



National College of Art and Design  
Faculty of Design and Department of Fashion and Textiles

BEDDING IN IRELAND: 1900 TO PRESENT DAY  
REFLECTING SOCIAL AND CULTURAL PATTERNS

by

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## INTRODUCTION

This thesis discusses bedding in twentieth century Ireland and how the production and use of the elements of bedding discussed, reflect social and cultural patterns in Ireland.

No specific books have been written on the topic but the authors listed here have covered various angles of interest. Claudia Kinmonth has written extensively on beds and on bedding in her book on Irish Country Furniture (Kinmonth, 1993). Mairead Dunlevy described the original bed as being the mantle, in her book on Dress in Ireland (Dunlevy, 1989). Kevin Danaher, in numerous books, provided accounts of rural Ireland and the typical Irish homestead at the start of the century.

I have used various approaches to research this thesis. The most important researching tool was interviewing family and neighbours on their memories of bedding, and customs associated with the bed. This provided a first hand experience in examining textiles that they had or that were handed down to them by other family members. Examining particular textiles in the Folklife Collection at the National Museum, in Daingean, Co. Offaly and researching their origins in Dublin, presented a unique opportunity to see the nation's textile collection, which is not open to the public. Books, magazine articles, journals, exhibition catalogues and television programmes provided the rest of the material.

Essentially, I am focusing on the first half of the twentieth century, mainly, the relationship of the bed to the rest of the household, the typical household, mattresses, bed cloths, bedding for specific occasions, and the start of significant changes in bedding in the 1950's.



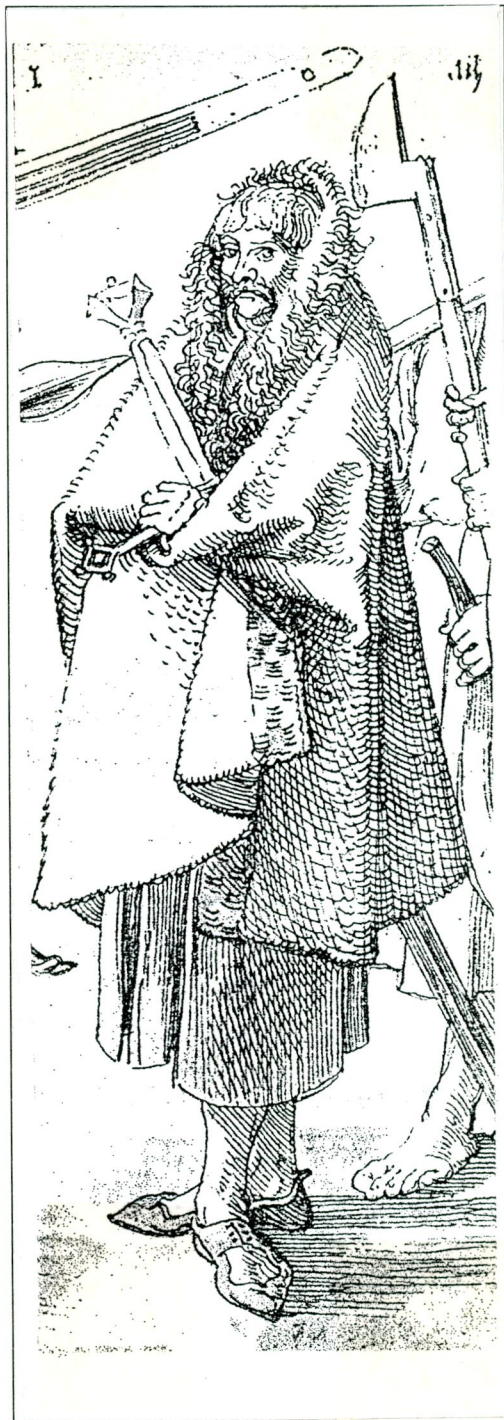


Fig.1 An Irish Chieftain wearing a mantle.



In the 17th century and earlier, Ireland had an extremely prosperous export trade, which was substantially due to the production of the mantle or shag rug and friezes, (fig.1). The "Irishe Mantels" or "Mantelles de Hiberniae", were exported from south eastern ports of Ireland to England, Wales and the Continent (Dunlevy, 1989, p.39).

