating of various jobs and lending a hand with the printing process in general.

It was around the end of 1958 that Ewen was appointed 'full-time' estimator for Thom and Co Ltd and was transferred from its then, HQ at Crow Street, up to the main plant in Glasnevin. Within the year c1960, the whole office was moved to Iona works Glasnevin. By 1962 Ewen found himself in charge of all carton estimating and to aid him in the understanding of such a broad business scope, there were a number of consultant estimators drafted in by Alex Thom's. This year also saw the inclusion of personal administrators and other office staff to cope with the expanding business. It was also in this year that Thom and Co Ltd amalgamated with the Hely Group and this led to the renaming of Thom's now to be known as Hely Thom Ltd.

Mr Hely had already established a trade in Dublin at the end of the 1800s and the emergence of his son, Charles Wisdane Hely, established a rival printing firm, for Thom's, in Dame Street, Dublin. (Figure 17.a and 17.b). It is widely believed that Charles was a fairly flamboyant entrepreneur from the early days. Not only did he employ the assistance of much sought after pretty girl shop
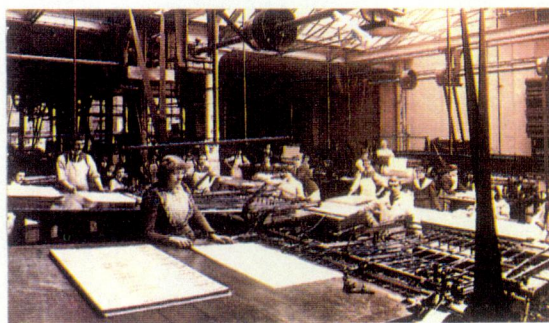
Figure 17 (a).

Figure 17 (b).

assistants but also had a four piece band playing at the opening of the firm to attract customers. Hely's acme printing works was well established in Dame Court early this century and handled, on a smaller scale, much the same work as Alex Thom and Co. Douglas Ewen's father after completion of the necessary printing training administration, had worked around for a few years before being employed by the Hely Group as Manager of the printing firm. But after many differences with Charles W Hely, Henry Ewen left Hely's to take up a position as business manager and director of Alexander Thom and Co Ltd. Henry always believed that Charles had other sources of income besides his printing firm, judging by the estates that he held down, one of which included Oaklands in Rathgar, now St Luke's Hospital. He also had a large interest in the Theatre Royal.

Hely Group moved to the East Wall Road in the 1930s probably as the result of a fire. Douglas Ewen believes that most printing houses had a fire and then prospered! In 1962 Alex Thom Ltd was joined by the Hely Group.

The amalgamation with the Hely Group saw a lot of reorganisation between everybody involved and Ewen says to this day that it was a general lack of trust between people from both firms that played the key role in the decline of the new business venture. Between 1962 and 1963 Douglas Ewen was moved into sales and became one of the head sales representatives for the firm. Mr Ewen was responsible for landing the P&G order as it was called within the company. P&G stood for Proctor and Gamble and they were primarily involved with the sale and manufacturing of detergents. Hely Thom Ltd printed and manufactured the cartons for all of their products which included Tide and Daz washing powders. Ewen recalled having to deal with this company from its HQ in Switzerland. Eventually, just like Kelloggs, Proctor and Gamble started to import the completed printed and finished cartons from Newcastle-on-Tyne in England.

In 1964 Ewen was second in charge of all carton work process and business for the company. this position would have entailed everything from buying in the necessary materials to estimating how much the entire job would cost and all the printing, folding, finishing and packing within. At this point he continues to talk about friends and associates that he had within the firm, and unusual tales that shouldn't go unrecorded.

Mr Hubert Parr and Mr J Surratt were close friends of his. Both working for the firm as estimators. Parr left after many years to go on to better things. Hubert

Parr met up and worked with a man called William Lyons and after designing the symbol for the Swallow Side Car Company they moved on to designing the Austin Swallow car. This in turn led to the designing of the car known to the layman by its initials 'the SS' and finally onto the designing of the first Jaguar car. It was after such an innovation that one Mr William Lyons was given a knightood, now known to all as Sir William Lyons. Hubert Healy, another friend of Ewen's, was a director of Hely Thom Ltd. Various artists working with the company since the Alexander Thom days such as Stene Tinkler, John Best, Roger Webb and a Mr Sutherland, were all acquaintances of Mr Ewens.

