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# **The National College Of Art & Design**

Faculty of Design  
Department of Fashion & Textiles

**A study of Donegal Carpets  
from  
1898-1995**

**BY:**

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# INTRODUCTION

*"The peaks are lofty in Donegal,  
widespread the heather on the  
mountain tops,  
Higher still the fame of its people,  
and wider still the goodness in  
their hearts."*

Seosaimh Mac Grianna

For those who may not appreciate arts and crafts, Donegal is famed for its fishing industry and traditional music, But this county which is situated in the North West of Ireland is better known to artists and designers worldwide for its wonderful textile tradition. Crafts such as lace, tweed, crochet and knitwear are what have helped put Donegal and indeed Ireland on the map so to speak. However in my opinion the real jewel of Donegal textiles came from a small factory in the fishing village of Killybegs. A place where generations of people have passed on their skills and really proved their talents by producing some of the most beautiful and memorable textile pieces ever to emerge from this country.

I am of course referring to Donegal carpets. A handcraft introduced here almost one hundred years ago by the Morton family and one that was picked up naturally to produce exquisite carpets that adorn some of the finest buildings in the world. As a Donegal native and a textile student, I have always held a great love and fascination for these wondrous hand knotted creations. To see and touch an actual Donegal carpet leaves one in complete awe and respect for its creators. One appreciates the skill and dedication these men and women had towards their work and can only admire and congratulate them for sheer perfection in reproducing designs.



I believe that Donegal carpets are an important part of our heritage. It is my experience however that not a lot of Irish people today are aware or even interested in them. I feel that this is a great shame and is what prompted me to research into Donegal hand knotted carpets. I was interested in how it started off, its development over the years and why it eventually ceased operation. What problems did it encounter, how did it change the lives of these Killybegs people, how they regarded it and also where these carpets lie today. I was also intrigued by the designers that contributed work e.g C.F.A. Voysey, M.H. Baille Scott, Gavin Morton etc, and how their designs differed, and in later years the work that Raymond Mc Grath did for Irish state Buildings.

During my months of research I have paid many visits to Killybegs and heard many stories from its people. This has helped me to build up an understanding of the difference that the factory made to their lives and to share also the pride that they have towards it. In this thesis I traced the early and humble beginnings of Donegal Carpets through the glory days from when they supplied to high society to the many changes of ownership, and finally to its sad closure in the mid eighties. However I conclude with hopes of a new beginning for Donegal Carpets and examine how past problems could be solved in the future. I also examine the carpets that are most memorable to me, their designers and what makes them so distinctive.





# CHAPTER 1

THE START OF AN INDUSTRY



The success story of Donegal Carpets can not be told without giving due credit to its founder Alexander Morton (1844 - 1923), whose contribution to the textile industry can never be overstated. In Killybegs he is a man who is always remembered even today by those who never knew him but know of the changes that he brought to their town. Back in the 1890's when the Arts and Crafts movement was at its peak, Alexander Morton (Fig.1) had one of the most successful textile manufacturing firms in the British Isles, specialising in lace, chenille, tapestry and machine woven carpets. He was an extraordinarily driven man with a passion for textiles who was always searching for improvement, and although his firm specialised in a variety of textiles he still saw room for expansion, finding new markets, new techniques and ultimately new textile areas to explore. It was this curiosity that led him to eventually set up his first hand knotted carpet factory in Donegal.

In a Maples shop in London, Alexander first noticed a rug that had a special quality. Unlike the regularity of machine woven carpets that his firm were producing, this rug was more distinctive. It had more texture and a lot more character. He gave it little thought until a year later when at an exhibition in Brussels he spotted this very same textile effect on the loom of a Belgian weaver. This time his interest was rekindled and he made a note of the firm that this weaver represented. On returning home he instructed his son James Morton who was due to holiday there to investigate this industry further. James found that there were several hand knotted carpet firms in Belgium and on visiting a convent where they were being made, it occurred to him that Morton and Co. could add include this product to their firm's range. After all the company was financially secure and so could afford to take a risk. It would also add to their reputation as being a flexible and progressive firm.

In order to set up such an industry, the Mortons had to consider the cost factor. They







Fig.1

**Alexander Morton (1844 - 1923)**



1940



work the long hours for less pay it would take and become skilled without much training. Ireland was immediately considered and in particular the rural west known as the congested districts. These areas were densely populated and poverty stricken. In the summer of 1897, Alexander Morton who was on a visit to Belfast mentioned his idea to a colleague Mr Frederick Wrench. He was a member of The Congested Districts Board, a government agency set up in 1891 to improve transport and encourage industry in these depressed regions. Wrench welcomed the idea enthusiastically and suggested Donegal as being a perfect location for such an industry. He also ensured that the Board would give financial help in setting it up.

After several meetings with The Congested Districts Board, Alexander Morton sent his two sons James and Guy and a nephew to visit west Donegal to examine the area. They visited the area around Ardara, Glenties, Killybegs and Glencolumbkille to talk to the locals and decide upon the best location for a factory. They were struck by the lifestyles of these people and in particular the obstacles they had overcome to make a living there. They recognised a need for industry and employment and knew that these people would work hard for a wage. Having investigated the amount of money that an average household would earn per week, they knew that they could pay well below the average wage in England or Scotland and still give these people more money than they could earn in any of the other jobs available at that time. James recounted his memories of Donegal to Jocelyn Morton in his book "Three Generations of a Family Textile Firm".<sup>1</sup>

***"We spent days, got records of the sprigging done by girls in their homes, the wages they earn, the number of girls within a given radius in each district and so on. We liked the people. The wages presently being earned according to samples and data given us showed that a long days work gave them not more***





***than threepence a day and generally we considered the conditions such that we could very materially improve them and attain the purpose of adding the industry of hand tuft carpet to our productions."***

Killybegs (Fig. 2) was decided as the best location for the factory. Apart from having an apparent endless supply of willing workers, there was a deep water harbour there and a railway nearby which would facilitate easy transportation. It looked like a venture that had nothing to lose, after all if the government was providing money for premises and the people would work hard for less pay and with a reputation like that of Morton and Co., they had all to gain. They could proceed knowing that they were helping the economy of Killybegs immensely and yet would make a profit themselves. One may argue that the Mortons took advantage of a deprived area and were merely using these people as slave labour, but in my opinion Alexander Morton and his company were able to offer the people of Donegal an income which enabled these people to eke out an existence within their own environment. The wages, however low, would be automatically reinvested into the town of Killybegs and therefore could improve its economy a little.

Back in Darvel, preparation was being made to get to know this hand knotted technique and so Mortons enlisted the help of a weaver from Wilton who taught some girls from Darvel the process involved. These girls were quite prepared to travel over to Killybegs to pass on their skills to the people, they did this in 1898 with James Morton, who took with him a small quantity of dyed wool and a few point papers to commence work on the first ever Donegal Carpet industry.

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1 Morton, J. Three Generations of a Family Textile Firm. London, 1971 p.91





Fig. 2

**Killybegs Harbour**



1954

1954

1954

1954

1954

Assisted by the Congested Districts board he rented a hayloft over a stable and set up looms. Interviews took place to find suitable employees and there was no shortage as indeed James described:

***"It took me hours to take names and addresses of the girls who came Some one hundred and fifty in all, and it was a sight never to be forgotten. They came from the hills and valleys for miles around, girls with bare feet, jet black or brilliant red hair like hill ponies".*** <sup>2</sup>

This conjurs up a powerful image and reinforces the fact that employment was scarce in Donegal and so the promise of a weekly wage would have brought great hope to the people. Weaving and other skills had been widely taught locally with the establishment of the Donegal Industrial Fund in 1883 and so the concept of hand woven carpets would not have been completely alien to them. Production started immediately and samples were shown to Mortons biggest customer in New York. The Killybegs people adapted this technique easily and it was evident that this experiment was going to bring success to Donegal. Orders were received and the employees worked vigorously. It wasn't long before Alaxander Morton payed a visit to Killybegs to inspect the new business for himself and to also look at suggested locations for the new factory that was planned. His first impressions of Killybegs were quite different to the way he was to feel in later years. Although he had been in Irish cities before, he had never encountered the rural regions and it shocked him. In a letter to James Morton he wrote:

***"I cannot find anything but hard rock and bog and it will require a divine miracle to make this place or these people any better. People on such a country never can and never will have a nature like those brought up on more productive soil, we can be over fat and inclined to be soft but we can also be affected by trying to live where it is impossible to live and so sour our nature and make***







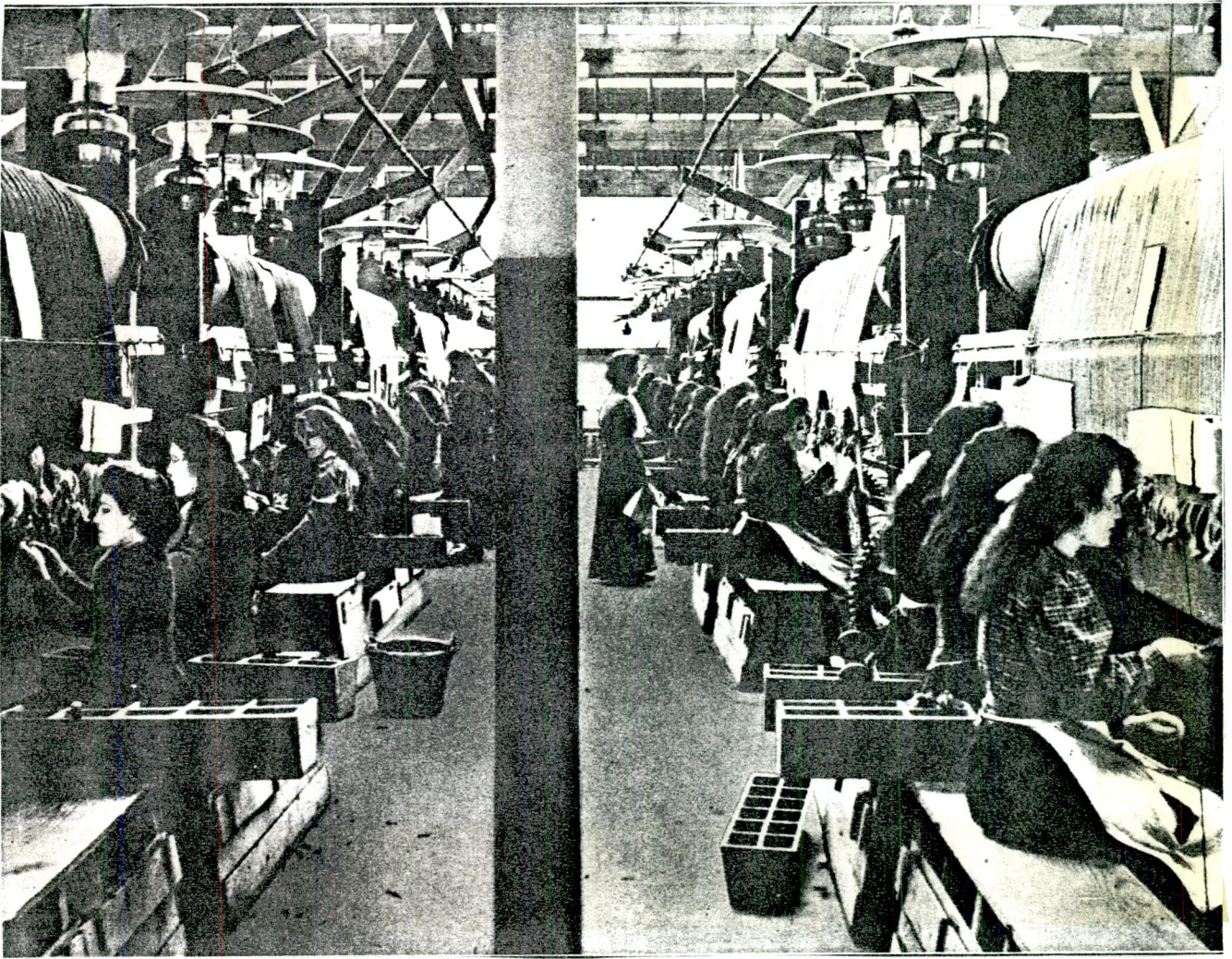


Fig.3      **Workers at the first Carpet Factory**



1945



*them (the Irish) what I regret to say they are - cross and troublesome all over the world".* <sup>3</sup>

Harsh words indeed to James who put such an effort into bringing the company over to Ireland and such a different first impression to that of his son who liked the people and the place immediately. It supprises me somewhat that Alexander Morton had not investigated the area himself, after all he was considering putting time and money into an industry which excited him. I find it odd that finding its proper location in Ireland did not interest him enough to make a prior visit. However, if it was a gamble on his part it certainly was paying off and the people of Killybegs started to prove their worth. Cross and troublesome they may have been but grateful they were for the work and they worked hard. The pay, however low it seemed to the Mortons was three times more than they had received before and they were content.

As time went on, any doubts that Alexander had were quashed when the new factory was built by local hands. He took great pride in the building and remained in Killybegs until its construction was complete. During this time he became acquainted with the local people and had quickly warmed to them.. The new factory could accommodate over four hundred employees and was built with local limestone and Canadian pitch pine timber. The looms, one of which weighed over four tons were imported from Scotland and can be seen in the factory to this day, a mark of their strength and durability. They were also made from pitch pine timber.

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2 & 3 Morton, J. Three Generations of a Family Firm. London, 1971. pp.92-94





By the year 1900 over four hundred girls were employed at Killybegs and the firm had received many lucrative contracts from overseas. One of the first Donegal carpets made at the new premises was for Queen Victoria who had ordered it from Millar and Beatty following a visit she made to Ireland earlier that year. In an article for Chambers Journal in 1902, Mary Gorges commented:

***"It will seem like a fairytale to the patient peasant workers in those lonely glens and hamlets, still so far removed from the rush and bustle of the worlds highways that they now weave a fabric for the Queen".***

This type of comment portraying the Donegal peasant as backward and wretched was quite common to writers at this time and in my research I have come across many articles which portray the Mortons as the people who saved these Donegal families from near extinction. In Art Journal of March 1900 (pp.78-82), James L. Caw wrote :

***"The introduction of an industry in which hand labour contributes so much to the ultimate value should be a great benefit to a district where in spite of poverty and privation, the people cling to their soil with a pathetic yet beautiful tenacity".***

Other articles written about Donegal people would remind one of a fairytale where by some divine miracle a whole race is saved. In The Gael of October 1903 (p. 331), in an article entitled "Persian carpets woven in Donegal", I found the author to be very imaginative indeed where it stated:

***"Scattered thickly over these mountain wilds are the humble homes of a race unequalled perhaps in the world for their endurance, their patient and unrequited toil, for what can the wretched patches of barren stoney soil or bog which constitutes their holdings yield save the most miserable crops?"***



And again further on in the account it is written:

***"The virtue of these people is as stern as the hills which surround their homes. Inured from childhood to privation of all kinds, leading lives of unremitted toil with none of the comforts or pleasures which brighten life and lighten labour, yet clinging with passionate love to the land of their birth".***

Perhaps it is because I myself am from Donegal that I find these comments about the 'poor and wretched peasant' to be rather over exaggerated. I'm sure that these people did not want to be glorified for their ability to live with poverty. I prefer to view them as determined survivors who made the most of what they had. and the very fact that they survived on this 'unproductive and barren soil' only reinforces the fact that these were very strong minded and talented people.

However despite these grim tales of depravation being told, some authors did indeed praise the people of Killybegs for the sheer skillfulness of their work and the strength of their character. In the article in The Gael referred to above, they are described as

***" a grand people physically and morally, gifted in the richest measure with all the best qualities of the celt".***

Because profits from Donegal Carpets were reasonably high, Alexander Morton invested twice as much money into the business as originally planned and The Congested Districts Board were so impressed by the progress of the firm that they offered to build three more factories nearby. The first was built in Kilcar, ten miles west of Killybegs and was opened by the Bishop of Raphoe in 1901, who apparently congratulated and thanked Alexander Morton on behalf of the people. It was reported in "The Furniture Record" that Mr Morton was told that " ***every member of his family who came to this coast was esteemed by the people for their respect for the***





**independence of their employees "**. The other two factories at Annagry and Crollly were opened in 1904 and it was decided that Killybegs was to be the central depot here all the wool was to be collected and the spinning and dyeing done. The other three factories were to be sole for weaving (they also had railway lines nearby for transportation). Although the Mortons gave direct employment to many of the local girls, they also indirectly employed the farmers who were rearing sheep. Donegal hand knotted carpets were made entirely of wool and it was specified that the wool used in the manufacture of the carpets was to be spun from the sheep reared locally. This was part of the appeal of a Donegal carpet and most certainly an aspect that was advertised by the Mortons. These carpets were entirely woven by Donegal people with the wool from the sheep reared on its mountains.

In Celtia of April 1903 ( p 58 - 60 ) , Louisa E Farquharson wrote that " **on each carpet lay great hanks of the beautiful native wool dyed in Donegal from vegetable dyes and every girl in the factory works up to 250 sheep per year and as the number of girls employed will soon reach 1,000, it will mean the consumption of the fleeces of over 10,000 score of sheep and a large sum expended in the area**".

The actual process of making hand knotted carpets was the same as those of Persia or Turkey. A woolen warp was stretched vertically between two long horizontal beams and stood vertically in front of the weavers who sat side by side and who varied from one to a dozen depending on the width of carpet. The design which was drawn on point paper, each square representing a tuft, was placed in front of the girls. They selected the necessary wool ( which had already been cut to length required) and tied them to two threads of the warp in a knot. After a complete row had been tied



the warp thread was divided to front and back rows and shoots of woollen weft were beaten down close and firm with a small toothed hammer. After the entire carpet was woven it was passed through a trimming machine which did not reduce it to a smooth pile but rather a textured one.

One can now appreciate the difference that the Mortons made to this town and its surrounding areas. Not only did he require weavers but also sheep rearers, spinners, dyers, and when a carpet was complete it had to be transported by rail which meant that this service was being used also. In the space of three years he had noticeably improved the economy of Killybegs and its surrounding areas with four factories in operation and in that space of time, he had put the work of Donegal carpet makers in famous buildings and homes all over the world.

It always intrigues me how quickly and efficiently Alexander Morton received these contracts. It would normally take a new company several years to build up such an impressive clientele considering also that in those days it would have been much more difficult to advertise. Yet Donegal carpets were sought after by those who had style. I feel that it shows how highly Morton Textiles were regarded at that time and how exquisite a Donegal carpet really was. In Irish Rural life and Industry 1907 (P. 54), One Irish critic wrote.