Not only was the mantle worn as a cloak but according to H.C.Hamilton, it was a "garment by day and a house by night: it maketh them with the continual use of it more apt and able to live and lie out in bogs and woods where their mantle serveth them for a mattress" (Dunlevy, 1989, p.41). This tradition carried on through the 17th century where Morrison Fynes in 1617, travelling throughout Ireland wrote;

*The very chiefs of the Irish, as well as men and women, go naked in the very winter time...to conclude, men and women at night going to sleepe[sic] be thus naked about the fire. They sleepe[sic] upon the ground...lying in a circle about the fire with their feet towards it, and their bodies being naked they cover their heads and upper parts with their mantles which they first make very wet, deliberately steeping them in water, for they find that as soon as their bodies have warmed the wet mantles, the smoke of them keepes[sic] in temperate heat through the night (Sutton, 1980, p.13).*

Under the reign of King Henry VIII in the 15th century, a rule had been passed specifically targeting the inhabitants of Galway, preventing them from wearing mantles. "No man or man child do wear no mantles in the streets, but cloths or gowns shaped after the English fashion"(Sutton,1980,p.14). In spite of the ban placed on the wearing of mantles, they were still important in the 17th century.





By the early 20th century, the type of society represented by people wearing shag rugs and lying down by a fire, had been dismantled, and in its place was a society primarily living in a small variety of house types in small rural populations. This section shall deal with the physical relationship of the bed and bedroom to the house structure and the family structure.

Family structures until the early 1920's were little altered from previous centuries in Ireland. The typical rural household was self-sufficient, where the family built their houses, reared their own beasts, grew their own vegetables, and produced by-products from their animals, such as butter making from milk and cream, and clothing from wool.

An example of a detail of self-sufficiency even among wealthier people is demonstrated by Miss Aphra Earle, who lived in Kilkenny and Waterford, and remembers that her family made their own furniture polish and soap from beeswax from their bees.

There was also a large element of self sufficiency in the production of textiles, for example, the custom of filling mattresses with items readily found on the farm or in the locality, and the reusing of flour sacks for bedding, will be discussed at a later point.

Sheep thrive on poor land, and due to this fact, the west of Ireland had a great tradition in spinning and weaving. Donegal produced dark striped and checked





Fig. 2 Two Donegal women spinning and carding, c.1900.



tweeds, while Mayo produced similar tweeds in brighter colours, and Galway produced *bainin* or white flannel. It is possible that brighter colours were achieved in different regions of the country due to a variation of plants used as dyestuff. Cattle and other animals were such a valuable asset to the livelihood of the population, that some humble dwellings, known as 'byre houses', were shared with animals, so that it was easier to attend to them during the bad winter weather (Pfeiffer, 1990, p.17).

In the killing of an animal, men had a distinct role and women had theirs. The actual killing, blood drawing, and cutting of the carcass was carried out by men. Each half carcass was cut into seven sections - the shoulder, ham, three back pieces, belly and half head. The pieces were then salted and packed into a barrel filled with more salt. Women dealt with the other parts of the animal - the *cruibini*, which were the lower legs and feet, the heart, liver, kidneys, and ribs which were either cooked fresh or lightly salted. Black pudding was made by the women from salted and stirred blood, meaning there was no waste from the animal. With a pig killing, one of the men in the house would wash the bladder and blow it up for the children, who used it as a football! (Danaher, 1985, p.56)

The pronounced divide between the work of the man and woman of the house is further illustrated in this quote;

*...Donegal men and women seem to live within roles which custom dictates. None of the textile firms will employ women weavers: very few women would want to weave because "it's men's work". Women very seldom milk a cow, but men never churn butter. It is very uncommon to see a woman working in a vegetable garden and rarer yet to see her using a spade, but men*





Fig.3 A Donegal woman spinning outside her house.