Ewen recalled a funny incident that happened within the printing and artist departments during the late 1950s when there was alot of aggravation between one of the printers and one of the designers. The designer, after putting up with enough antagonism from his colleauge decided on a sizeable revenge. After receiving a poster job from 'Bass' which required a waiter carrying bottles of Bass on a tray with one hand and a towel over his opposite arm, the designer acquired a photograph of the printer and painted his face in place of the waiters. There were thousands printed and circulated to the four corners of Ireland.

When Ewen was directly involved with the art department in Thom's in 1951 to 1952 he played a major part in the production of Thom's last poster. The poster, for Lamb's Jams was first printed by litho stone in the early 1940s by the firm and after WWII it was re-printed because of popular demand. The designer / artists that originally undertook the design had died and it was left up to Ewen to recruit somebody to fill his shoes. It was a Canadian artist working in Ireland that started, a Mr Walter till. He drew almost two thirds of the design but after taking ill, died suddenly. After a hard search he contacted an English artist that came to Ireland just to do the job. This would have been quite remarkable for its day.

Getting back to the chronology of Ewen's working life, he stayed in charge of all carton production from 1970 onward. It was in this year that Hely Thom Ltd was acquired by the Jefferson Smurfit Group and the Company was renamed Smurfit Print and Packaging Ltd.

Ewen remained in control of his position and was moved in 1972 to the newly developed Smurfit Cartons at a plant in Coolock. In 1973 Smurfits renamed the Iona works firm to 'Iona Print Ltd'.

Ewen spent the last eight years of his working life at the Smurfit Plant in

Coolock in charge of the carton manufacturing for all of Smurfit's work until his retirement in 1980.

In 1986 Iona Print Ltd became a trading unit of Smurfit Ireland Ltd, trading as Iona Print. In 1988 Iona Print was changed to the name by which it is known today, simply, Smurfit Print.

Ewen's account gives us a good impression of the set up and ethics of Alexander Thom's as it advanced through the twentieth century. We can conclude that it was a very forward looking and competitive concern.

The fact that the machinery was updated regularly to keep abreast of modern times and technology and ahead of its competitors, and that experts were employed in every field, demonstrates an initiative and confidence similar to that shown by Alex Thom himself in the earlier years. Another important factor to note is the quick development of Ewen's career. It is obvious that his aptitude and skill were noticed and encouraged at an early stage and indeed rewarded by the furthering of his education in London at the firm's expense. This is highly commendable and unfortunately often very rare in this day and age. It is easy to see that the reputation of the firm which its founder had worked so hard to gain was maintained and thus is reflected in the calibre and loyalty of their clients over the years.

I think that I can safely conclude that Alexander Thom would have been proud.

CHAPTER IV

CHAPTER IV

Thom's Directory

'Look up Thom's you will find the information there'. (Ffrench, 1936)

For years this would be the reply that one could expect when seeking names, phone numbers, addresses etc of the majority of Irish Offices. The Directory is an encyclopaedia in itself.

Every year since its inception in 1844 Thom's Directory has appeared without fail. The directory is a concise volume listing information that encompasses everything from market days to the names and addresses of all businesses in Ireland. By 1936 it was comprised of 2,600 pages with a wealth of information in comparison to the first publications of a mere 653 pates. Thom's Irish Almance and Official Directory was the original name of Thom's Directory and it was first published and issued in 1844 with Alexander Thom as publisher and editor. (Shown previously in figure 9.).

Thom's Directory has acted for, and included over the years: The Irish Free State Government Directory, Northern Ireland Government Directory, Commercial Directories of the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, Educational, Ecclesiastical, Law and Medical Directories, Banking Directory, Post Office Dublin City and County Director, also a Peerage, Baronetage and Knightage Director which includes an Irish 'who's who'.

The methodical vigilance with which the directory was put together and the close and intelligent attentions shown in the revision of the volume each year, are the qualities of the Directory that have made it such a lasting phenomenon. The Directory remains an essential part of Irish business and life.

After the launching of Thom's Directory in 1844, it received a rare review at the time from the famous Quarterly Review in which it stated:

> 'it contains more information about Ireland than has been collected in one volume in any country'
>
> (Ffrench, 1936).

With such a boost to the morale, Alexander Thom spared no expense on improving and enlarging the capacity of his now famous directory. In 1847

Alex Thom increased the actual dimensions of the book and brought it up to royal octave size. Also, new information was added. In 1848 a list of mobility, traders and gentry was included, the next year the Annals of Dublin were put in, and in 1850 Thom's Directory was without rival because of the stop in publication of Pettigrew and Oulton's Annual. Strangely enough, Shaw's Pictorial Directory made its first and last appearance in 1850 too.