***" There is something about the soft, springy, mossy feeling of a Donegal carpet underfoot which makes all other carpets feel thin, hard and boardy in comparison and while in machine made carpets, everything must be adhered to and the same pattern constantly repeated, the Donegal hand tufted carpet can be varied indefinitely in design, colour, size, shape or quality".***





# CHAPTER 2

DESIGNS, DESIGNERS & EXHIBITIONS





One of the many features Donegal Carpets can boast is its impressive catalogue of designers. This has been one of the contributing factors to its popularity. Although in the early days of production, designs were of Turkish or Persian character, designers such as Voysey, Knox and Miller steered away from this style and created simple flat designs in wonderful colours. They were the people who brought Donegal Carpets into the spotlight and who gave these carpets an edge. This is not to say that the Persian style disappeared totally. Gavin Morton was very much influenced by these Eastern motifs and this is obvious in his designs which were woven in Killybegs. (Fig.4)

Gavin, known as "the Wee Guy" was described by Jocelyn Morton in "Three Generations of a Family Textile Firm", as being "**a very gifted and competent designer**". He led a team of designers that included G.K. Robertson, John Edniet and George Logan who produced many designs for Donegal Carpets. One of the very first exhibitions that featured these carpets was by The Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland which was held in the Royal University Buildings Dublin on 21st November 1899. It included seven carpets which were praised by many critics. Writing for "The Furnisher" in December 1899 one writer declared: "**These are remarkable for their beauty of design, for harmonious colouring and general fitness for the wear and tear to which a carpet is necessarily subjected.**" Although I am unsure of the identities of all of these carpets, it is clear that a few of them were of Persian style and so may be attributed to Gavin Morton. In a review published in The Journal and Proceedings of the Arts and Crafts Society in Ireland 1901 (p.65), Harold Rathbone commented how one of these carpets was "**obviously an attempt to vie with a Turkey carpet which it successfully does.**"

One carpet which certainly featured in the exhibition was C.F.A. Voysey's creation







Fig.4

Donegal Carpet of Turkish Stlyle by Gavin Morton



1941

1941



'The Rose' (Fig. 5) which was made in 1899. Rathbone in the previously mentioned article gave a critical yet favourable view. He described it as:

***"Excellent in design and colour and the tone if a little inclined to be sombre is rich and titanesque. There is rather an excess of the blue ground on the border.....but the flat treatment of the roses is excellently understood".***

In my opinion this is one of Voysey's most remarkable carpet designs. He did not draw the roses in intricate detail but flatly and with perfect balance of weight, colour and pattern. James L. Caw in Art Journal of March 1900, (pp.80 - 82) described it as:

***"marked with the same spirit as the hangings and that is probably the direction in which the design will tend".*** I agree that a superb piece such as 'The Rose' would possibly be more appropriate as a wall hanging rather than a carpet. I personally would feel guilty for walking on such a beautiful piece of work.

Charles Francis Annesly Voysey (1857 - 1941) started his career as an architect but drew a great number of repeating pattern for wallpaper, woven and printed textiles and for carpets from the late 1880's onwards. He has been described as the leading designer of flat design in his day. In an article entitled 'Ideas in Things' in 'The Art Connected with the Building' (p.101), he gave his thoughts on the principles of design and use of colour saying that:

***"Nature never allows her colours to quarrel , her purple trees with their gossamer of delicate spring green dwell lovingly with the blue carpet of hyacinths. Harmony is everywhere, the most brilliant colours are always in small quantities".***

Later in the article he reveals the real key to his success in design by saying:

***" We cannot be too simple, a true desire to be simple in all we do strengthens our sense of fitness and tends to the perfecting of proportion and workmanship and a more reverent regard to natural qualities of materials."***





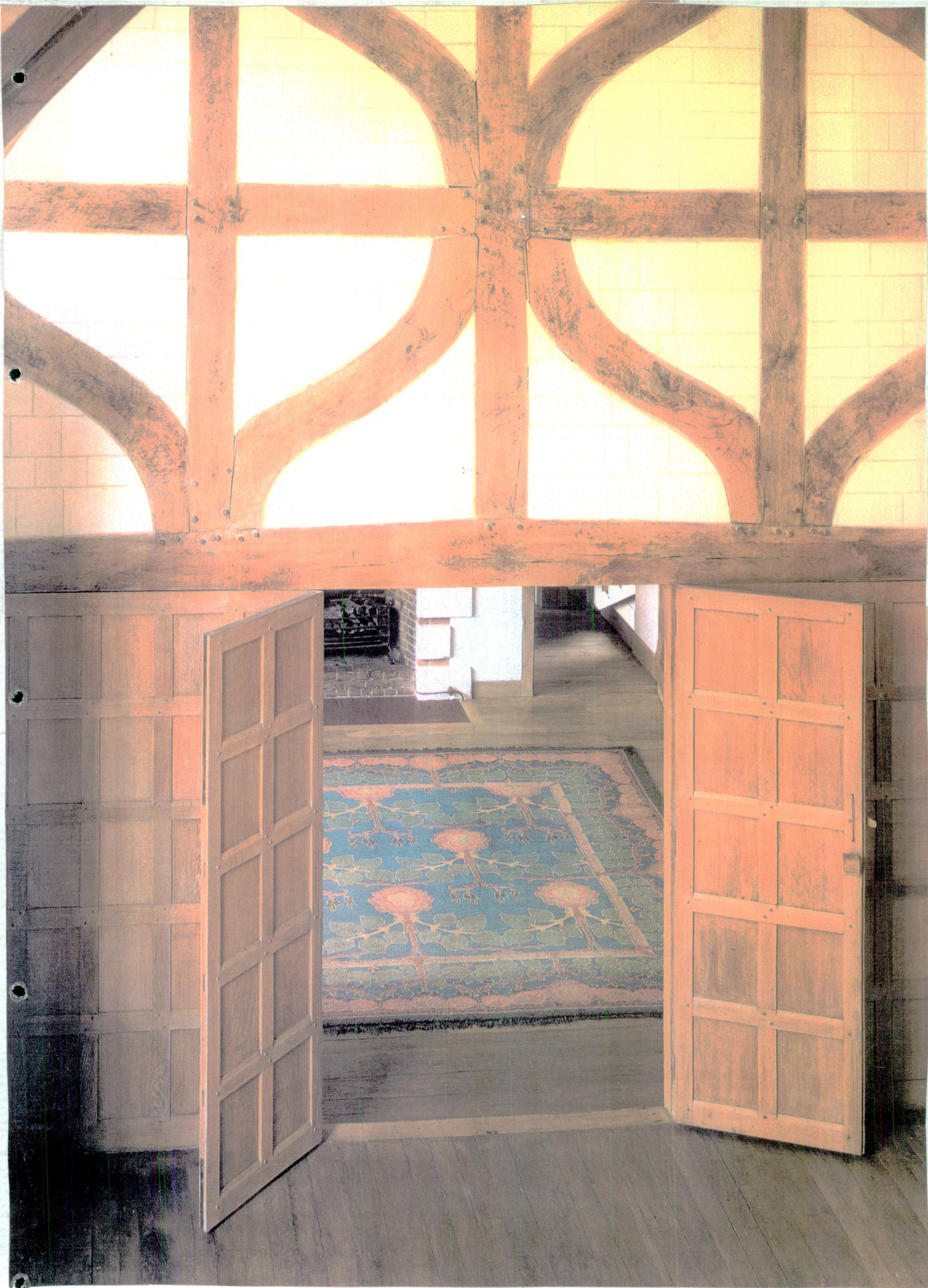


Fig. 5

The Rose designed by C.F.A. Voysey







Several Donegal Carpet designs were created by Voysey and it is thought that very few of them were originally designed with carpets in mind but rather printed textiles or wallpaper. I believe that this was why a lot of Voyseys carpets are so distinctive. They could easily be designs for curtain, upholstery or wallpaper and therefore look so much more interesting on the floor because they do not have the typical geometric motifs that often appear on carpets. Voysey's designs had movement whereas many other carpets like those of Persia had designs which were anchored by strong lines and rigid forms. It is quite easy to distinguish a Voysey Donegal Carpet from one of Gavin Mortons. Although talented in his own way I do not believe that Morton had a flair for design like Voysey and although his carpets were in superb colour they did not possess the same freedom of form. C.F.A. Voysey had a contract with Mortons to supply ten designs per year initially for a period of five years starting in 1897 and renewable each year from then on.

From the 7th - 13th of March 1903 an exhibition of Donegal Carpets was held at The Grafton Gallery, London. It was organised by Liberty & Co., one of Morton's biggest customers. Several carpets were shown and one third of the exhibition was attributed to Voysey. Liberty's, who often supplied matching fabrics and wallpaper depending on public demand, issued a catalogue of designs and gave each carpet a name usually of a town or village in Ireland. Amongst the Voysey carpets shown were 'The Inneskeen' (otherwise known as 'The Rose'), and 'The Donnemara' which was described by Liberty's as "**A pleasing rendering of tulips and half blown roses modulated and blended together with excellent decorative effect**". It is a very abstract design. I feel that the motifs are recognisable as plant forms yet not as obvious as roses and tulips, however it is interesting to observe the different colour schemes used in weaving 'The Donnemara' and the changes that the width of the carpet makes to the overall appearance of the design. In Fig. 6 the difference of colour scheme to Fig. 7 is







Fig.6

The Donnemara designed by C.F.A. Voysey



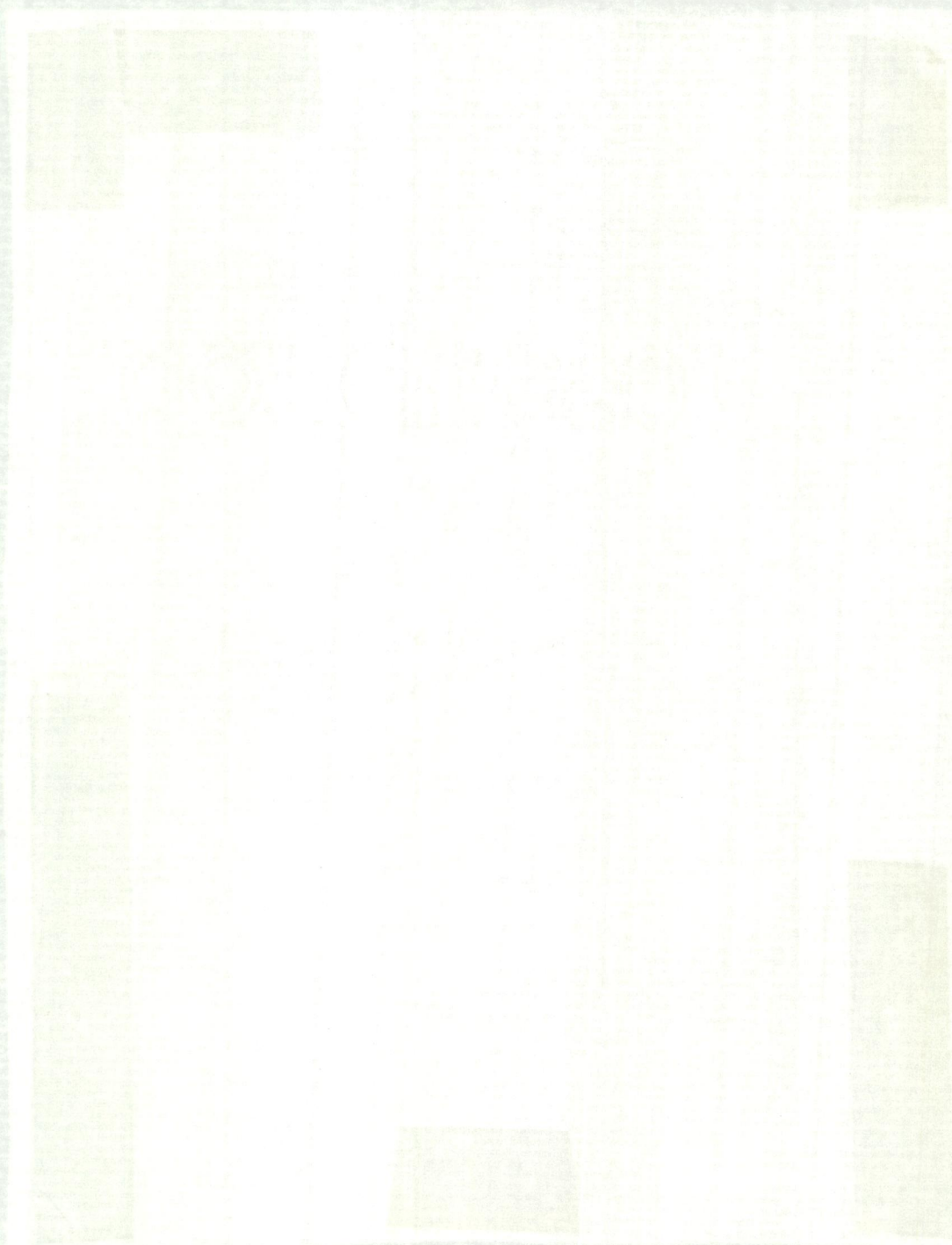






Fig.7

The Donnemara designed by C.F.A. Voysey





emphasised by the centre piece being bigger and therefore showing more repeat pattern. Also if one studies both designs one may see that Voysey highlighted different areas. In Fig. 6 the eye is drawn to the vibrant orange leaf pattern against the dark brown form. In Fig. 7 the red flower dominates yet is cooled by the green leaf pattern while the other colours merge in the background.

'The Duleek' Fig. 8 is another of his designs which was used by Mortons for double cloth and madras muslin and also used for wallpaper. Voysey treats the animals and the trees very simply with both motifs disappearing into the border, an element which I find to be rather distracting as the entire design is not visible. The border appears to cut everything off abruptly. However it is refreshing to see him use swans, doves and stags in his work which reflect his condemnation of what he called: "**The unreasonable, unhealthy and insane opposition to the conventional application of animal life to decoration.**"<sup>4</sup>

'The Lisburn' (Fig. 9) which also featured in the 1903 exhibition was described by Louisa E. Farquharson in Celtia April 1903 (pp. 58-60) as: "**A leaf green ground and a trellis design enclosing sprays of conventional flowers carried out in myrtle an moss green with a border of trailing vines intermingled with the grapes and leaves in various soft shades of green**". This is not as easily recognisable as being a Voysey carpet because of the trellis pattern and the small isolated repeats. There is none of his usual sweeping lines to be found here and I feel that overall the design of 'The Lisburn' is quite rigid.

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<sup>4</sup> Voysey, C.F.A. taken from 'The Journal of Decorative Art' April 1898 p.86.









Fig.8

The Duleek designed by C.F.A. Voysey

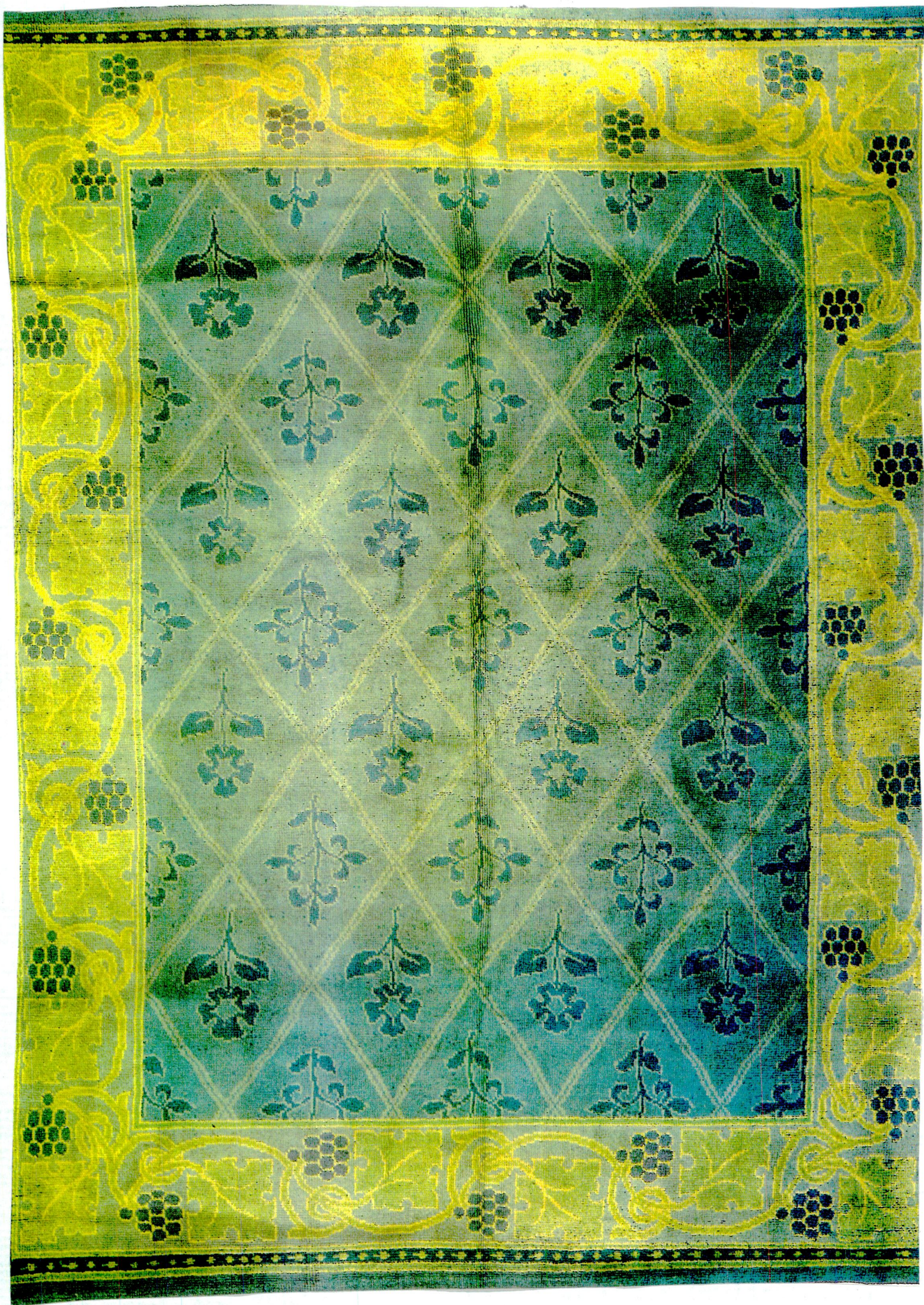


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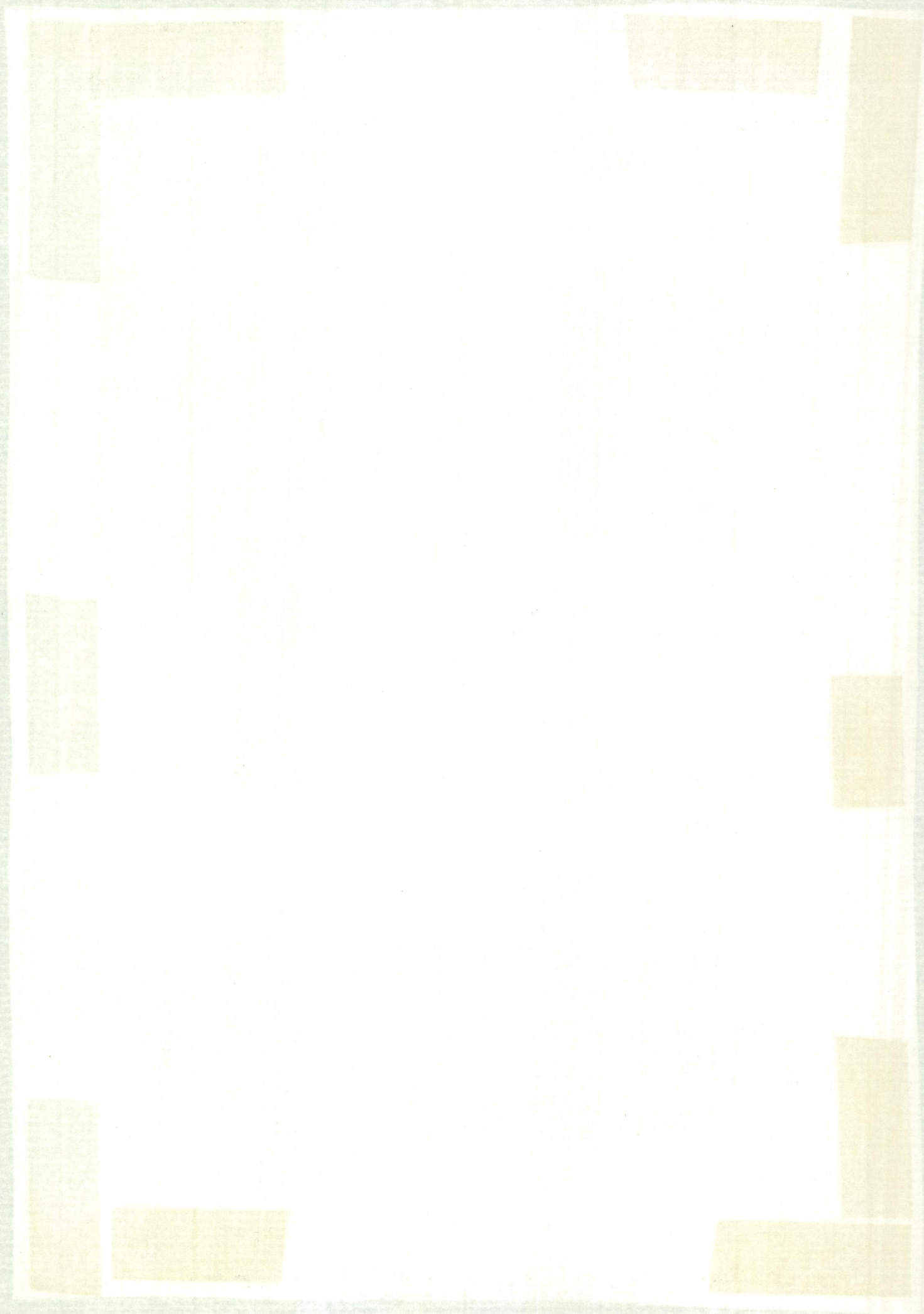
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Fig. 9 The Lisburn designed by C.F.A. Voysey








'The Glenmure' (Fig. 10) which was also exhibited was described by Liberty's as **"A treatment of teazel and leaves suggesting gothic influence with a border of similar ornament"**. This is another of Voyseys carpet design that I find interesting because of its intense green colouring and vivid red. A wonderful combination and a great demonstration of his flair for colour. 'The Fintona' (Fig. 11), was designed by The Silver Studio and was shown also. Liberty's described it as **"The principle motive of decoration"**. It could easily be mistaken for one of Voyseys designs as the flat treatment of the leaves and flowing forms are characteristics of many of his pieces. What I like particularly about 'The Fintona' is how the leaves in the border slip over the lines and have a wonderful directional flow. Somehow the border does not restrict the movement of the design but is intermingled with it therefore making the whole carpet seem more alive.