*do not usually grow flowers or cook. Men assume the role of head of the household in very literal ways and mostly women endorse this attitude...* (Hoad, 1987, p.16)

On the farm, it was the man's work to care for the sheep and produce wool. Men were always weavers, while women carded and spun the wool on large spinning wheels outside the house, or on smaller wheels, which were positioned by the turf fire (fig.2 & fig.3). Women created textiles by other methods, such as knitting and sometimes did embroidery. Knitting was central to women's lives. Handknit sweaters, caps, stockings, trousers and shawls were commonly worn. The heavy oiled wool was popular with fishermen in particular, and it was said that if one drowned at sea, he could be identified by the stitches of his sweater. The stitches on a sweater told stories often relating to the life of the wearer, such as the sea, family, marriage. Other patterns had religious or superstitious meanings (Shaw, 1984, p.27). Olive Sharkey notes that the spinner was often an elderly woman living alone and depending solely on the money her spinning brought in. If she was doing well, she could afford to buy wool from a farmer, otherwise she would have to 'steal' fleece caught in hedgerows where sheep had passed through to another field (Sharkey, 1985, p.64).

The farmer's wife was in charge of the dairy and the keeping of the fowl. This territory meant that duties such as butter-making, the storage of eggs, the killing of fowl, taking produce to the market or dealing with a travelling buyer was her responsibility, which she shared with her daughters. One of the women interviewed for this thesis, Mrs.Huddelston, confirmed this point when she related that her mother made butter from the milk of their cows, which was sold at the market nearby.



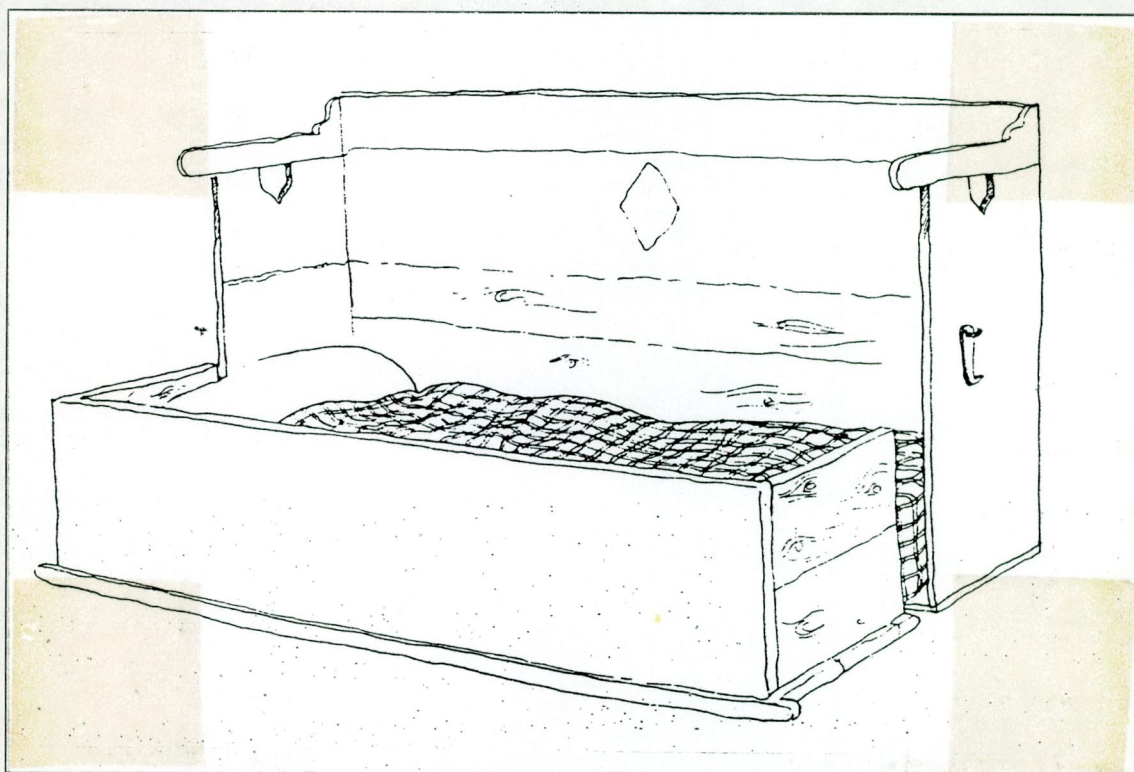


Fig.4 The settle bed.