There was no questioning the fact the the Directory was Thom's first 'stride into the limelight of universal publicity' (Dublin Historical Record, 1946).

But it wasn't something that came easily for Thom himself had strived for years to try to overcome the barriers that held back Irish printing firms from gaining those much coveted Governmental and other large budget jobs, jobs that he knew were well within the capability of the Irish print industry. In the preface of the very first issue of Thom's Directory, Alexander Thom, not descending to sneer or abuse, has a light earful for the Queen's Printer, Spottiswoode and the London Stationery Office:

> 'He (the publisher of Thom's Director) may also be here permitted to state, as a decided proof that printing can be executed in this city in a manner as satisfactory to those who wish to avail themselves of its advantages, and as creditable to the country as in any other part of the Empire, that the whole of this volume, containing 672 pages of closely printed matter, was worked off and placed in the binders hands within forty-eight hours from the time the first sheet (of 16 pages) was laid on the publisher's steam presses.
>
> (Dublin Historical Record, 1946).

At the time of the printing of the first directory, Alexander Thom, had in his firm the following manpower and paraphernalia: light printing machines which were driven by steam engines, 1,000 forms of standing type, an assortment and large quantity of hand presses, type racks, cases, frames, imposing surfaces, and a printing staff of twenty-two men and twenty-four apprentices. This makes the printing of such a huge amount of directories with such limited resources, quite a remarkable achievement for its time.

With the official changing in size from Crown Octave 71/4 by 43/4 to Royal Octavo 9 by 51/2 inches and the fact that the directory was now gaining praise from the four corners of the globe and being looked upon as the national handbook of Ireland, the London Stationery Office or Spottiswoode's Printing Firm could no longer be the witholding influence that kept Thom's from Government bookwork contracts on the grounds that Dublin printing firms were incapable of such undertakings.

After this Alex Thom obtained almost every Government printing job that was put out to tender or run as a competition. It was not until 1876 that Thom's was appointed Queen's Printer for Ireland, a position which was not occupied since the death of the previous one - George A Grierson in 1850. This position of office was first formed in Dublin by King James 1 in 1604, when John Frankton was appointed:

> in consideration of his labour in printing very many things, not only for his Majesty's service, but for the public good, to hold in some ample manner and form as the King's Printer for England held and executed that office there. (Dublin Historical Record, 1946).

An article in the Dublin University Magazine in 1862 accurately summed up the over all effectiveness of Thom's Directory at that time. It was obvious now that Alexander Thom's main interest in the printing business until his dying day was his innovative Directory.

> 'When Mr Thom first published his directory 18 years ago, he had the out line in contemplation of what it might become, and every January since has seen him advance more nearly to his high standard'. 'A vast amount of what it (Thom's Directory) contains is common to the London and Dublin directories; and, in a large proportion of the occasions upon which refer ence to such a production is necessary, either volume may be indifferently consulted. It is only due to Mr Thom to state, that his aim has been to ele vate and extend his work beyond its local or insular value, and that in this he has proved eminently successful. In addition to every particle of special Irish information of any importance, he supplies the public with a careful parliamentary and peerage, a naval and military, and calonial directory, brought down to the latest moment. In conveying these facts and records he does not grudge space, or impair anything by editorial parismony.

> The portion of the volume more generally interesting is that devoted to sta tistics, which manifestly receives all the scrupulous care that such a branch demands. Extreme condensation is necessary here, and it might be thought that this would prove fatal to the numerous statements of figures in which the editor is obliged to engage. That, however is not the case. We have fre quently had occasion to scrutinise Mr Thom's statistics, and have never found them inaccurate in any serious particular, or even confusing. The tabular arrangements, are in many instances, admirably managed. This is true both of the Irish and British statistics, but especially of the former, which enter minutely into every circumstance of our production trade, and manufactures, often at the same time, instituting such comparisons with former years and looking to the new figures for point and interest.
> The carefulness with which this portion of the directory is treated has frequently been attended during critical discussions in the legislature, when appeal to its pages has been considered sufficient to determine

disputes as to fact.'

The undeniable fact remained, Alex Thom was somewhat of a genius when it came to statistics which explains the fact and reason why he was elected vice-president of Ireland's statistical society. It is also factual that he was offered the presidential position of the society but declined the offer. Public belief is that his decision was made by virtue of the facts that: he shunned almost all publicity that singled him out from the crowd, and also, he was completely enthralled by the perfecting of his beloved Directory.