Commenting on the exhibition in an article (already mentioned) Louisa E. Farquharson gives a glowing report of the Donegal Carpets and described entering the Grafton Gallery as being :

**"Surrounded by a wealth of harmonious colouring by a beauty of design remarkable even in these days of eye pleasing effects. Here on every side and underfoot were thick piled carpets. Low tones were the rule and the larger and more pictorial patterns, (perhaps drawn from bog and plants). They had been made without help of steam or complicated machinery for a fair wage by colleens in their native Donegal"**. 

Also included in her account was the fact that Liberty's considered the exhibition worthwhile because **"These handmade carpets afford an excellent example of that artistic individualism which obtains only where pure handicraftmanship is employed in contradistinction to the monotonous perfection and regularity of machine production"**.









Fig. 10

The Glenmure designed by C.F.A. Voysey



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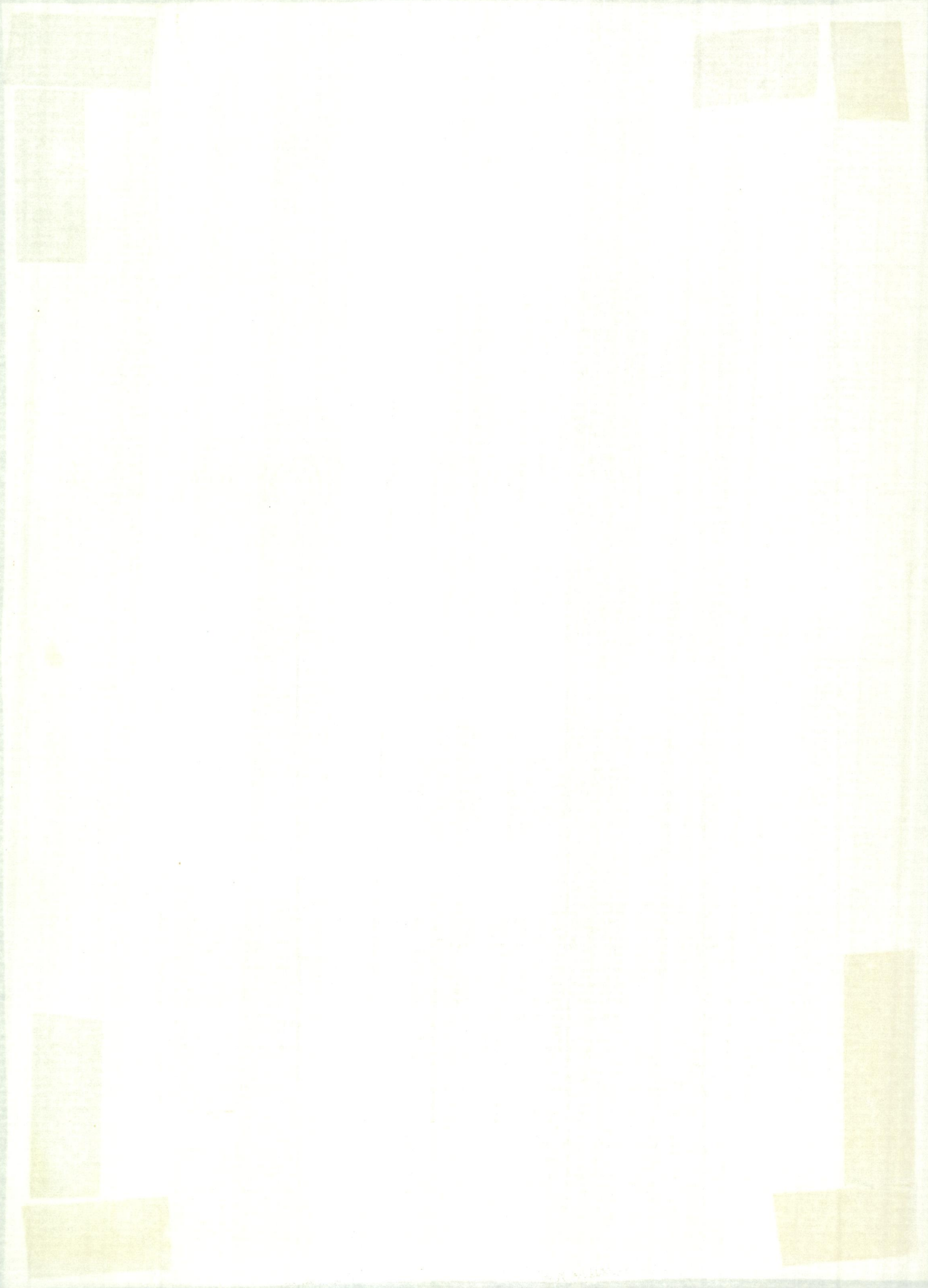






Fig.11 The Fintona designed by The Silver Studio



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This exhibition was what gave Donegal Carpets its greatest publicity since it had opened as it exposed these carpets to an important audience in the centre of London. It is said that the catalogue published by Liberty's listed press opinions from thirty newspapers accross the British Isles. The Daily Telegraph of March 9th 1903 declared that the King was **"amongst the admirers at the exhibition and had picked out a carpet for his own bedroom"**. (Now that the Donegal peasant had woven for the King and Queen, the fairytale is complete!!)

Some of these carpets shown at the Grafton Gallery crept into another exhibition organised by Liberty's entitled 'Celtic Art'. This Celtic style inevitably appeared on Donegal carpets as it really did emphasise their Irish roots to foreign customers and gave them an identity. One of the first celtic rugs to be woven in Killybegs was a design by Mary Watts, wife of painter George F. Watts who was acquainted with James Morton. He persuaded her to submit a design to be woven at killybegs. The design was called 'The Pelican' (Fig.12) and included symbols of the house, the heart, love and the cross. It also included symbols of expansion and had four birds at each corner symbolising the pelican in distress feeding her young with her own blood. The colours used were crimson red, olive green and blue highlighted by cream. It was a successful composition with a lot of messages concerning home and the hearth (where she intended it to be placed). With the design she sent a letter to the workers explaining what each symbol meant so as to enlighten them on what exactly they were weaving. Such a desire to inform the underprivileged of the importance of artistic beauty and its underlying message was a typical element of the Arts and Crafts movement of which she was an activist. However, the Celtic theme was developed by James Morton and was introduced into Donegal Carpet designs much to the delight of Mary Watts who in a letter to Morton wrote **"How glad I am that you are going to carry forward the Celtic. Art"**.



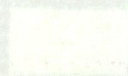
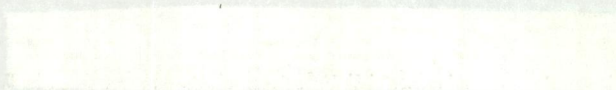
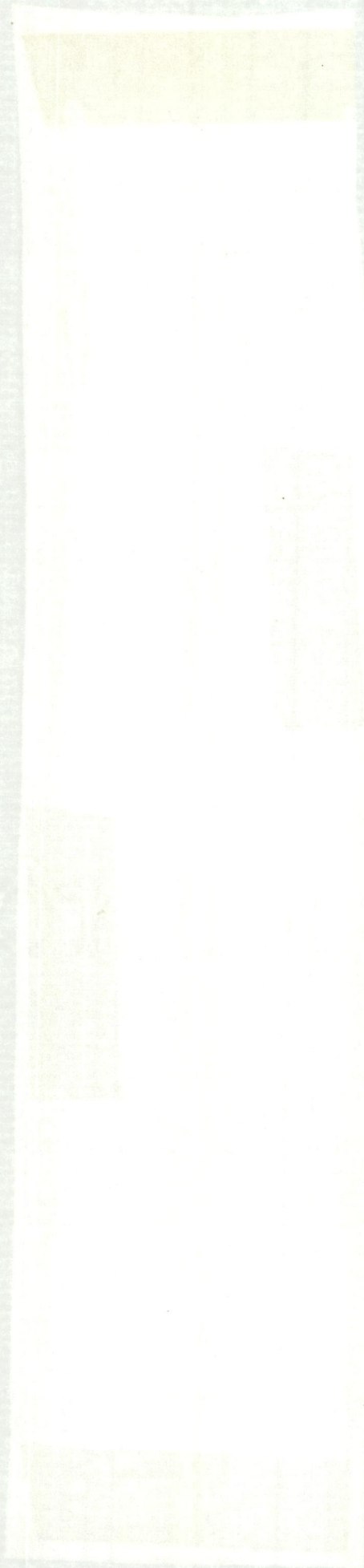




Fig.12

The Pelican designed by Mary Watts





One of the first carpets with celtic design to be woven in Donegal was for the Offices of the Department of Agriculture in Cork circa 1902. Around this time there was an altar mat with celtic ornament woven for St. Eunan's cathedral in Letterkenny. However one of the most memorable celtic carpets woven surely has to be 'The Ardmore'. A striking carpet adapted from one of the pages in the Book of Kells. This was shown at the Grafton Gallery in their 1904 exhibition and described by Liberty's in their catalogue as having, **"an olive green ground divided by pillar shaped panels of peacock blue and intersected by tracery"**. Other carpets exhibited included 'The Merville' a celtic design attributed to Archibald Knox who designed for Liberty's at the time and was also engaged by The Silver Studio. He was described by Paul Larmour in The Irish Arts Review Yearbook 1990-91 (p.215), as having specialised in **"celtic ornamental work fused with Art Nouveau"**. Knox supplied many designs for Donegal Carpets (Fig. 13).

In 1904 an exhibition took place in St. Louis called The Irish Industrial Exhibition. It featured hand made carpets, rugs, lace and tapestries and included some Donegal carpets one of which was 'The Ardmore' and also featured 'The Pelican'. Some Donegal girls travelled over to St. Louis to demonstrate in the industrial hall the process of hand knotted carpet manufacture. Other exhibits included rugs by The Dun Emer Guild, set up by two of W.B. Yeats' sisters and Evelyn Gleeson in Autumn 1902 and which also had celtic influences.

With Donegal Carpets being shown at exhibitions almost every year since production started, it is not surprising how quickly their popularity grew. One of their greatest advertised assets was that they could make carpets to any size or shape required up to forty feet wide and to any length. The fact that one could submit designs to be woven was a big advantage to artists and designers worldwide.







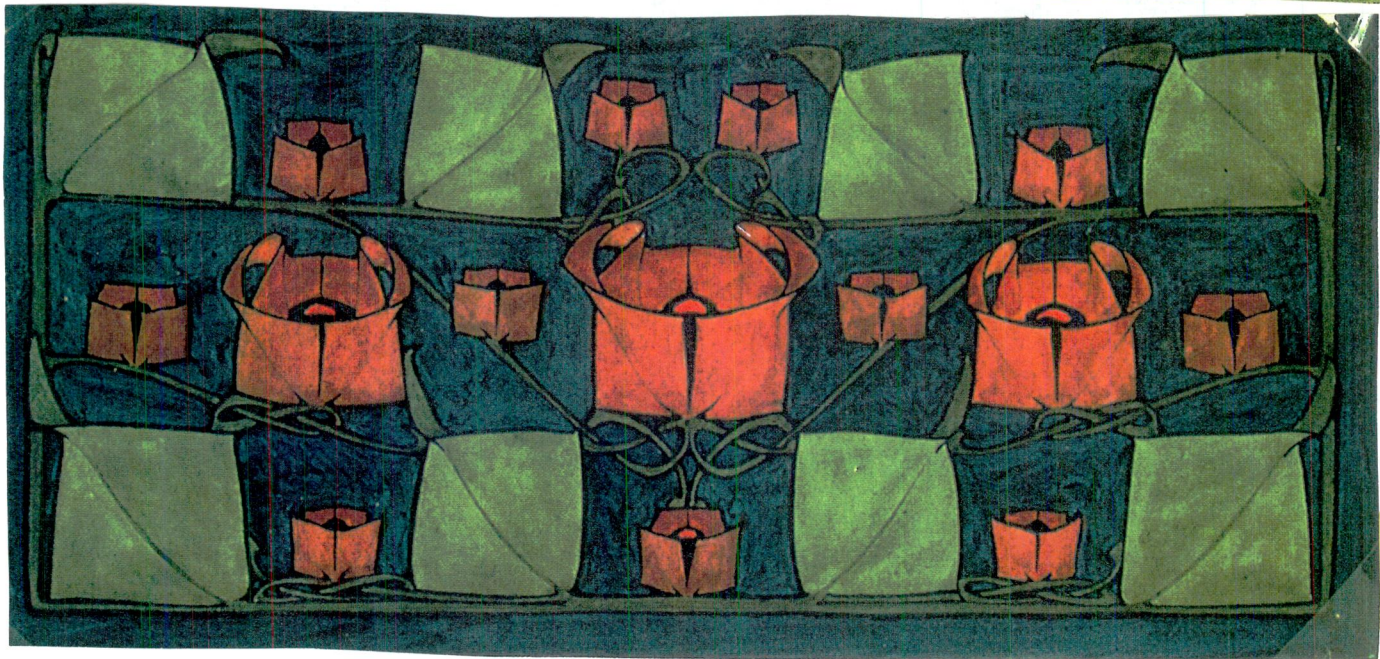
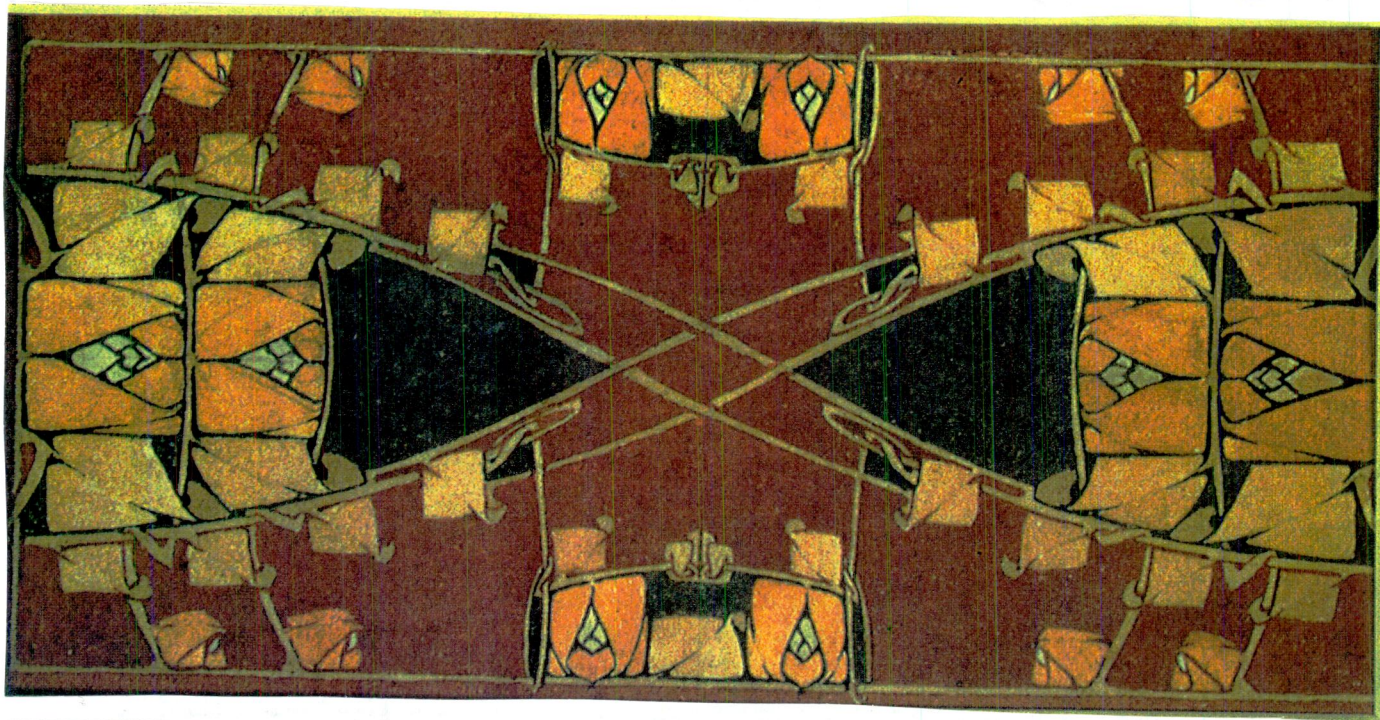
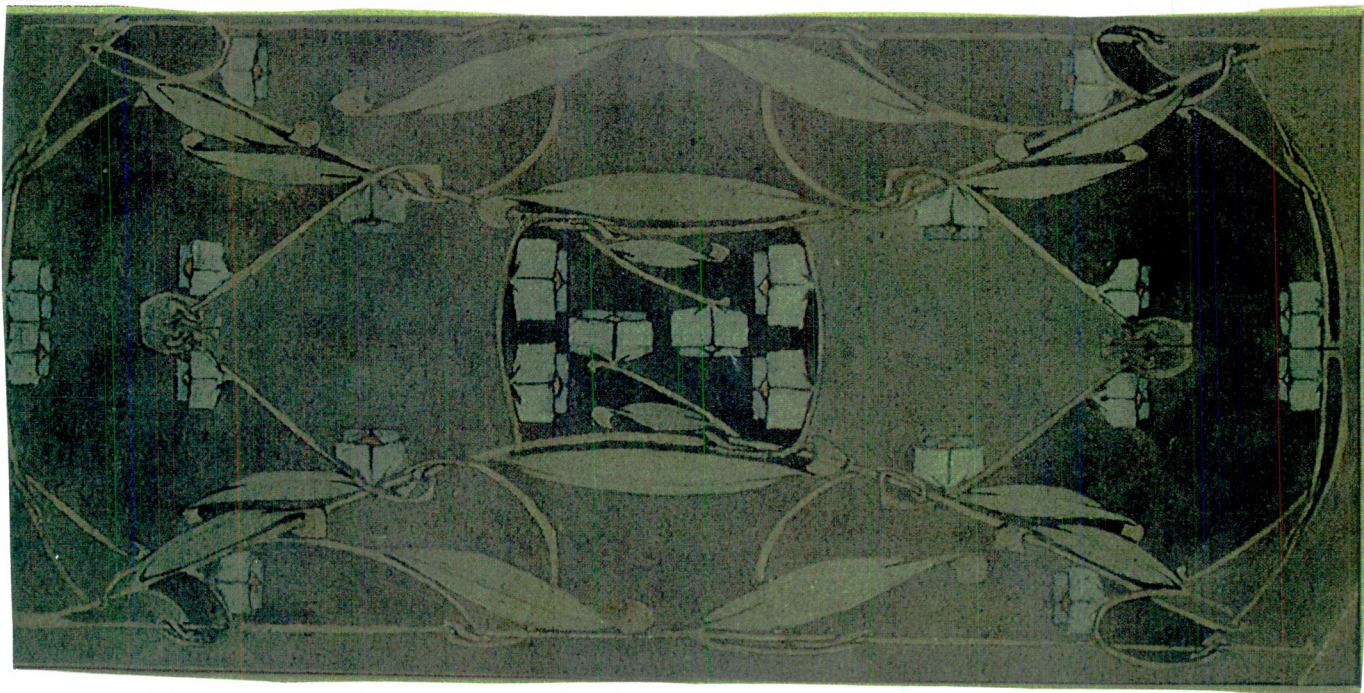


Fig. 13 Designs for Donegal Carpets by Archibald Knox



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Architects who took advantage of this service included George Walton (1867-1933), who designed many carpets to suit his decorative schemes. One of his commissions was to decorate Kodak Offices in London, Glasgow, Vienna, Milan and Brussels. This was a very lucrative contract and he designed carpets to suit the interiors. These carpets are very unique as only a specific number of a singular design were woven and this made them exclusive. Between 1907 and 1910, Walton built houses for George Davison who was in charge of Kodaks European Operations. Hand knotted Donegal carpets were made for both houses, one in Wales and the other in Oxfordshire. Davison commissioned Walton to decorate the interior of his house boat, 'The Log Cabin' and he installed a Donegal carpet there also.