*"Butter making could be a small task with a dash churn to provide the family's needs and leave a few pounds over for sale, or a big enterprise with the cream from thirty or forty cows and a big churn ...In all cases these were the concern of the mistress of the house, the farmer's wife, who might manage the small task alone or have half a dozen women, daughters or servants, to speed the larger endeavour" (Danaher, 1985, p.85).*

In such family establishments where numbers were large, often including grandparents and many children living in small spaces, the business of beds and bedding could be a matter of some innovation. The style of one's bed depended solely on the size of one's house, which in turn relied upon the size of one's farm holding.

For example, Mrs.Charlotte Watkins (born in 1919), originally from Manor Kilbride, near Blessington, Co.Wicklow, lived in a small house. Her father was a farm labourer and she was the eldest of four sisters. In their house was a kitchen, porch, and two bedrooms. The two eldest sisters slept in two iron beds in one of the bedrooms, and their parents slept in an iron bed in the other bedroom. The girls' bedroom was sparsely decorated with a table, a mirror on the wall, and a small press for clothes. The other two girls slept in a settle bed (fig.4). This piece of furniture served as a seat during the day and when pulled out, became a bed at night.

Mrs.Kitty Huddelston (born in 1918), originally from Collon, near Edenderry, Co.Offaly, describes the first house she lived in as a small farmer's house. Mrs.Huddelston was an only child, and her parents were able to afford to employ a girl whose job was to look after her. Cows were kept and were milked by another maid.



In the house there was also a scullery, a kitchen, a sitting room and three bedrooms. The beds were iron in each room and as there was a spare bedroom, it was kept for guests.

Miss Aphra Earle (born in 1925) remembers Graigue, the first house that she lived in, near Cluncunny, Co.Kilkenny. The house was one of three houses that originally belonged to her grandmother, which were divided up between four sons. The two sons that were unmarried shared one house, whilst the two married sons were given one house each. Miss Earle's father was a fruit merchant and farmer. There were seven in the family, including three brothers and two sisters.

Graigue was a two storey house with a sitting room, dining room, kitchen, and bathroom downstairs. Half way up the stairs, were two rooms, one either side of the staircase. Upstairs, there was a spare room, the parents' bedroom, the sisters' bedroom and another bedroom for the boys.

It is interesting that the children should share bedrooms, when there were spare bedrooms. Kevin Danaher notes that "Lady guests were brought to the best bedroom to lay off their cloaks, bonnets and gloves, so that this room should reflect the status of the family in its fine furnishings" (Danaher, 1985, p.18). Perhaps the spare rooms in Miss Earle's house were used for this purpose.

The family left Graigue in 1930 and moved to Grantstown, Co.Waterford to a larger house. There were four rooms at the back of the house which were not used, as the