While looking for a characterisation of Thom as written by his peers and fellow workers, I luckily uncovered a description that would make any man proud. I would pity the employee, namely proofreader or compositor, that would be the case of an error in the publishing of Thom's Directory.

Even though he was a tough man to please when it came down to typography or typographical accuracy, he was always on the level with his employees and never pertained to condescending airs. He was also a most approachable man when ever complications or errors arose. Alexander Thom was totally opposed to trade-unionism and 'the perpetual menace of illegal combinations' as he once put it. With that in mind though, he was completely fair on all accounts to every one employed by the firm, in particular to the head men involved in the printing make-up or compository department which he would always tip with a bonus on either a weekly or holiday pay time. Christmas would always have been a great time for extras and with this in mind, probably made the employees work that much harder. To verify his generosity, the head man or overseer of the composing department was the highest paid man in the Irish Printing trade at that time with a wage of six guineas per week. It is believed that he was referred to within the firm as 'the Governor' and that there was rarely if ever a bad word said about him. Those employed always thought of 'the Governor' as a rebel in his own reassured way, but the blissfulness of a perfect working race, all helping and aiding in the manufacturing of a particular object with no disturbance was not ever possible back then no more that it is now. The last years of Alexander's life were shifted towards troubles in the employment field, and he died only a year after a major strike in the printing trade in 1878, and sadly the first time that he had experienced such turmoil in the print industry after his many years at heading such a successful business venture.

An article titled 'The founder of Thom's Directory', from an issue of the Dublin Historical Record, pinpointed exactly what may had led to the sudden death of

Figure 18 (a).

Figure 18 (b).

Thom. 'He is believed to have fretted too much over the loss of his old staff of competent craftsmen, when compared with the strike-breakers brought in by his newly-appointed manager, who had ill-advised him to resist the men's demands for an increase of two shillings per week, and who was afterwards sacked for incompetence. Most of the strike-breakers imported by the manager were unskilled men of poor experience, and the results of their handiwork disorganised Mr Thom's systematic plant and equipment'. Thom's was falling apart and Thom himself was in too weak a position, healthwise, to prevent it.

Alexander Thom died at his home in Donnycarney House, Co Dublin on 22 December 1879 at the ripe old age of 79. Alexander was laid to rest in Mount Jerome Cemetery Dublin.

In 1877 before his illness over came him, Alex Thom gave over his copyright to his son-in-law Mr Frederick Pilkington. When Pilkington joined Thom's in 1880 it put new life into the growth of the Directory and this was aided by a Mr T Mason as its editor. The Directory continued to rise in size and popularity even through changes in editorship. The next men to undertake the position were John Rynd and Samuel Carse which led up to 1907 when it was taken over by Samuel Carse's son, Mr Samuel B Carse. Young Mr Carse had already been involved with the editing of the Directory, helping out his father since 1899 and long would he remain in the position even through such a major set back like the fire in 1916 which burned their Middle Abbey Street business to the ground.

Everything that was needed to produce a volume of Thom's Directory was now a molten lump of lead, the original forms of type which included all the outstanding pages for the Directory were now but ashes. Every publication from the first ever published were burnt in the fire. But determined to continue the Directory, Mr Carse acquired an amount of previous issues from friends of the firm, subscribers of Thom's Directory in previous years and the rest of any at hand. Beginning in May 1916 the editor began to assemble the 1917 Directory at a temporarily acquired building at 28 Westmoreland Street Dublin. When all the necessary information had been gathered and re-edited, the whole volume for 1917 was reset at the company's temporary premises at Crow Street, Dublin. It was an outstanding accomplishment when the Directory was ready, completely edited and printed in the following March 1917.