Mackey Hugh Baille Scott (1865-1948) was another architect /designer who designed carpets to suit his interiors. In 1903 a house was built by G.H. Brewerton and given the name Foxwold. Almost all the furniture and rugs were designed by Baille Scott. He preferred to use rugs rather than carpets arguing that there was little art in a carpet as most carpet designs are very flat with the design stretching to all sides. He believed that the design should develop from the centre and that rugs were more hygienic than carpets. In an article in 'Houses and Gardens' London, 1906 (p.76), he claims that in order to keep a carpet properly one has to subject it to **"a yearly beating with rods"** whilst **"in the case of rugs this annual drubbing is not demanded and an occasional shaking is all that is required"**. His designs for Foxwold (Fig.14), were geometrical and very abstract and possibly much too dazzling to suit a large carpet, however they did work well with the interior for which they were designed especially, in my opinion, the dining room where the rugs although quite small, really do add a splash of colour which complement the overall design of the room. In a catalogue of his designs which is among the Morton papers in The National Archive of Art and Design, there is a short note on rugs which sums up his opinion.







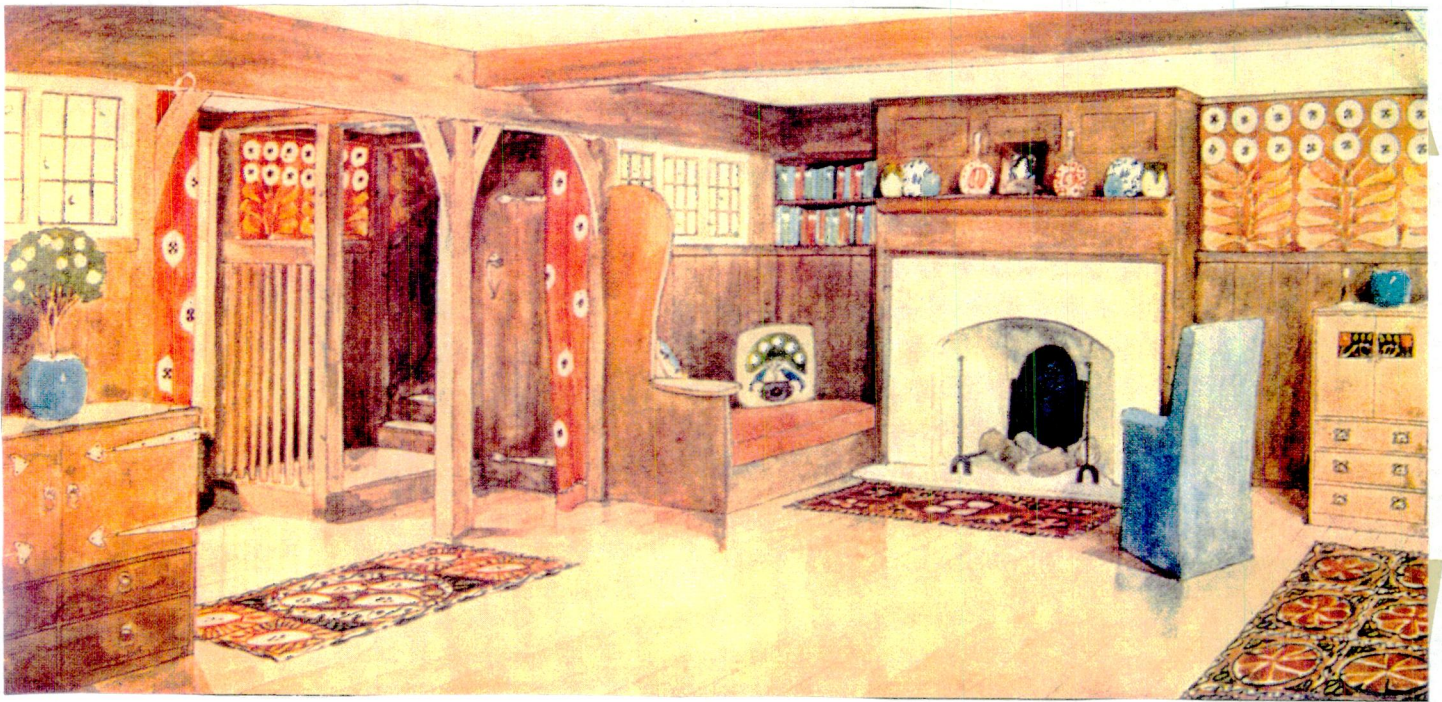


Fig.14

Designs for Foxwold by M.H. Baille Scott



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***"The desirability of using rugs which, instead of the accidental colours of the oriental varieties should present in their colour scheme a definite relation to the furniture and the decoration of the rooms, has led to the production of rugs which meet these requirements".***

In 1907 Liberty's of Regent St. held another exhibition of 'The New Irish Handmade Carpets' which did not reflect the Arts and Crafts movement. Amongst these shown was 'The Killibegs' whose design may be attributed to Cecil Miller, who had previously designed for Mortons. It was described in the Liberty catalogue as ***"a detached pattern of vine leaves and grapes"***. Miller was influenced by classical designs adapted from the Georgian period and was one of the first designers to interpret this style for use in hand knotted carpets. He used it in his commission for the Royal Yacht which was an Adams design in white and wedgewood blue. This classical style was perfect for the superb elegance of the interiors of embassies and ministeries which had requested Donegal Carpets. It was a style that was to prevail for quite some time as the company received many such contracts throughout its most productive years.

In the first ten years of production Donegal Carpets had exceeded everyones expectations and had established a reputation for superb handcraftmanship. Liberty's was one of its biggest customers and contributed invaluablely to its promotion and advertisement. As we have already observed, they were responsible for several exhibitions which proved to be important in the development of the reputation of Donegal Carpets as a quality item. The company had carried out work for an impressive list of customers. These included King Edward and Queen Victoria and carpets for 10 Downing St., Government House in Ottawa, Buckingham Palace, Windsor Castle and the biggest Donegal carpet ever made was for Belfast City Hall. It measured 107 ft. x 46.6 ft and weighed 2 tons 5 cwts and was cropped at Carlisle.





The outbreak of the 1st World War disrupted business at Killybegs, and during internal troubles in Ireland from 1919 onwards, Alexander Morton struggled to keep all four factories open. He had settled in Killybegs himself to breed cattle and grow crops. His love affair with Ireland was so great that he left his family in Darvel, visiting as often as his health would allow and writing countless letters. Alexander Morton had indeed become passionately attached to Donegal and its people and although sometimes the carpet factories were running at a loss, he kept them operating for as long as he could in order to keep these people employed in such difficult times. He died in 1923 and Stephen Gwynn summed up his legacy in 1927 when he wrote of him:

***"Some day a memorial to him should be raised in Ireland. He has one in his native Darvel. Yet in Donegal, so long as his factories are kept open, he needs no monument and even if they were closed there is many a waste hillside that was broken by his plough and the whole standard of living has been sensibly improved where he set his mark".***

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# **CHAPTER 3**

POST WAR - DONEGAL CARPETS





Donegal Carpets may have enjoyed much fame and success during its first few years of production but after the death of Alexander Morton, the factory was to go through many changes. As mentioned previously, the economic state of Ireland during the war meant that there was very little money around or interest in spending it on expensive carpets. Hand knotted Donegal Carpets faced some serious competition from machine made carpets as people could simply not afford extravagant items. James Morton took over the factory after the death of his father but could do little to boost what had now become an ailing industry. Staff were drastically reduced but he held on to as many as he could possibly afford in an attempt to save this much loved business which was his father's pride and joy. This was a dark period in the history of Donegal Carpets and not much has ever been written on it, but according to Paul Larmour in 'The Irish Arts Review 1990 - 1991 (p. 26), a large quantity of carpets were exported to the U.S.A during the thirties. With the outbreak of the Second World War, the three factories at Annagry, Crolly and Kilcar were shut down much to the regret of the local people, and only the Killybegs factory remained open. All the spinning, dyeing and weaving was done there with skeleton staff. James Morton died in August 1943 and was succeeded by his son Jocelyn Morton who became chairman of the business. This was now the third generation of Mortons to take control of the factory and perhaps this notion of exquisite hand knotted Donegal Carpets was beginning to fade in the minds of the younger generation who may not have shared the enthusiasm that their grandfather Alexander had for them, or perhaps this factory was too expensive to operate for a company that was based across the water and for whatever reason, the Mortons finally gave up the business in 1952. This was the end of an era for them and for the Killybegs people who had worked faithfully under their instruction for fifty four years. This heralded the start of a new and chequered future for Donegal Carpets.





Before their departure from the Killybegs factory, the Mortons employed a local man called Daniel Campbell as trainee manager. I had the pleasure of meeting him recently as part of my research in Killybegs. During my interview with him, a fresh man of eighty two years, he described the economic state of Killybegs and the daily operation of the factory while he was employed there as factory manager for almost thirty years. Born in 1913 he was only a child when Donegal Carpets was first enjoying success but he still has vivid memories of the older women in his family bringing home frames and working on rugs in their own homes. He remembered always being fascinated by those frames which hung on the back of the door with the women working quickly by hand.

In 1952 he got the job as trainee manager for the Killybegs factory and was sent to Carlisle, to Morton headquarters to train for several months as an apprentice. He described this period as being enjoyable and said that his training was very thorough. Mr Campbell returned to Killybegs as manager and remained there in that post after Mortons left two years later. He considers himself to be very fortunate to have had the opportunity to work for such professional people and to have been educated by them in the process of running a textile business. I feel therefore that Daniel Campbell can provide important clues to the development of Donegal Carpets throughout the years and having worked with its original owners can give an insight on how differently the factory was run by its many different owners throughout the years. In 1954 the company was taken over by a consortium headed by the Mc Grath, Freeman and Duggan families. Joe Mc Grath, who was best known for his involvement with Irish Sweeps, had the finance to put into the industry and it gradually began to improve. Electricity was brought to the area in this year also and it marks the start of what is known as 'the golden era' of Donegal Carpets with the industry becoming successful yet again. With the changing of hands came a new design team.





William B. Horsfall led a team of designers that included Oliver Messel, Michael Scott, Louis de Brocquy and Raymond Mc Grath who was a cousin of one of the owners and became involved in the business. He was to become the factory's most important designer in these years.

Raymond Mc Grath (1903 - 1977), was an Australian of Irish descent who studied Architecture in the University of Sydney. He came to England in 1926 and had success in private practices. It was in 1940 that he eventually travelled to Ireland and found work at the Office of Public Works. He was appointed senior Architect soon after and has been described as 'the Voysey' of his time. His work for the Irish State Buildings brought important commissions to Donegal as he used these carpets in all of his designs for their interiors, each one marked with his own style. He had studied Irish Architecture of the Georgian Period and took his inspiration from there and also from Celtic images. He was greatly inspired by Dublin itself and absorbed every Architectural detail, which is evident in some of his work, therefore his designs have a traditional, historic yet elegant style which is suitable for these sumptuous buildings.

One of the first contracts that the factory undertook under new management was a Mc Grath commission for Aras an Uachtarain (Fig.15). His plans for its renovation included Waterford Glass chandeliers, Irish silk poplin hangings and eighteenth century chimney pieces and ornamental plaster work. The Long Gallery carpet (Fig.16) had a patriotic border of shamrocks and a riverine head inspired by one at The Custom House in Dublin. Amongst the most prestigious contracts carried out in these years was for The Irish Embassy in Paris. The building was a nineteenth century hotel described by Nicholas Sheaff in the Irish Arts Review 1984 vol. 3 (p. 41) as being: "***Fitted up with splendid 18th century boiserie and singeries***".







Fig. 15 **Aras an Uachtairan, design for The Entrance Hall carpet by Raymond Mc Grath**

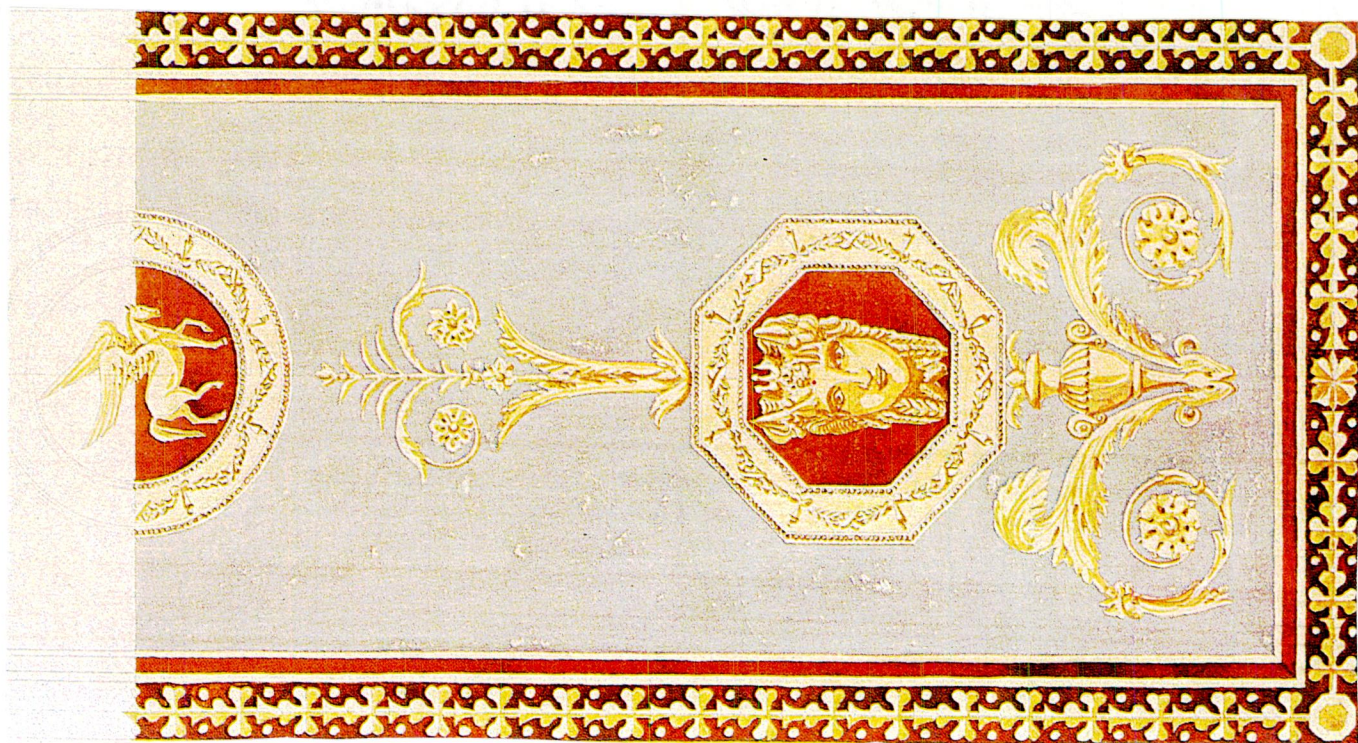


Fig. 16 **Aras an Uachtairan, design for The Long Gallery carpet by Raymond Mc Grath**



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Mc Grath designed the interior with the help of Ambassador Fay and his wife Lillian who wanted to retain its authenticity and splendour. The carpets woven were inspired by 18th century Savonnerie work but included some Irish symbols such as the harp on the Grand Salon carpet (Fig.17) . These carpets were of enormous advertising benefit to the factory as The Embassy was a show piece and the commission was a resounding success.

Many similar official contracts followed. Carpets were commissioned for The Embassies in Paris and London which were laden with celtic imagery reminiscent of the chevrons and spirals of the stone carvings at Newgrange (Fig.18) ; Again Mc Grath was relying on Irish historic art to give these carpets a distinct identity. There was also a commisison from Rome for carpets and furnishings. Indeed the 1950's were quite hectic for the Killybegs workers. Daniel Campbell remembers how they were scheduled on nine hour shifts and the factory was operating around the clock to ensure that these orders would be ready on time. He described the working day as having started at 7.30 am and ending at 6.00 pm with a few breaks in between. Even though the factory was receiving profitable orders, the employment figure never rose past one hundred workers. Responding to my query regarding the standard of pay, Mr Campbell stated that the wages were reasonably low but added that emigration was rife and that it kept these people who had no wish to leave home, on enough to survive. Most of them had fallen into the tradition which had been passed on to them by their parents or sisters who had worked there also. They had a fondness for their trade and he described the high spirits of the workers when working on these commissions and the satisifaction and pride they shared when each one was completed successfully. There was immense job satisifaction which was an added bonus. Mr Campbell commented on how the 1936 Conditions of Employment Act meant that female employees were limited to working forty hours per week and he regarded this as being for the better.









Scale 1/4" to 1 ft. Size of Carpet 17'0" x 20'0"

Sketch for Savonnerie style carpet for Grand Salon  
Irish Embassy, Paris.

Raymond Mc Grath. 2/10/54.

Fig. 17

Irish Embassy in Paris, design for The Grand Salon carpet by  
Raymond Mc Grath



1941

1941



*Stair Carpet — Irish Embassy, London. Scale 1" to 1ft.*

Fig. 18      **The Irish Embassy in London, design for The Stair carpet by Raymond Mc Grath**



[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

It also meant that each employee was entitled to one weeks holiday with pay. This was later increased to two weeks holiday with pay and ten paid church holidays also.

During the 1950's and 60's, Raymond Mc Grath continued to support the factory, (and other Irish industries), bringing in contracts such as one for The Irish Embassy in Ottawa (Fig.19). This included a carpet for the entrance hall in vivid blue and yellow with a crest in the centre which features the harp. This commission was carried out for Ambassador Fay who had been posted there and later was sent to Washington where he and Mrs Fay again fitted out a new embassy in 1965 with the guidance of Raymond Mc Grath.