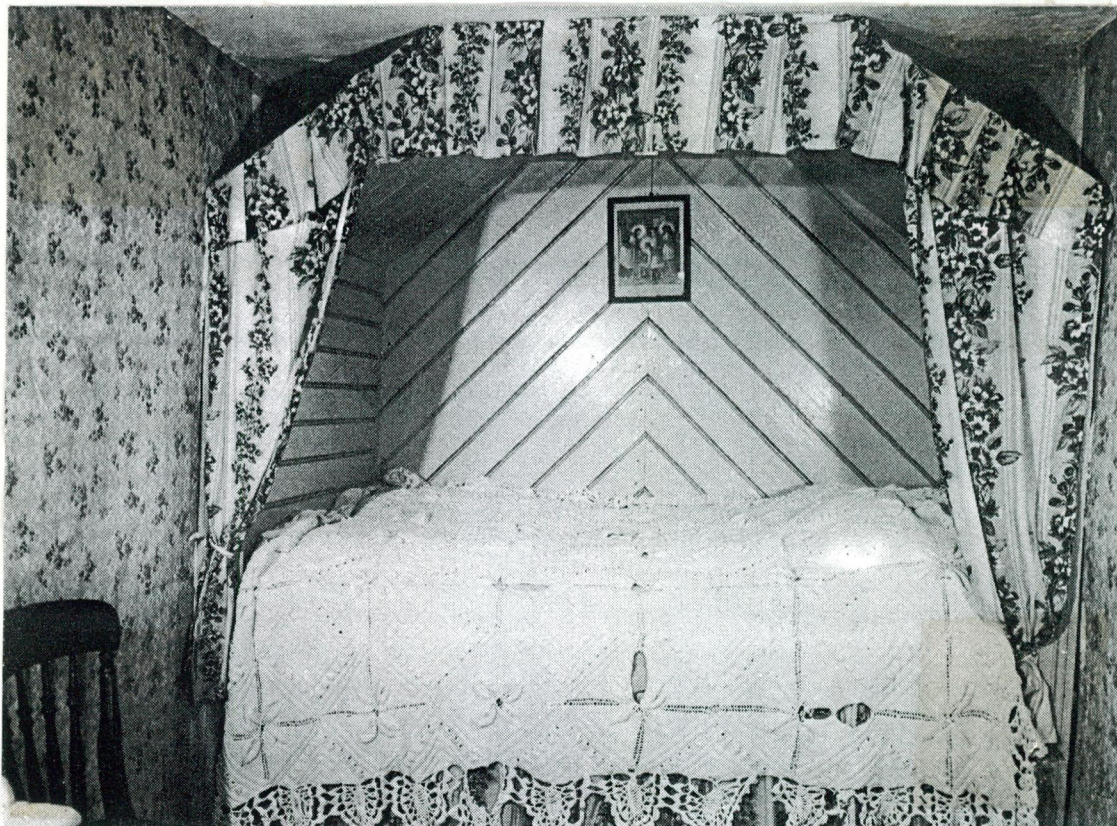


Fig.5 The covered car bed.



Fig.6 The loft bed.



house was so big. In the cellar, chicory was grown and sold by Miss Earle's father. There was a long passageway to the kitchen and scullery. There were bedrooms either side of the sittingroom and upstairs there was another bedroom, a bathroom and a hot air cupboard. As before, there were four spare rooms, half way up the stairs. In this house, Miss Earle had a bedroom to herself, as her sister had left home to work in 1938. She remembers having an iron bed with a foam mattress on a solid base. It proved to be difficult to source the development date of foam.

Other types of beds that were popular were the covered-car bed (fig.5), the loft bed (fig.6), and the outshot bed (fig. 7).

The covered-car bed or canopy bed was boxed in wood and had curtains which were used for shelter and privacy. They were generally constructed of pine, which was usually painted but occasionally wallpapered (Kinmonth, 1993, p.154). This type of bed was generally to be found in the "lower bedroom" of a house. The "lower" bedroom refers to the bedroom opposite the hearth. The "upper bedroom" refers to the room behind the hearth.

The loft bed was generally used by children, as it was usually built in the loft of the kitchen, "here they fell asleep within sight and sound of the company in the kitchen" (Danaher, 1985, p.14). According to Claudia Kinmonth "Lofts over the fire or over the lower end of the kitchen provided a warm place to sleep. Sometimes this loft was enclosed and access was made possible via a ladder" (Kinmonth, 1993, p.155).





Fig.7 The outshot bed.

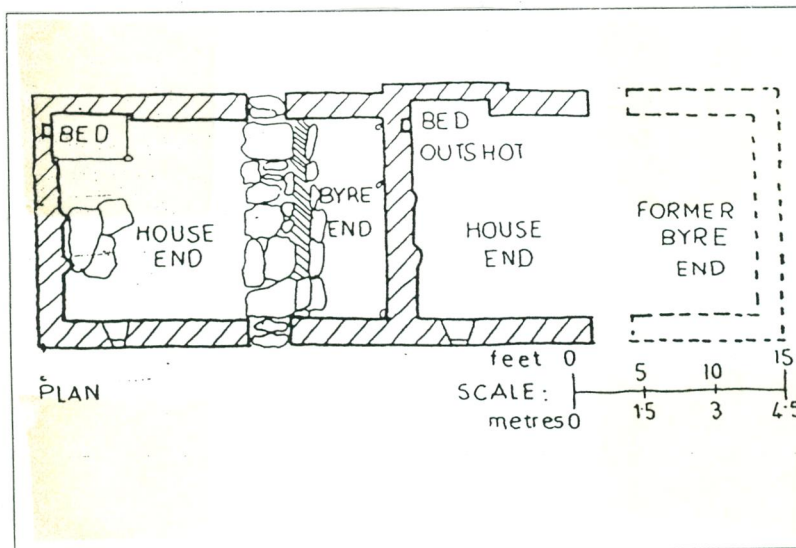


Fig.8 Plan of the outshot bed.