A few years later saw the organising of new Governments in the Irish Free Stage and in Northern Ireland and this was complimented by the inclusion in
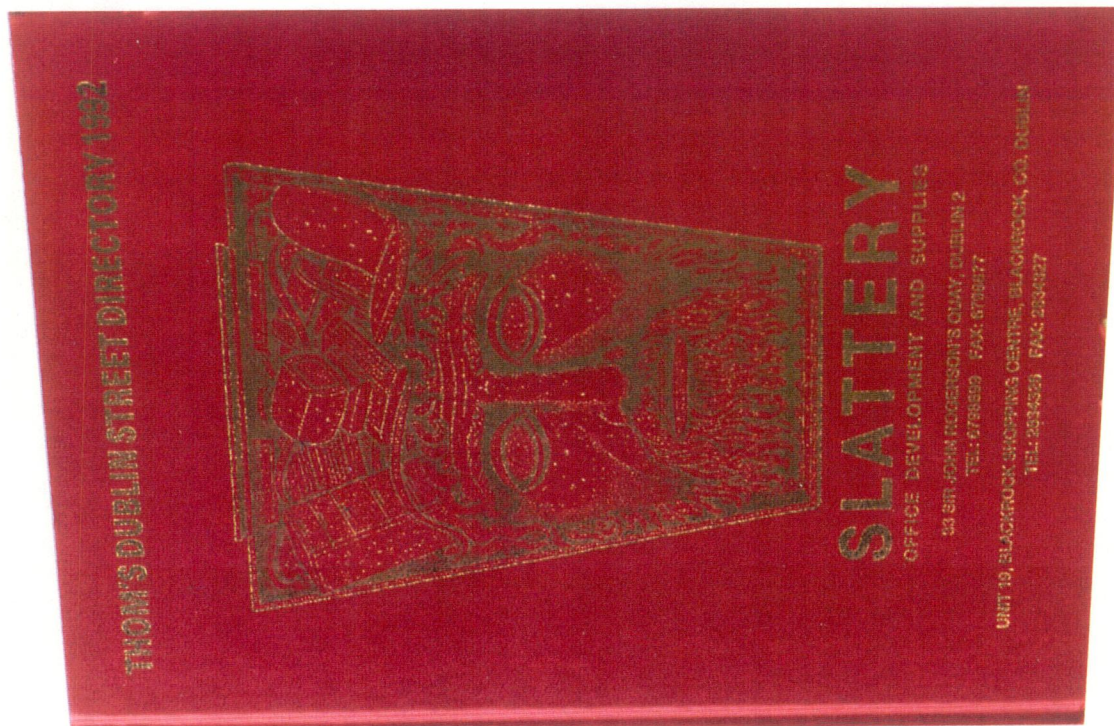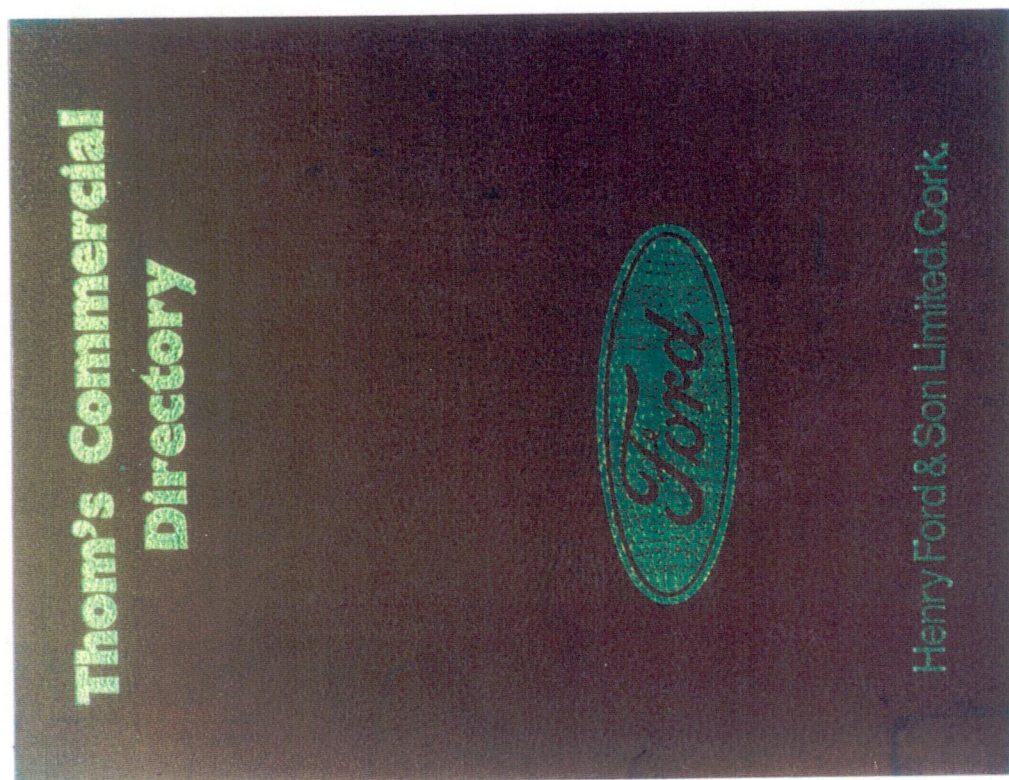
Figure 19.