In Dublin, Donegal Carpets were found in some of its most reputable hotels. In 1958 The Russel Hotel commissioned five carpets and The Shelbourne repeated its order for carpets, such was the success of the first one supplied there. The Great Southern Hotel in Killarney ordered an impressive eleven carpets in the same year which was a huge commission for the Killybegs factory. The Gresham Hotel in Dublin had three Donegal Carpets woven for their foyer in golden yellow and brown with a large decorative centerpiece (Fig.20) which is very ornamental, and a geometric border. Elsewhere carpets were woven for The Dorchester Hotel and Goldsmith Hall in London and for the Bank of England. There was also a Donegal Carpet woven for The First National Bank in New York. These contracts were invaluable to the business as they allowed a great number of people to view them in a public place.

The 1960's brought contracts from Harrods, Iveagh House and Trinity College. This involved the redecoration of the common room which featured a large Empire style carpet that survived a fire several years ago. However one of the biggest contracts carried out in the 60's was for Dublin Castle as part of its restoration scheme.









Fig. 19

The Irish Embassy Ottawa, Entrance Hall carpet by Raymond Mc Grath



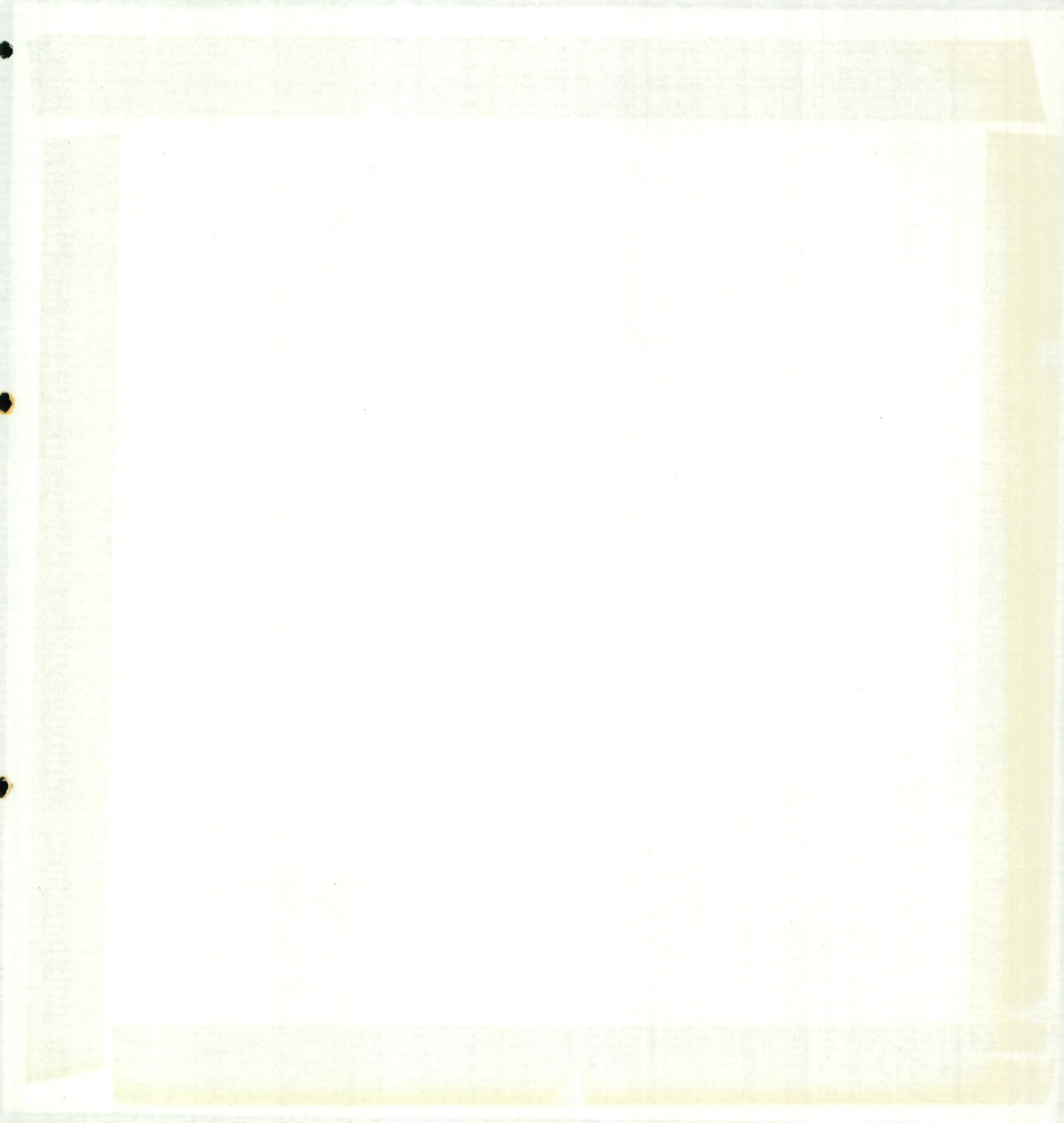
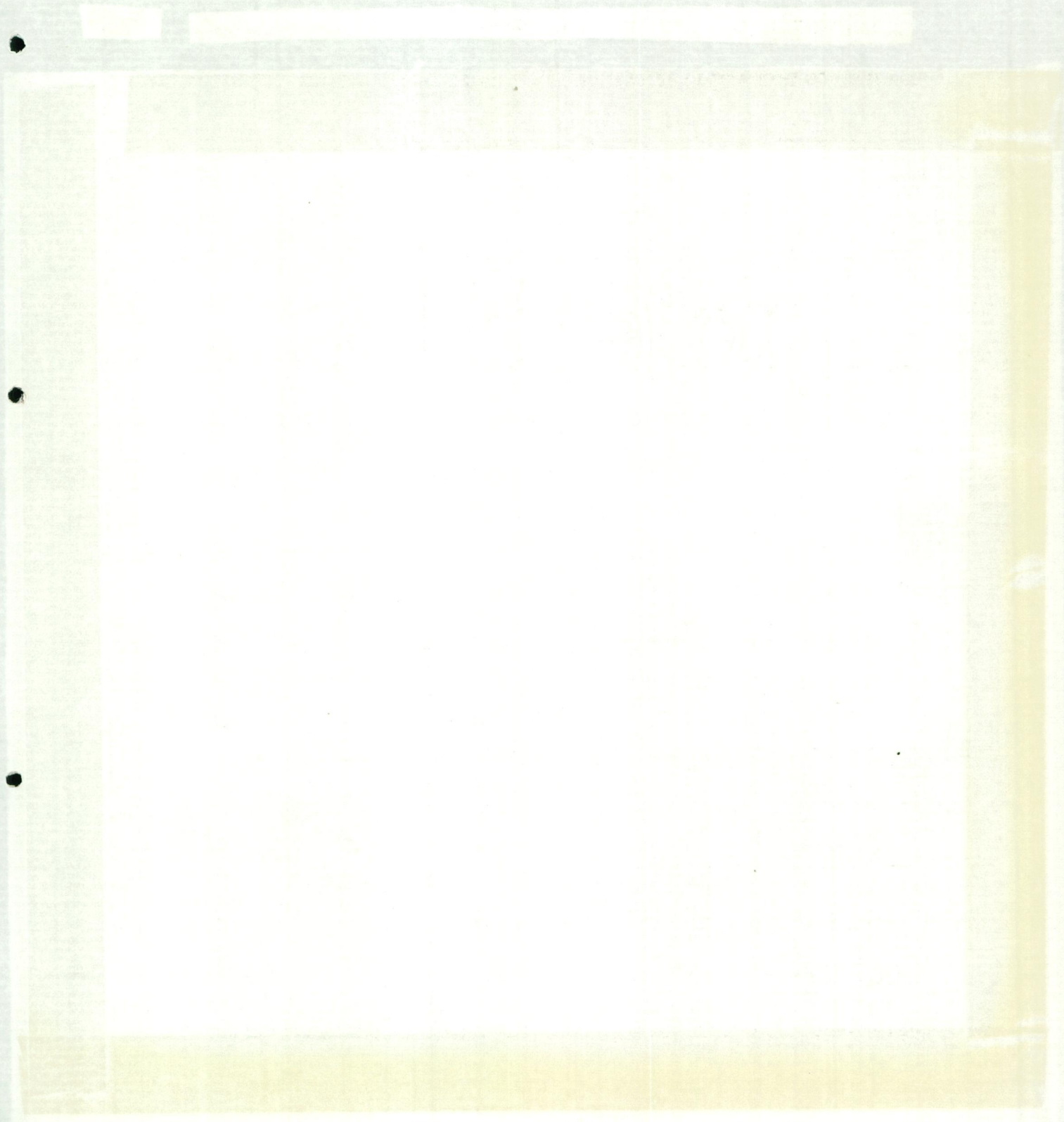






Fig. 20      The Gresham Hotel Dublin, Foyer carpet by Raymond Mc Grath



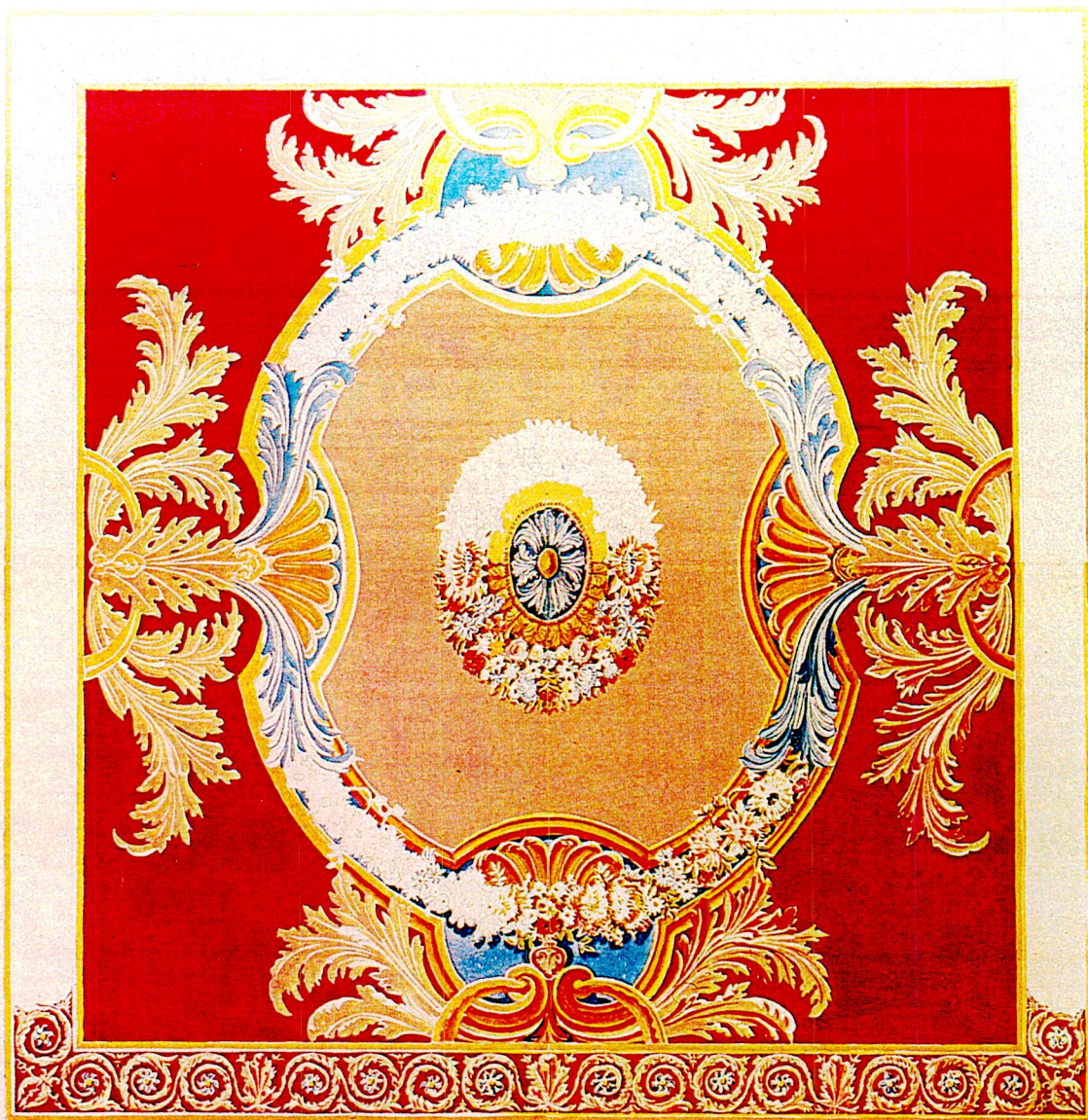


Mc Grath supervised the work assisted by Oscar Richardson. Several rooms were fitted with Donegal Carpets including the State Drawing Room which featured a carpet inspired by an 18th century savonnerie (Fig.21), a common theme used in Mc Graths work), and this same source was used for The Throne Room carpet (Fig.22) in rich brown and golden yellow. These carpets were the main attraction of the rooms with the furniture and the colour scheme complimenting them. The Round Room has a carpet (Fig.23) design which reflects the pattern of the ceiling plasterwork. Nicholas Sheaff in a previously mentioned article remarks: ***"The Round Room carpet is a delightful concept reflecting the ceiling in the Adams manner and complementing a mood of airy elegance"***. This work took a few years to complete and continued into the 70's with a carpet being fitted in The Picture Gallery in 1972 and the recarpeting of the main staircase. Despite thousands of visitors to Dublin Castle these carpets have never lost their vibrancy of colour or quality. During his 25 years with The Office of Public Works, Raymond Mc Grath relied on the skills of the Killybegs people in order to carry out these official style carpets for State Buildings. He supported the industry and brought many profitable orders its way during the fifties and sixties. However by the mid 1970's the tide was beginning to turn. The factory experienced a decrease in work caused primarily by cutbacks in Government spending which reduced these state orders. It is clear that during the glory days of the Mc Grath years that the factory was inundated with large orders and so its investors did little to boost the ordinary consumer market. When these commissions inevitably dried up they paid dearly for this mistake as competition from machine made carpets increased.

When Joe Mc Grath died, his successors had little interest in the industry but continued for a few more years. Raymond Mc Grath intervened to try and save what he regarded as a prestige Irish industry up until his death in 1977. His death marked the end of the state orders that kept the factory operating during the last two







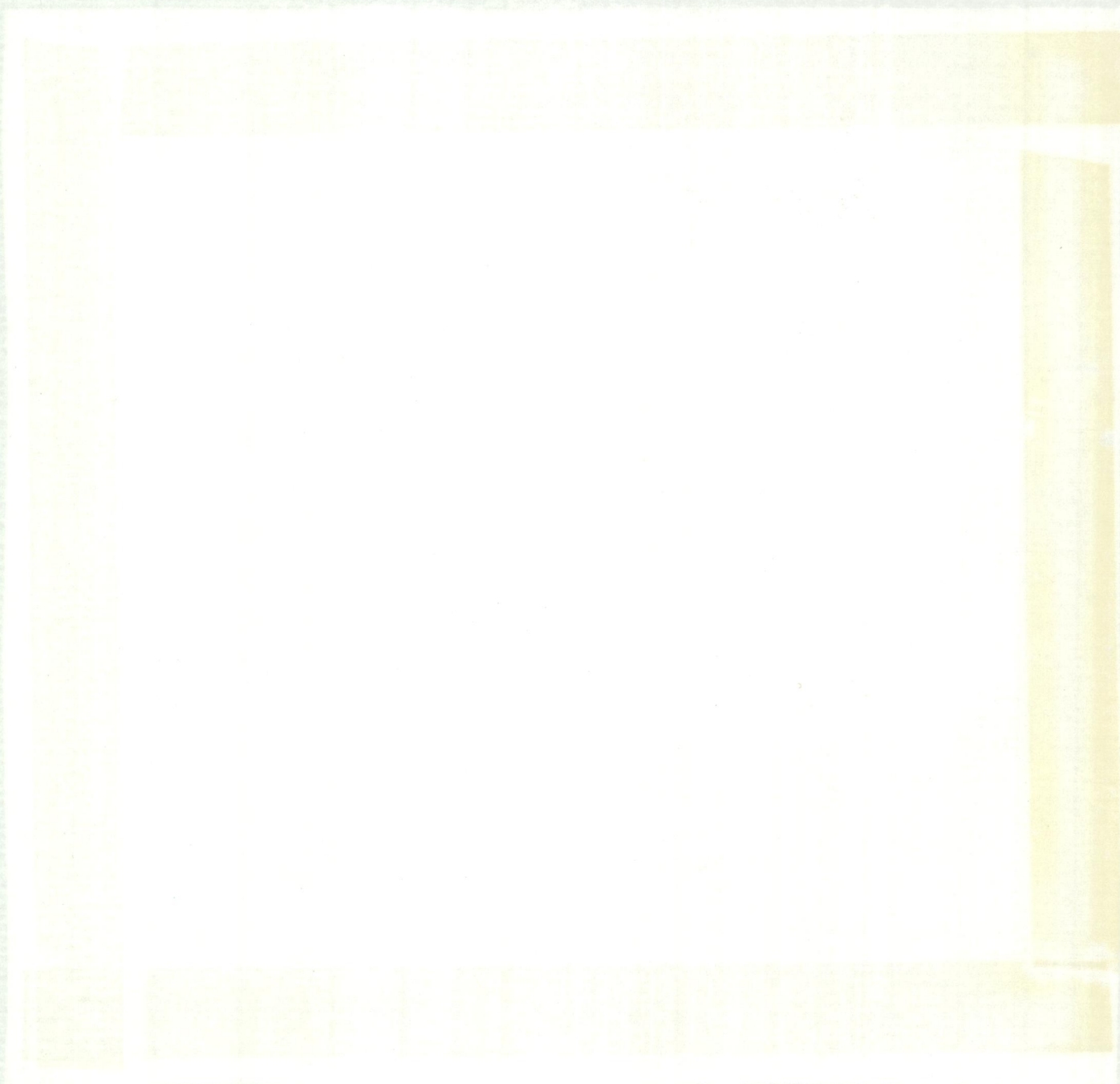
*Raymond Mc Grath*  
Sept 1927

CARPETS FOR THE RECONSTRUCTED DRAWING-ROOMS, STATE APARTMENTS, DUBLIN CASTLE.  
THREE AS DRAWING, SIZE 16'5" X 10'5". ONE WITH MATCHING BORDER & FLORAL CENTREPIECE  
ONLY, SIZE 16'5" X 11'0". ONE DITTO, SIZE 16'5" X 13'3". SCALE ONE INCH TO ONE FOOT.