The outshot bed was created out of a need to retain the useful working space by the hearth and the desire for a draught-free sleeping space. This demonstrates the importance of the hearth which was the focus of all activity in the house. Apart from cooking, the hearth was a great social hub where stories were told when family and neighbours called around. The outshot was always positioned by the hearth to take advantage of the heat without infringing on important social space. It projected from the exterior of the house, and was big enough for a double bed (fig.8). A curtain was hung in front to screen the bed from view (Pfeiffer, 1990, p.17). The eldest member of the family usually slept in the outshot bed (Kinmonth, 1993, p.153).





This section deals with the variety of bed types which were used, from the shag rug to the bedcorde. The range of different mattresses used, before springs became popular, will also be dealt with.

As mentioned previously, the shag rug was used as an article of clothing and bedding. It doubled as a mattress and blanket. Straw and reeds were the next recorded form of mattress being used, with families lying on the straw and reeds communally close to the fire, which was known as lying in stradogue, the shake-down or the thorough bed (Kinmonth, 1993, p.150). All of these names were used to describe the same sleeping arrangement. It was recorded in a poem by P.Mc Clabber in 1807;

*And in a corner by the wall/ we have a bed which  
cannot fall/.../plain straw it is...and o'er this bed/ the  
ruins of a quilt are spread.*

There was a Poor Inquiry carried out by the British Government which showed that people slept in such a way up to the 1830s (Kinmonth, 1993, p.150).

The first example of raising bedding off the floor is recorded in the 17th century. A Mr.Richard Ryan of Tipperary, had an inventory drawn-upon his death which included details of his bed: 1Bedstead, 1 Feather Bedd[sic] and bolster, 1 Blew[sic]Quilt and 1 Bed Corde (Kinmonth, 1993, p.156). The bed corde was a base on which the mattress lay. It was constructed by threading rope through holes in the sides and ends of a wooden bed frame. Corded bedsteads were used in the 18th century for the poor to raise their bedding off the floor (Kinmonth, 1993, p.156). Claudia Kinmonth provides

another record of the bedcorde in an account as recent as 1964 in Co.Antrim “ a wooden bed with a chaff or feather bed tick stretched on a (bog) fir rope frame” (Kinmonth, 1993, p.156).

The bedcorde was underneath the straw mattress which was underneath another mattress filled with either loose straw (sometimes known as chaff), flock (wool or cotton waste used as stuffing), goose feathers or white bogcotton. In Kerry, hessian sacks, which originally held animal meal or bran, were filled with fresh straw every springtime, and were placed under goose feather ticks (Kinmonth, 1993, p.157).

In an interview with Mrs.Charlotte Watkins, who was brought up in Manor Kilbride, near Blessington, Co.Wicklow, she recalled having a chaff mattress , which she believed to be the waste product from corn, and that feather mattresses were not common in the area. According to Mrs.Eva Cobbe (born in 1913), originally from Redcross, Co.Wicklow, she recalls sleeping on a flock mattress, while her brothers slept on a feather mattress. There is no apparent reason for the use of different materials between the brothers and sisters and Mrs.Cobbe found nothing unusual about it.

In an interview with Mrs.Kitty Huddelston, she gave an account of how her father bought Barberstown Castle in Straffan, Co.Kildare in 1942. The family kept chickens and other farmyard animals. As there were so many large empty rooms in the castle, one room was used specifically for killing the chickens and another room was used for plucking feathers. The routine was, cocks were picked out for the killing and starved the night before. Their heads were chopped off and they were then plucked. The

feathers had to be sterilised before using them. Ticking fabric was bought and the reverse of the fabric was rubbed with Sunlight Soap, which fixed the feathers to the fabric. The family then made mattresses, pillows and cushions for their own use.