Figure 20.

the Directory of a large quantity of new material outlining the reformation of Government policies etc and editing the original information to suit these. Carse, at this time, felt that the old character of Thom's Directory was changing - essential changes because some of the older sections of the volume had out-lined their usefulness and were deleted to make necessary space for fresh infor-mation. At this time, new material added covered topics covering: Customs duties, a classified list of manufacturers, especially manufacturers of Irish prod-ucts, and a complete trade directory of the main towns in Ireland. (Figure 18.a and 18.b)

The Directory continued in this form almost to the present day until in 1968, the copyright and Thom's publications ie Thom's Dublin Street Directory and Thom's Commercial Directory were purchased from Hely Thom and the opera-tion moved to 38 Merrion Square Dublin. The purchaser was a South-African business man by the name of Mr J L Wooton. Mr Wooton gave me the follow-ing information but was unwilling to elaborate on the finer details of the takeover.

> 'The Company name became Thom's Directories Ltd and has traded up to the present as such. The two Directories (street and commercial) were pub lished in alternate years. In the early 70s Hely Thom's melted down the type by mistake (normally set metal is the property of the publisher who has paid for the setting). and this caused a crisis in the company as the whole text of the two directories had not be re-set. As re-setting this in hot-metal again was not an economic proposition (not commercially viable), the directory was re-inputted onto IBM computers and this was the start of the computerisation of the contents of the directories.
>
> A who's who has been added in the intervening years, together with street directories for Cork (Figure 19.), Limerick and Galway. The books are now published annually. The Street Directory at the beginning of each year and the Commercial Directory in the middle of each year. The contents of the street directory are now available on Videotext 'Minitel' service.
>
> Thom's Dublin Street Directory (Figure 20.), now lists over 8000 streets in Dublin and environs and both directories are sold world-wide.

In my opinion Thom's Directory is symbollic of all that was good in the compa-ny. From the faultless research to the careful handling of the text and statistics and the attention to detail is incredible and indicative of the firm's constant efforts to produce only the best for their clients.

CONCLUSION

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This conclusion is a personal judgement reached by the study of Alexander Thom and Company Ltd. Thom's company, coming from rather humble surroundings in the early 19th century, grew to become one of, if not the, most important printing firms of its time. With the acquiring of the position of the Queen's Printer to Ireland and other meritable jobs. While supplying Ireland, England and various other countries throughout the world with the most up to date and efficient printing for its time, it also withstood the threats of both world wars. In 1962 Alex Thom's amalgamated with the Hely Group printers and became Hely Thoms, until 1970 when it was then acquired by the Jefferson Smurfit Group and renamed Smurfit Print and Packaging Ltd

Printers like any other business persons work hard to keep up with a fast expanding and changing industry, equally today as much as in yesteryears. But most notable is the fact that Alexander Thom might have survived if not prospered in today's printing / business environment.

In researching my thesis I find a strong bond between my own business attitude and that of Alex Thom's. His shrewdness and ability to quickly adapt (such as in getting the Post Office job in the early 1800s) to given situations, pushed him ahead of others in his field. He possessed the qualities that even today one would not expect to survive without in the business world.

Even though Thom came from an age of antiquity where a shilling was a week's wage, and he socialised with the upper-class members of his society, he was also conscious of the necessity to remain humble in the face of public opinion - a trick of trade, one might say, that has always been in and never gone out of fashion.

My case study of an ex-employee of Thom's could not have been surpassed by any other reference source, Mr Douglas Ewen. From his apprenticeship in 1935 through both the amalgamation and acquisition, was with the firm until his retirement in 1980. Ewen's career with the firm provided me with a second to none view of the workings of the complete company and whilst utilising his excellent memory, I was provided with the base on which all of the thesis material was built.

The final chapter is a study of Thom's Directory, a marvellous almanac which is

still in print today. Not only is the directory accredited with begin one of the finest street directories in the world, but it also possesses everything from market days to the names and addresses of every business in Ireland.

<u>Thom's Directory</u>, apart from the praise which I expressed earlier, gives us a profound knowledge of Alex Thom's personality, even if he did die c150 years ago. We can ascertain that he was probably a pernickety fellow and was keen on preciseness and tidyness - especially when it came to work. The Directory is also an expression of his love for Ireland and its culture and it appears that he went to no end to attain a profuse knowledge of his adopted homeland.

Alex Thom's history provides a lesson for all of us, be it educational, ethical or otherwise.

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