Fig. 21 Dublin Castle, design for State Drawing Room carpet by Raymond Mc Grath



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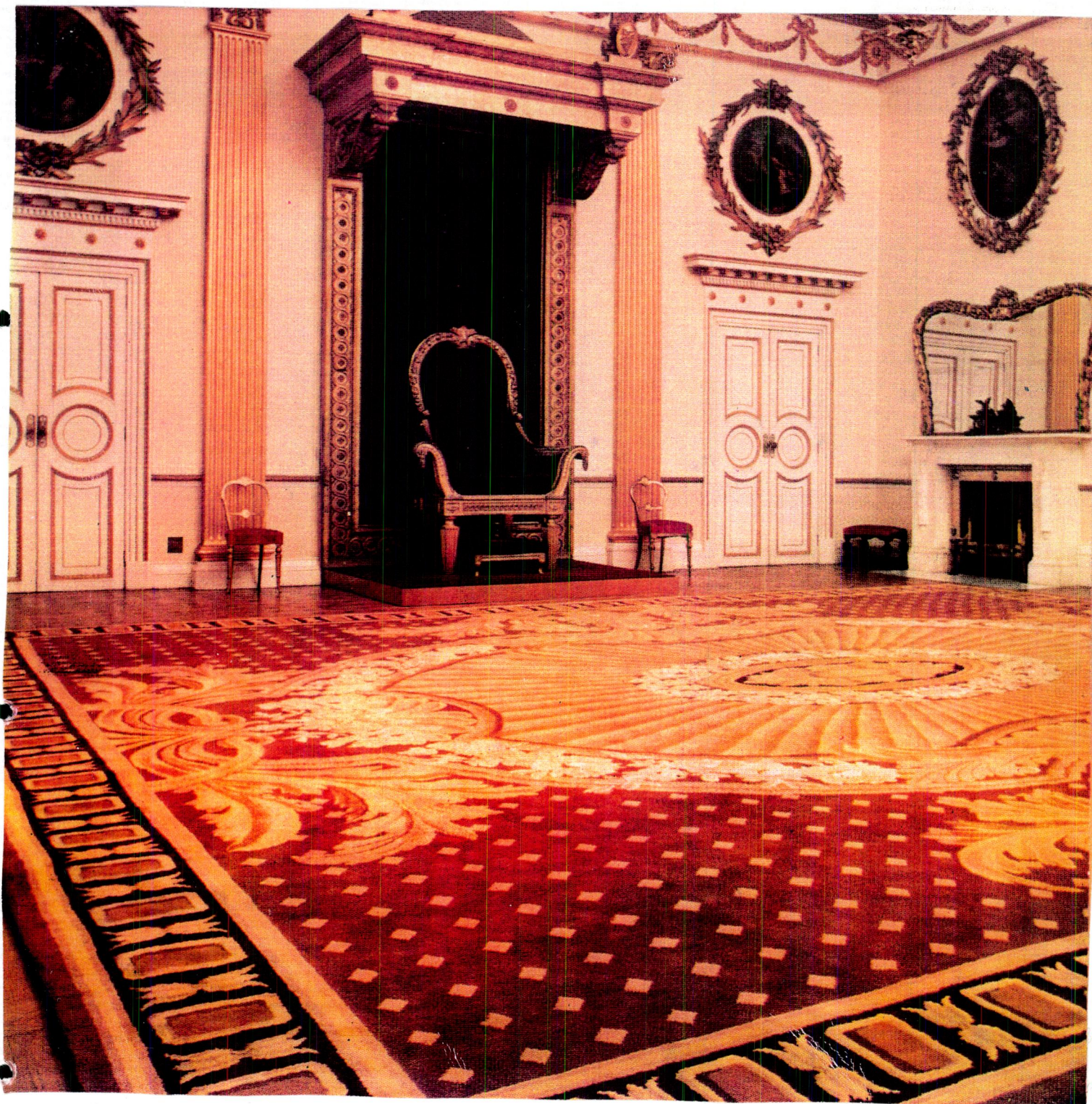


Fig. 22

Dublin Castle, design for Throne Room carpet by Raymond Mc Grath



1945

1945

1945



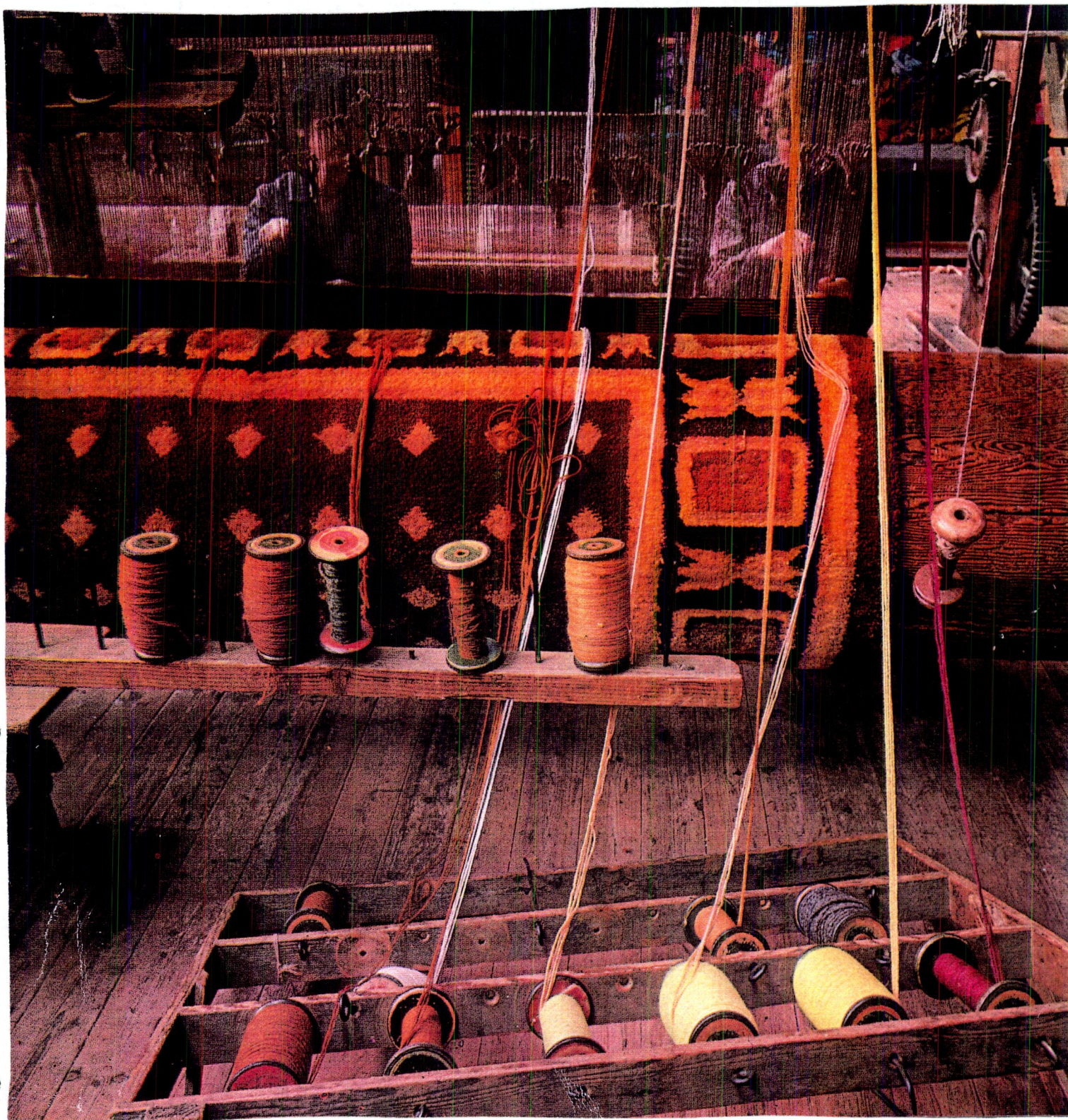
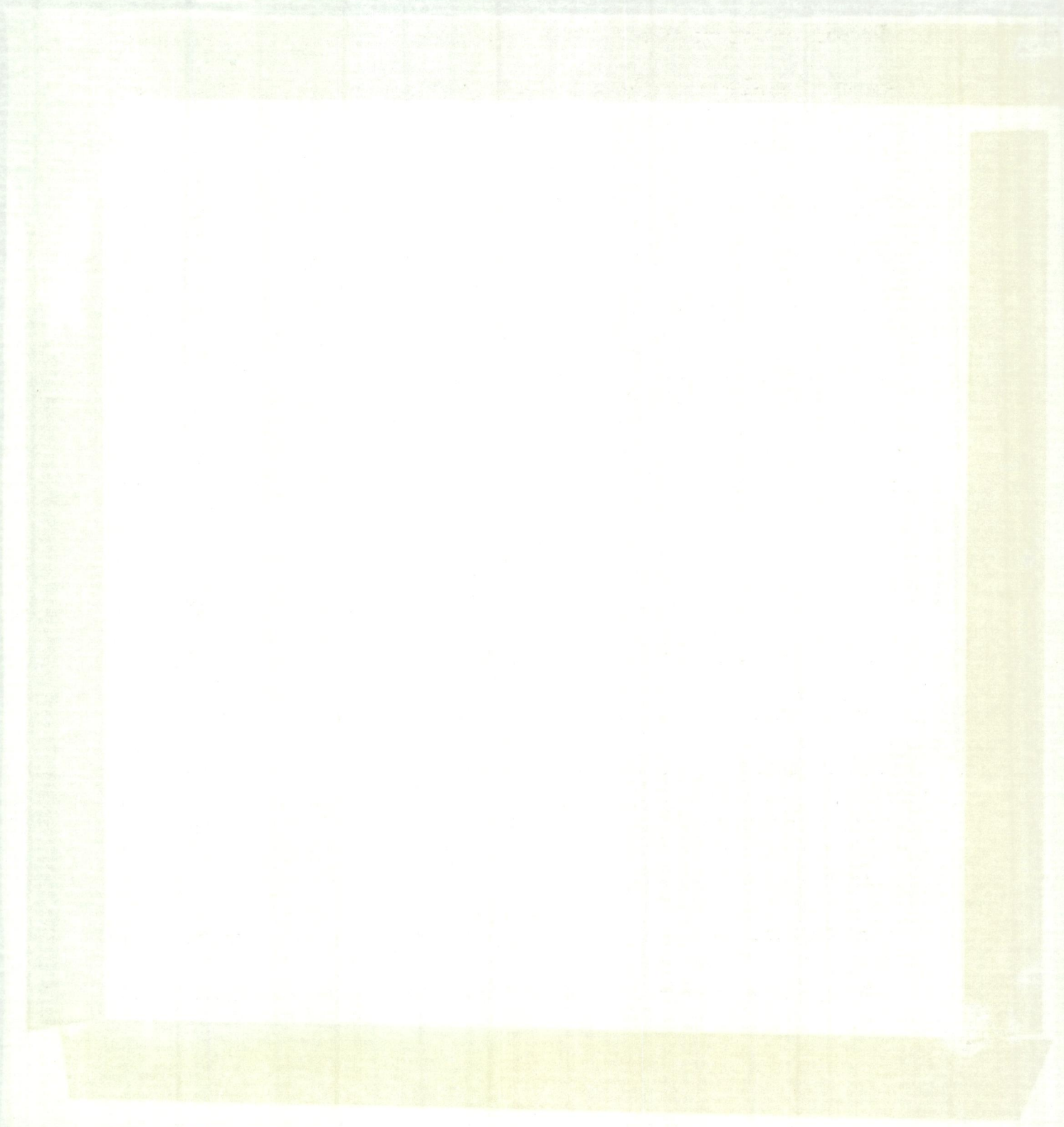


Fig. 23      **Design for Throne Room carpet by Raymond Mc Grath, being woven up at Killybegs**



[Redacted text]



decades. The future was unsure for the business.

In 1974, Donegal Carpets changed hands yet again and was bought by an Englishman Frank Kinsella who had a genuine interest in the industry. He invested a substantial amount of personal capital and attempted to increase the market for Donegal Carpets by exhibiting in Scotland and America. Under his instruction, the factory showed some signs of recovery. Kinsella felt that the factory needed to promote its products and concentrate on good marketable designs and reduce the dependency on custom designed once-off carpets for a specific market. He strived to create an identity for Donegal Carpets and to produce a range of easily recognisable designs which would become popular and distinctive for the public.

Increased marketing in America kept the orders coming in from there which kept the factory busy. In 1978 the American University of Notre Dame commissioned a 10' diameter carpet to celebrate the 21st anniversary of its president. It was widely acclaimed and regained some publicity to Killybegs. This was followed by a wall hangings in 1979 completed for Knock Basilica. "The Apparition" was 22' 13" x 18' and was the biggest woollen mural ever to be made by the factory. It took six weavers over three months to complete and involved half a million knots. In the same year came a large contract from the English Government to design two carpets for Lancaster House and later The British Embassy in Paris, and so by 1980 the factory showed significant profit and extra staff were recruited. The factory could now offer potential customers the choice of over eleven carpet styles which was quite extensive.

In June 1982, the factory produced a 54' carpet for the Sanctuary of Armagh Cathedral. It was made to replace an existing Donegal Carpet which had been there for eighty years and staff was increased from 20 in 1980 to 35 in 1983. In this same





year, Kinsella exhibited carpets at Chicago Expocentre in order to attract attention from America's leading architects and interior designers. They were well received there and he returned with many orders to Killybegs. However despite this success, the company was losing money. By the time Daniel Campbell retired as factory manager, the factory was in serious debt. According to him the Government gave no help and had lost interest in the factory and with the introduction of 25% V.A.T. it meant that they had to borrow heavily. State sponsorship was given to other Irish industries and Donegal Carpets recieved none and so it was running at a huge loss. It depended heavily on orders from corporate and institutional buyers, but more than often they passed over these expensive handknotted carpets for cheaper foreign imports of inferior quality. Because of this staff were reduced yet again to 20 and it was becoming increasingly difficult to find enough skilled workers to make up a team of weavers.

However as a mark of their appreciation for his time spent as factory manager, the staff of Donegal Carpets made a gift for Daniel Campbell for his retirement. A wonderful wall hanging,(fig 24) bearing his family's name and crest. It hangs proudly in the hallway of his Killybegs home today.

The company, although crippled by lack of working capital, struggled on for a few more months which reflects the determination of its staff and owners, but on May 11th 1984, the burden of debt was too great and they were forced them to close. In the same year the factory was taken over by a new company headed by Joe O' Doherty. He was an Irish/American living in Limerick who managed to obtain Government sponsorship and job creation schemes. However according to Daniel Campbell, he was reputed to have invested them in Limerick and not in Donegal and never really tried to make a go of things. The factory remained open for a few more years but the only notable order that was undertaken was to make a carpet for The Brighton Pavillion.







Fig. 24

**Mr. Daniel Campbell, pictured with The Wall Hanging which was a gift from the Killybegs workers to mark his retirement.**



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# CHAPTER 4

A NEW BEGINNING





From 1986 onwards, operations ceased at the Killybegs factory and the building that Alexander Morton had so proudly constructed lay derelict. I travelled down to Killybegs in October 1994 to view the building and investigate its interiors. I had heard that it was now being used as a net making centre for the local fishermen, so I did not expect to find anything related to its past remaining there. I was pleasantly surprised.

The exterior (Fig. 25 & 26) was impressive, a little run down perhaps but still a wonderfully constructed building with a lot of character. As I walked around I discovered that the back end of the building was being renovated and I had access to its interiors. Daniel Campbell later told me that the back section and upstairs of the building had been used as accommodation for some of the employees who had too far to travel and so lived in the factory. He too had lived there with his family for a few years. I was told by the workmen that this section was to be rented out when the renovations were completed. It did not interfere with the actual factory interior where the weaving had been done.

As I entered the building I was expecting to see a deserted and desolate interior. However I was surprised to find that all the looms and the machinery were still there (Fig. 27). Some of the looms had wool still wrapped around them, and on the floor lay scattered spools (Fig. 28). In a corner were rows of bobbins hanging on the wall, many still full of wool (Fig. 29). It was as if the workers had just abandoned what they were doing and left. From my studies of old pictures of the Killybegs factory, I recognised some of the machinery and parts of the looms and felt awed by the fact they still remained here, (Fig. 31), nearly one hundred years later. Daniel Campbell had described in a later interview, the cropping machine that Joe Mc Grath had bought from the Mortons and had brought over to Killybegs from Carlisle. (The carpets had