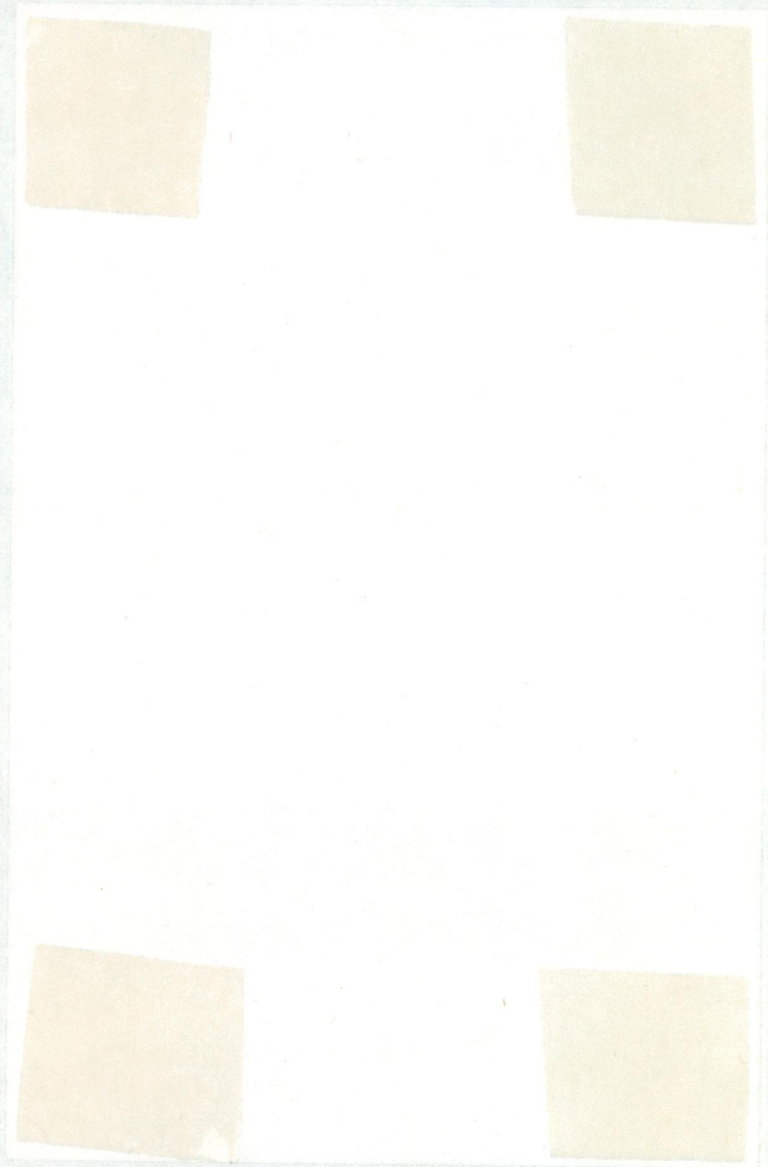
Horsehair mattresses eventually replaced the other mattress fillings. Mrs. Kitty Huddleston believes that horsehair mattresses began to be used in some parts of Ireland from the 1920's. She remembers that it was possible to send a horsehair mattress to the ODearest mattress manufacturing company (in the most recent sales catalogue from ODearest, printed in 1990, it states that for almost 100 years they have been making beds). The filling from the middle of the mattress was teased out and replaced by springs. Model Housekeeping, an annual book giving advice on housekeeping and interiors, is still advocating the above in 1962 "If you have an old mattress worth remaking (and this is something many people ill-advisedly never consider) ask handles to be included" (Model Housekeeping, 1962, p.442).

However, the horse hair mattresses were not as comfortable as the feather ticks, they were hard and thin compared to the softness of the feather mattress. In Kevin Danaher 's book, Folktales of the Irish Countryside, elderly people in the parish of Athea, Co.Limerick related stories to the author, however, the date of this quote is unknown;

*Long ago, it was all feather mattresses, or ticks as they used to be called, that people would have to sleep on. And it was not everyone had them, because of course it would take the feathers from more than a hundred geese to stuff a really thick one. Of course, it is only the soft feathers of the breast of the goose or the duck or the hen that would be put into a good tick. And a good one*



*was a lot more comfortable than the hair mattress that's going now, and there was nothing softer or warmer on a winter's night* (Danaher, 1967, p30).