Fig. 25 & 26

The exterior of the Killybegs Factory



1954-1955

1954-1955

1954-1955





Fig. 27      **The interior of the Killybegs Factory**

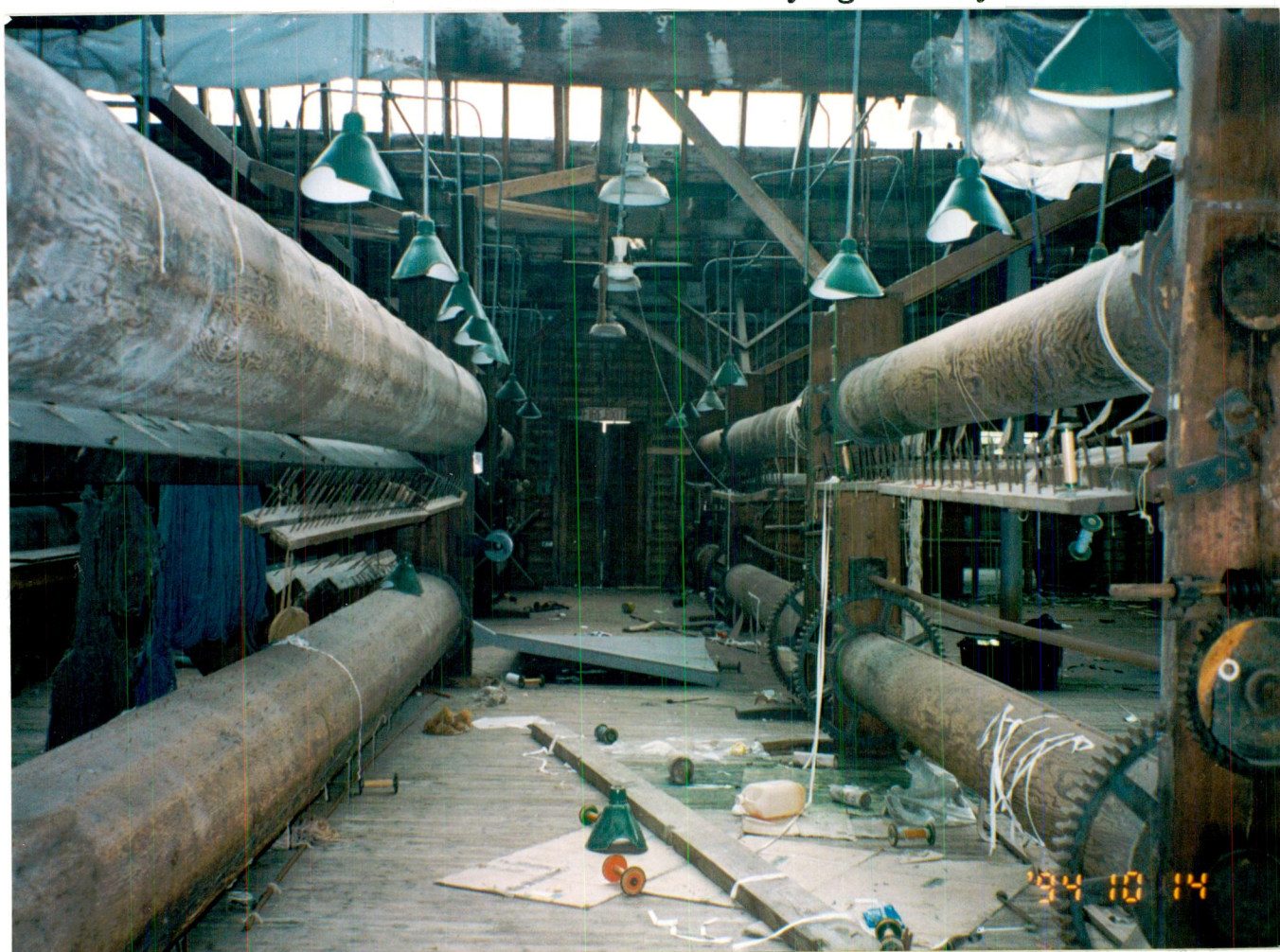


Fig. 28      **The Looms**



1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945

1945



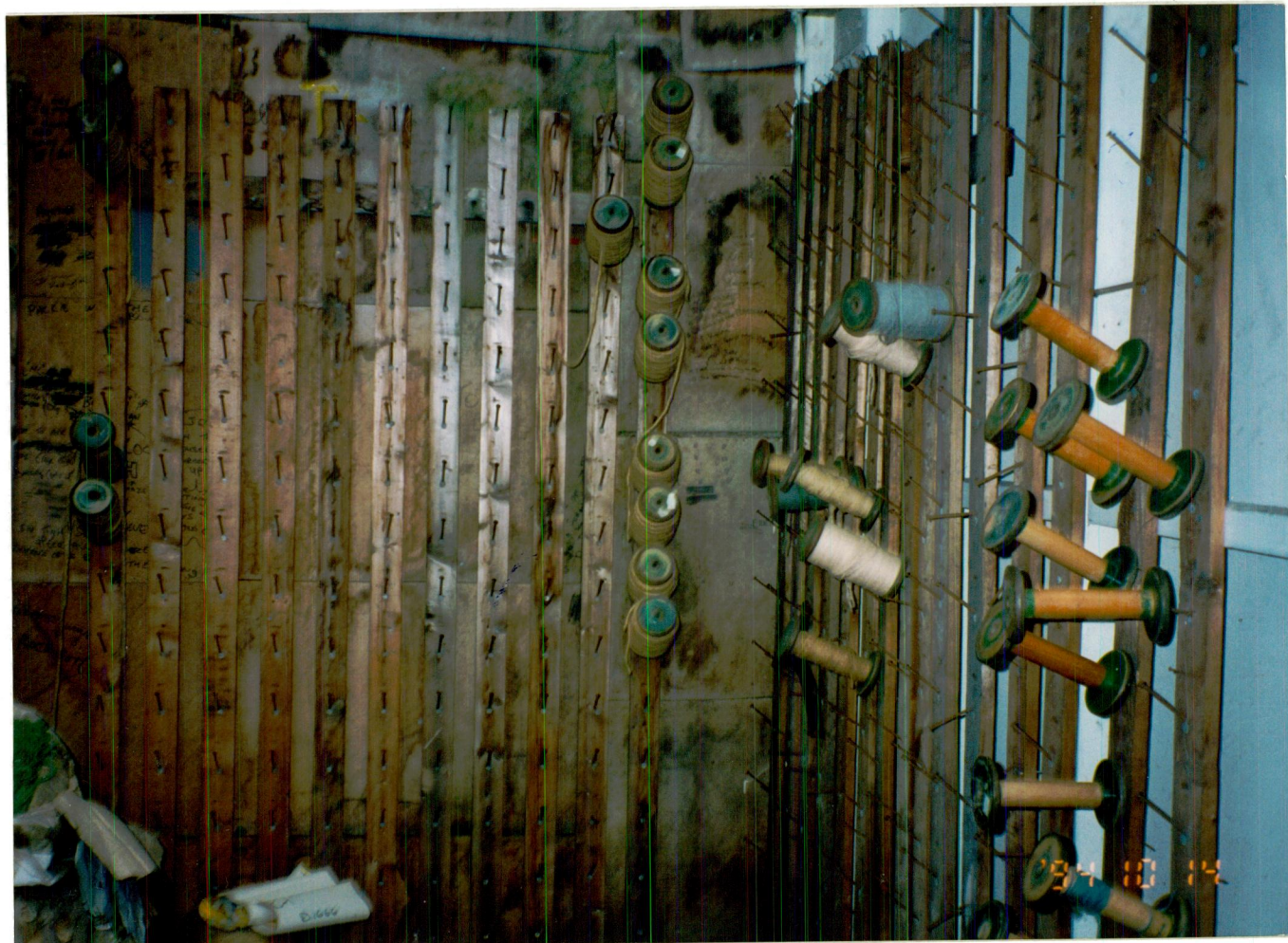


Fig. 29

The Spools that hang on the wall



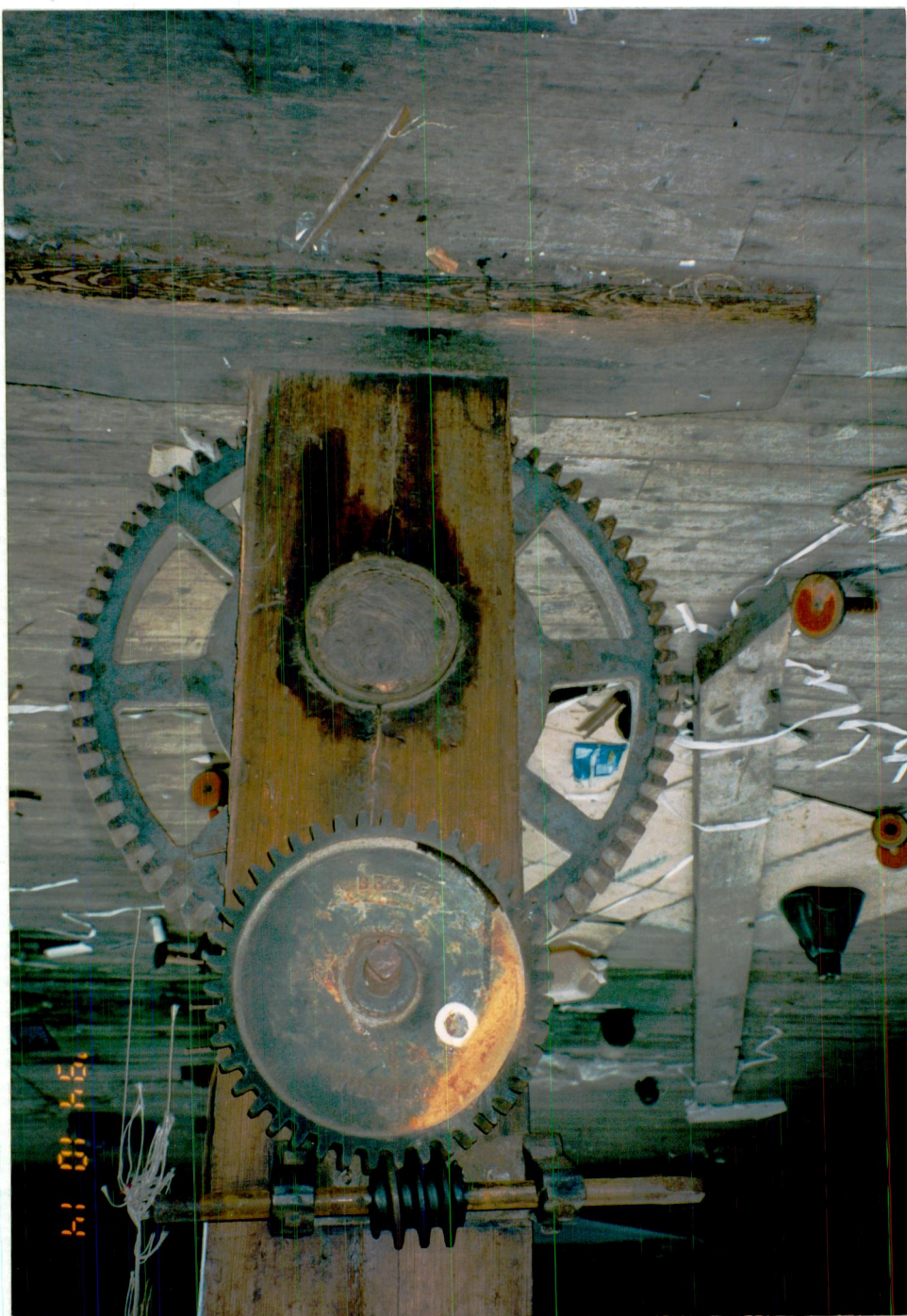
Fig. 30

The machinery in the factory





Fig. 31  
A part of the Loom



194 10 14



100

100



always been cropped in Carlisle when the Mortons owned the business). According to him it was the biggest in the world and was quite an historic piece of equipment (Fig. 32 & 33).

I found several point papers on the floor with designs on each (Fig. 34), and thread to match each. It was an incredible find for me. I had spent months researching the history of Dongal Carpets but only really started to understand and absorb it when I saw the actual factory for myself. Somehow it all became much more clear then. The one thing that occurred to me was how easy it would be to set up the business again. The building was a little damp but the equipment was in superb condition. It seemed an awful waste to leave it there unused. I left the factory that day feeling sad that such a prestigious Irish industry could end this way.

However on my next visit to Killybegs a month later, the situation was very different. The interior of the factory had been cleaned and there were several people working on it. I met a local man named Michael Byrne who had worked there in the eighties and was involved in the clean up also. He informed me that some of the local people in Killybegs had come together to try and set up the carpet business again. Since I had last been there, they had renovated one of the side rooms and had set up a few small looms again (Fig. 35). I was delighted to see a few of the local women weaving up small rugs using the old point papers that had been lying around (Fig. 36 & 37). Most of these women had worked in the factory before and all of them agreed that it should be opened up again. Michael Byrne explained how they were on a FAS scheme which had given a little financial aid and they were weaving up a commission for the local church hall. He added that they were trying to get government sponsorship but was not hopeful of the chances of getting it.









Fig. 32    **The Cropping Machine**



Fig. 33    **The Cropping Machine**









Fig. 34      **Point papers**



Fig. 35      **One of the small Looms that had been set up**



100

100

100

100

100

100



Fig. 36 & 37      **Ladies weaving up rugs on the Looms**



1944-1945

1944-1945





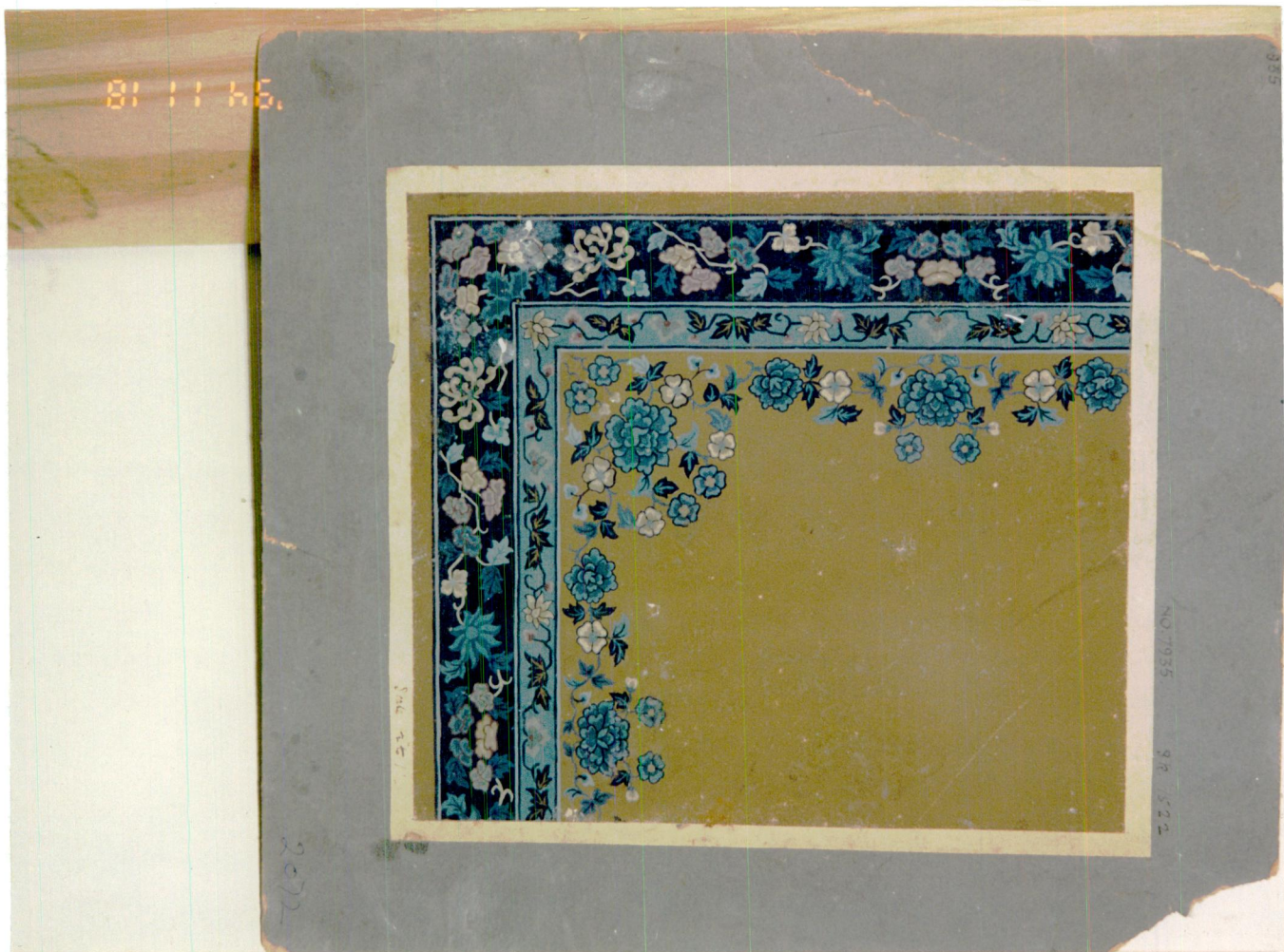


One of the greatest discoveries that I made at Killybegs was a collection of original art pieces showing corners of proposed carpet designs. I could not find any signatures on them which was a shame. Michael Byrne told me that he had found them in the basement where all the designs were kept and had hung them in the small office which he had constructed. Unfortunately he could not determine where these designs were woven for, nevertheless each one is impressive. The collection of photographs that I took of these pieces can be seen from Fig. 38 - 49.





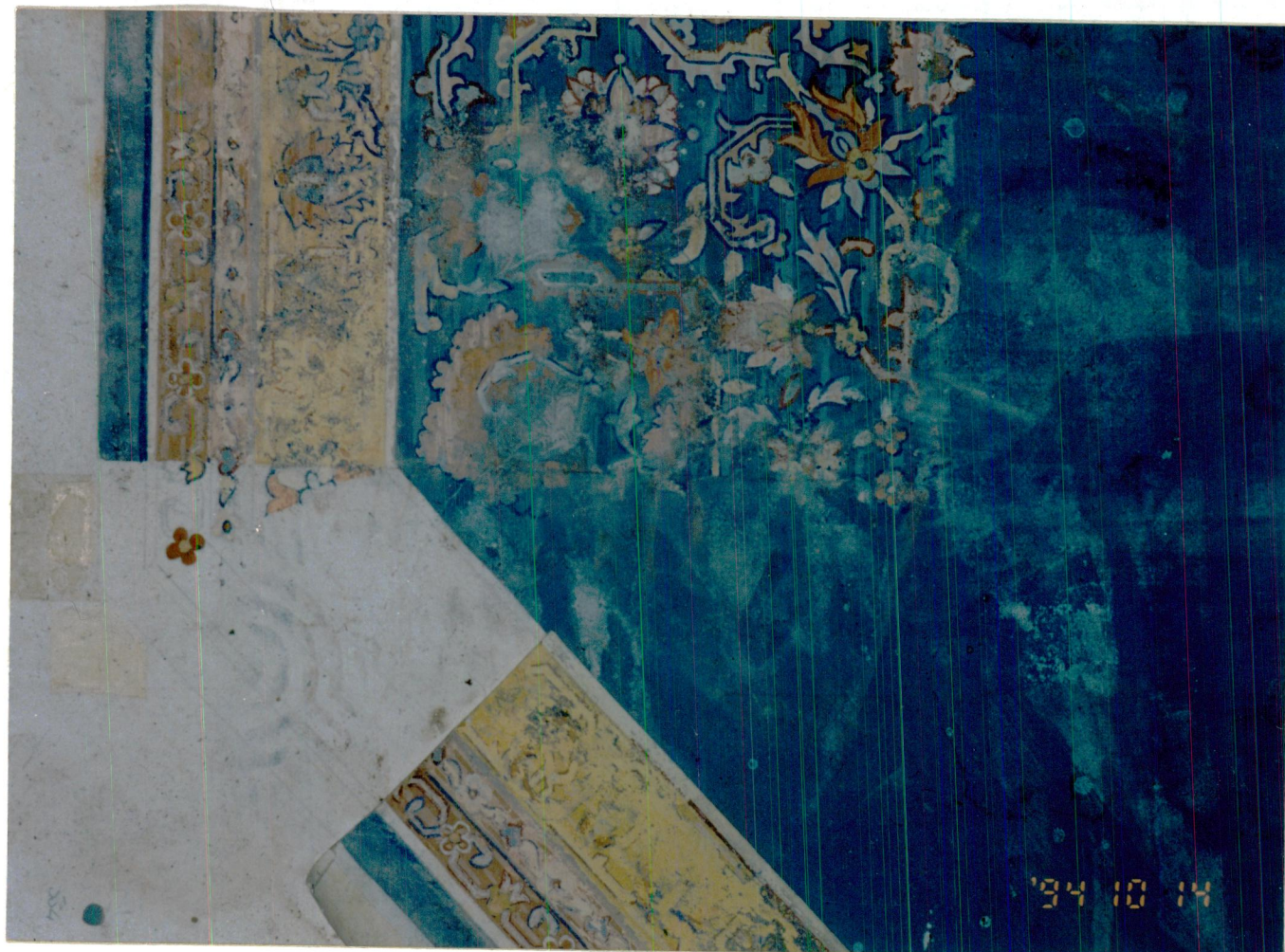
Fig. 38 - 49 Photographs of original Art pieces







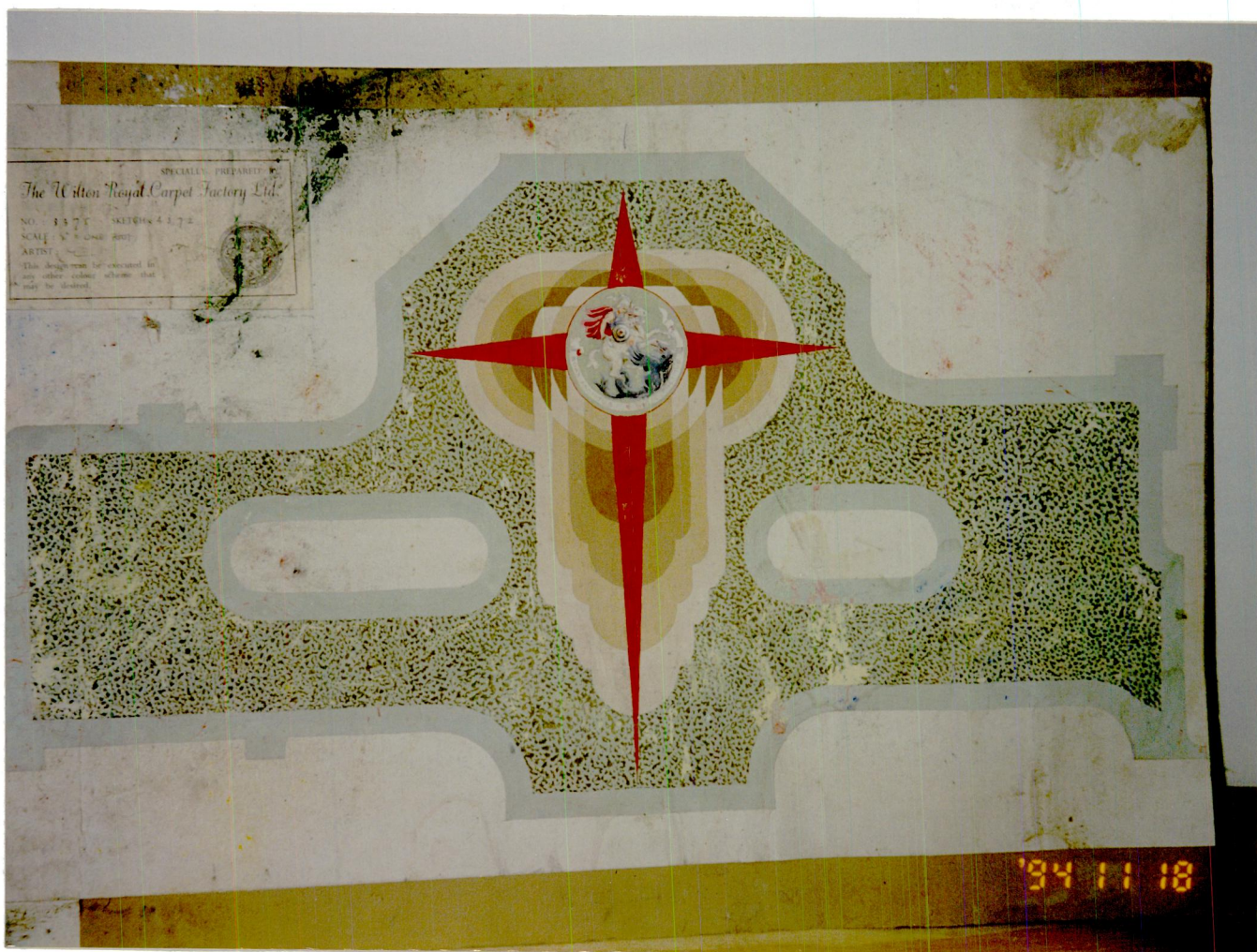
















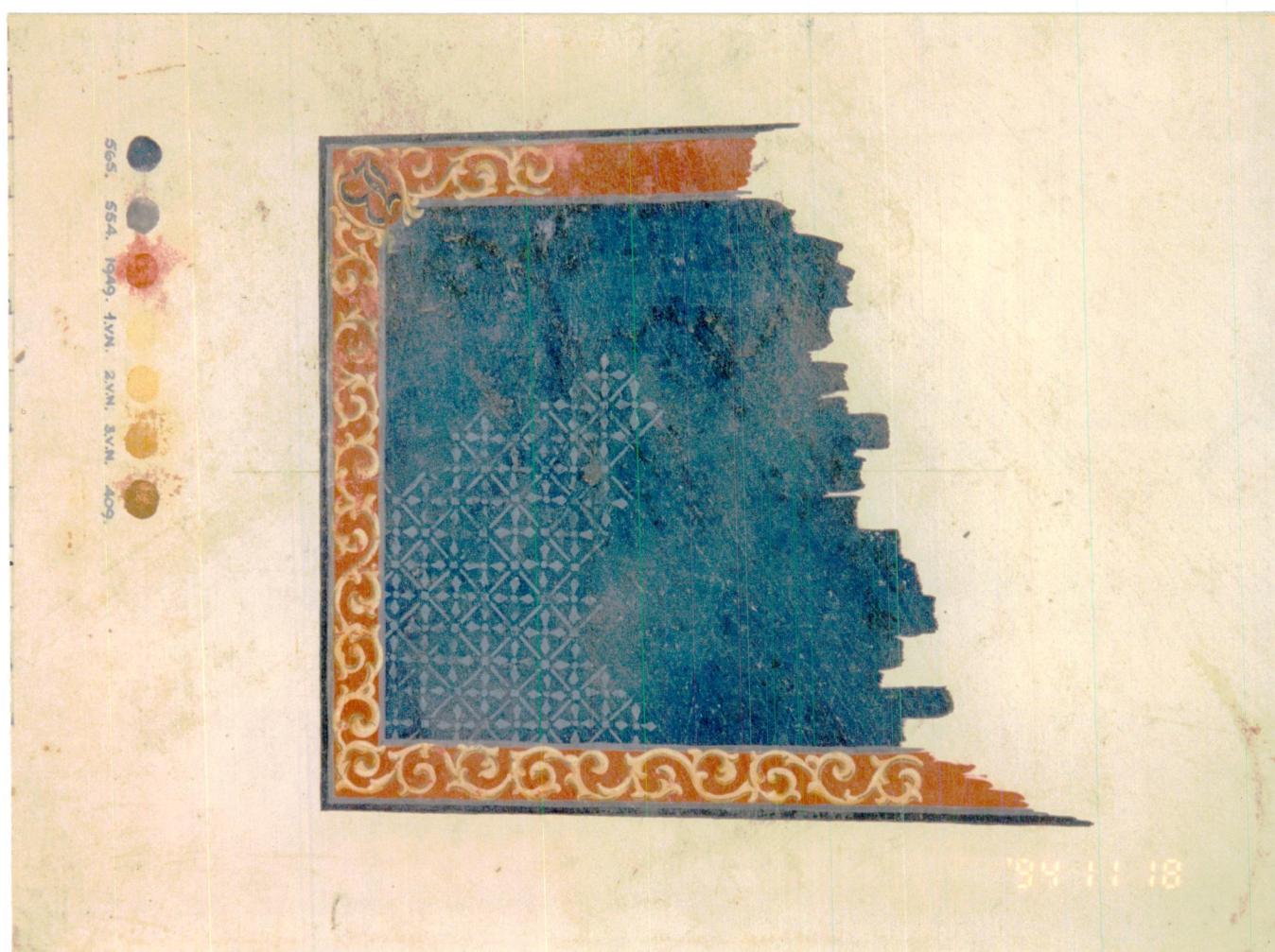
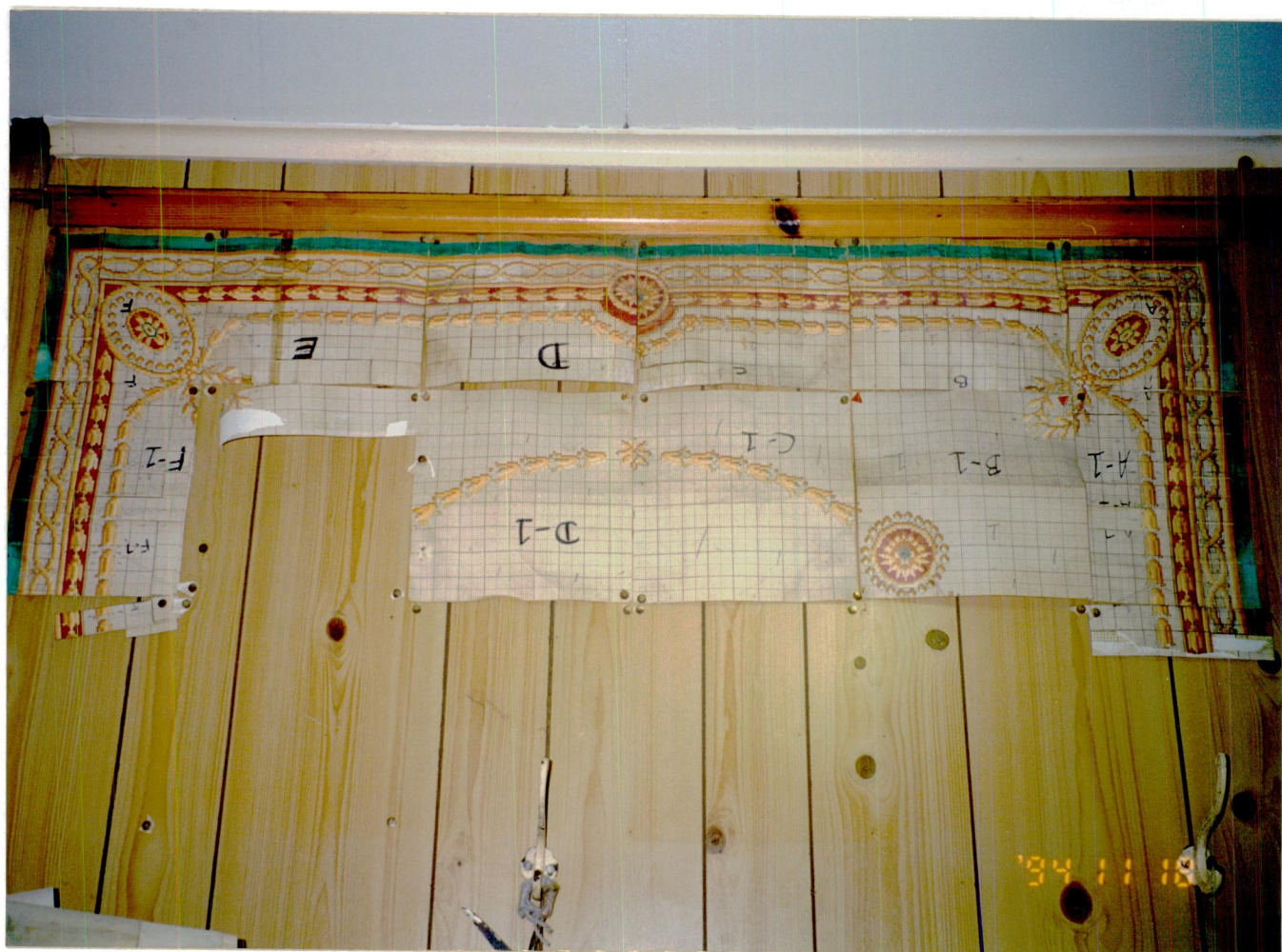




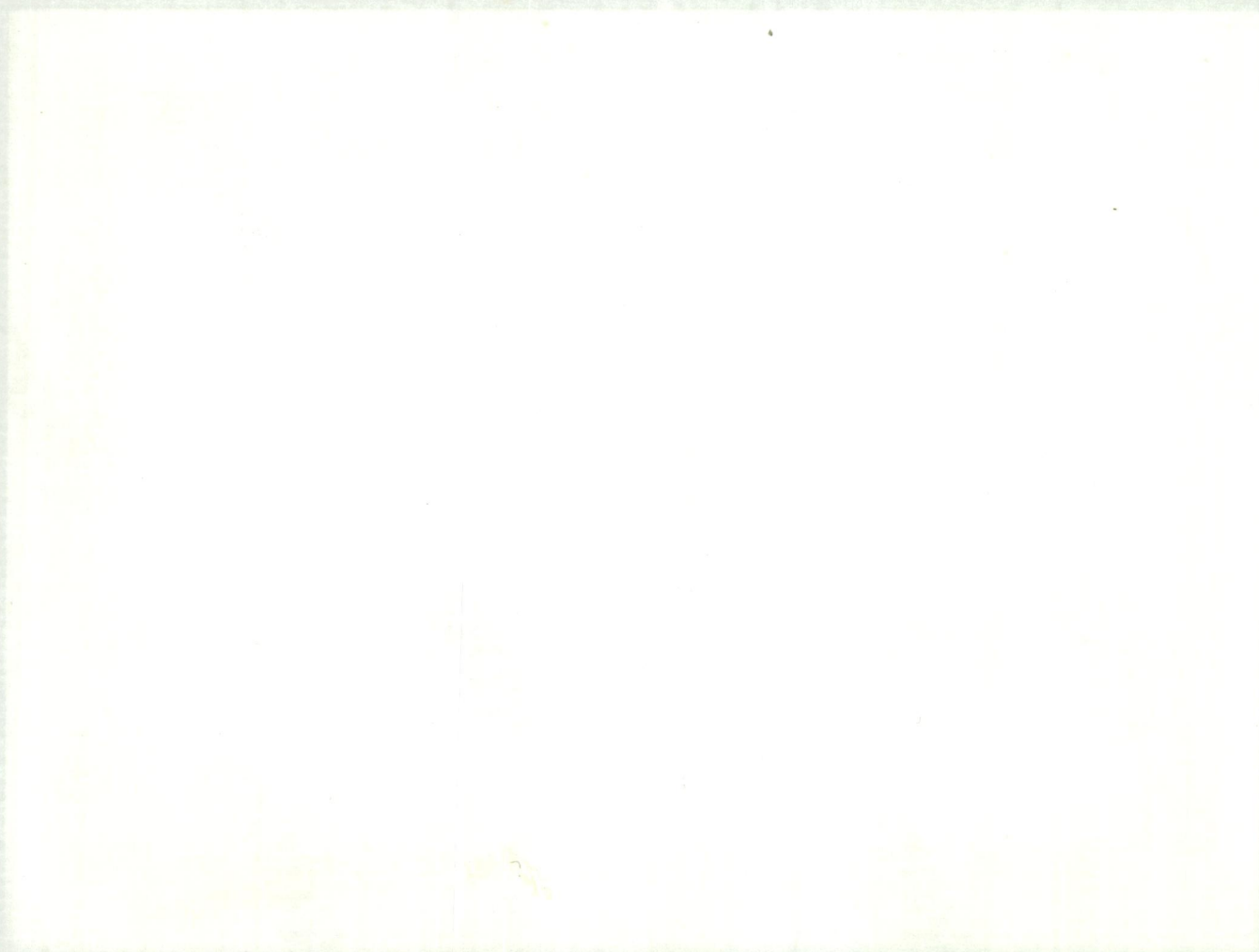




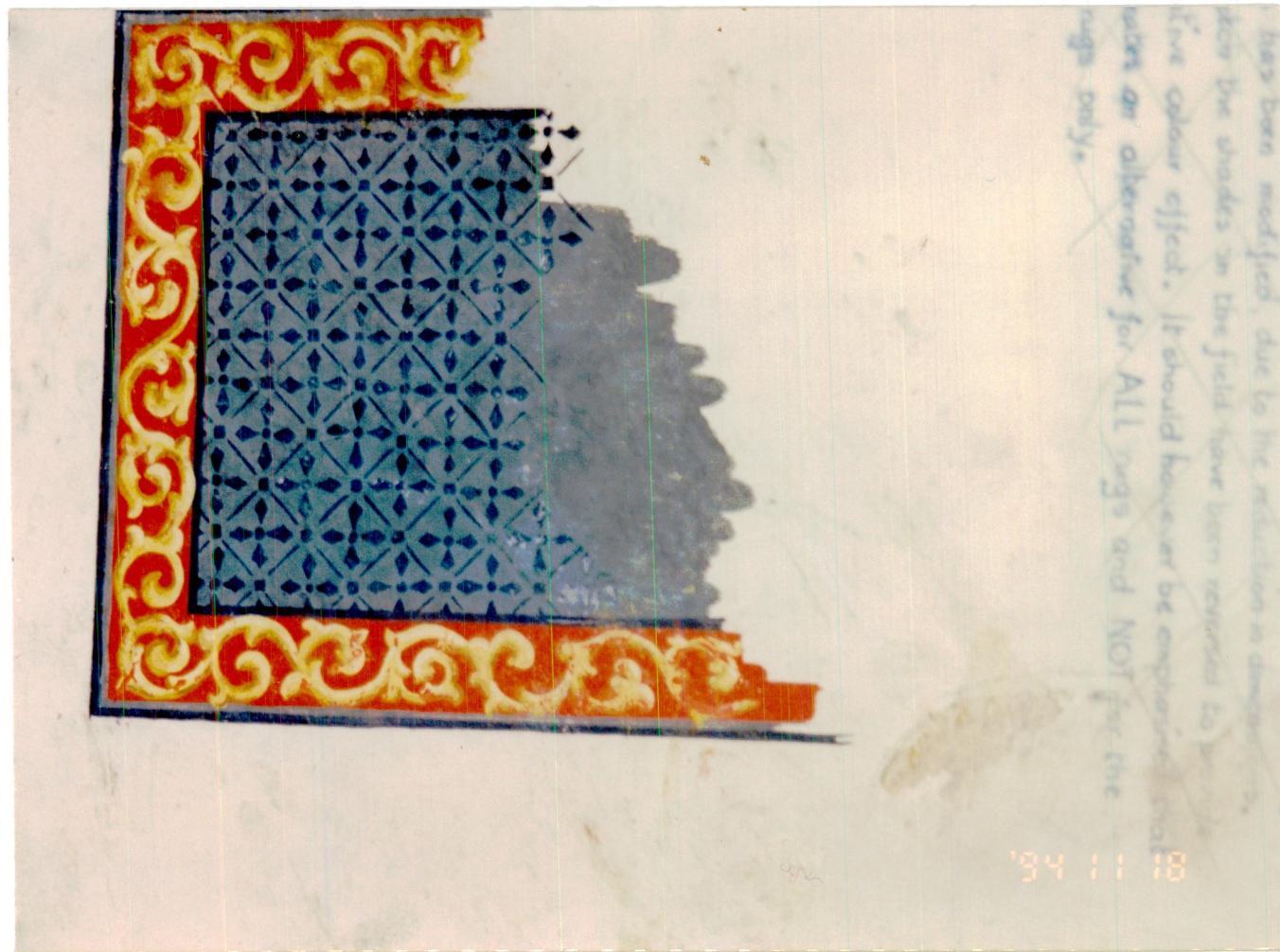






















## CONCLUSION

As one can now observe Donegal Carpets went through many changes over the years. As the factory constantly changed hands, there were hopes amongst the local people for a steady workload to secure their jobs but more than often their hopes were dashed as the factory constantly ran into debt. What were the main problems that weighed this factory down? How could Donegal Carpets appear to be so successful by supplying its products to an impressive list of customers yet still be crippled by lack of funds? In my opinion, many of the problems that the factory experienced were caused by lack of marketing knowledge.

When Alexander Morton set up the business, he had a vast knowledge of the textile world. His company was already established world wide, so he did not have to overcome many of the problems that other new companies experienced, as the Morton name was famous for quality. This allowed him to introduce that hand knotted carpet to the public much more quickly. Alexander Morton also sold these carpets through Libertys and Miller and Beatty which allowed the general public to view and order them. A large amount of orders in those early days were private commissions for stately homes in Britain, however during the time that Raymond Mc Grath was involved in the business \ it relied on large orders from the Government, Banks and Hotels etc. Donegal Carpets were simply not advertised for the ordinary consumer market. Although it could be argued that thses carpets were too expensive for the ordinary buyer, I believe that the company could have promoted its rugs and wallhangings which would have been cheaper to buy and really pushed this idea of a quality handmade item further. Unfortunately during this era, the factory's main concern was for the Government orders and neglected its advertising campaigns. As a result, few people in Ireland<sup>K</sup> knew much about the company or what it could offer.





When Frank Kinsella took over, he recognised that company's existing problems and tried to overcome them by advertising in America and Britain. He brought back some of its popularity and tried to attract public attention. He felt that by establishing a range of carpet designs that he could create an identity for the company, that would become recognisable as a quality item but by then it was too late. The company had already been in operation for seventy years and in order to have built up such a range, they would have to have been introduced much earlier to give them time to become known to the public.

During my interview with Daniel Campbell I asked him why he thought the business had deteriorated and he replied that he thought that it was due to the fact that the factory had many different owners. He claimed that a lot of people who were involved in business had little interest in it and were only concerned with profit making. He felt that Donegal Carpets had not been properly promoted. He added that a lot of the older women that had worked in the factory had passed away and that the tradition was almost gone. He feared that with the closure of the factory, the younger generation would never learn the process of hand knotted carpet manufacture, and so this age old tradition would disappear from Killybegs altogether. In order to set up the factory successfully again, he agreed that a good marketing plan would have to be one of the company's main priorities, and felt that it would involve a substantial amount of money.

During my research, I have discovered many designers that have contributed to Donegal Carpets, all of them were well known, and excellent designers, but I did notice that none of them were Irish. I feel that if Irish designers had been involved with the business then it would have given the company the identity it craved, and added to its 100% Irish tag. Now is the time, I feel, to involve designers from this country if the company





re-opens and bring fresh ideas into Donegal Carpets, instead of using the old designs that remain there. I believe there would be a market for hand made carpets in Ireland and indeed worldwide today. People still appreciate a beautiful item especially a hand crafted one.

No matter what state its finances were in, Donegal Carpets survived for almost a century and over the years one thing remained constant, the dedidcation and <sup>s</sup>kill of its workers and the surperb quality of its carpets. This in my opinion was the legend of Donegal Carpets and what has emerged as being the strongest contributing factor to its success. If the factory could employ this calibre of talent in the future, then I am certain that we have not heard the last of Donegal Carpets.

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