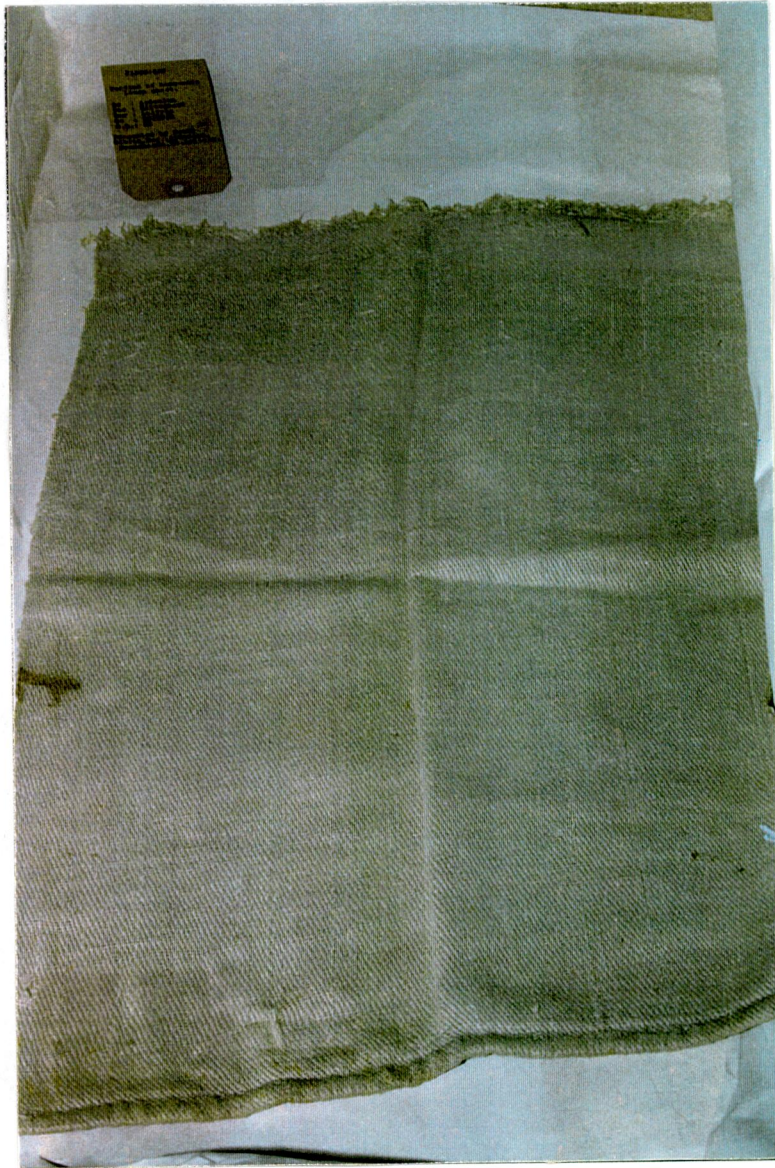


Fig.9 Part of a home-made linen sheet.



In this section, a range of bedcloths will be discussed, incorporating topics such as linen, flour bags, wool, blankets and quilts.

According to E.F.Sutton "Linen has been a part of native clothing for centuries, thirty or more yards was used for a single cloak" (Sutton, 1980, p.15). It was a high status fabric and down through the years, became a central part of the bottom drawer of a young girl. In a chapter discussing dress in Ireland from 1840-1910, Dunlevy quotes H.C.Hamilton "Apart from splendid wedding attire she also required a trousseau. It was put on display in her home with the presents. Newspapers frequently listed the items - particularly if there was a quantity of good quality linen" (Dunlevy, 1989, p.172).

Kevin Danaher notes that "bed clothes were home made or locally made in all the best houses, with handspun and woven linen sheets..." (Danaher, 1985, p.45). In fig.9 there is an example of part of a home-made linen sheet from the Folklife Department in the National Museum. The piece measures 50cm.x 36cm. and is woven in twill. On one of the shorter sides there is a hem 1cm.deep. The sample is from a sheet which formed part of a box of blankets and sheets given by the donor's grandmother to his mother on the occasion of his mother's marriage over 70 years ago. (The Museum acquired the sample in 1950). The piece was in constant use, first as a sheet and later on as a towel.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Mr.J.J Mahon describes in a letter to Mr.Lucas, Deputy Keeper of Irish Antiquities, how he came to have the linen sheet and its original function. See Appendix II.

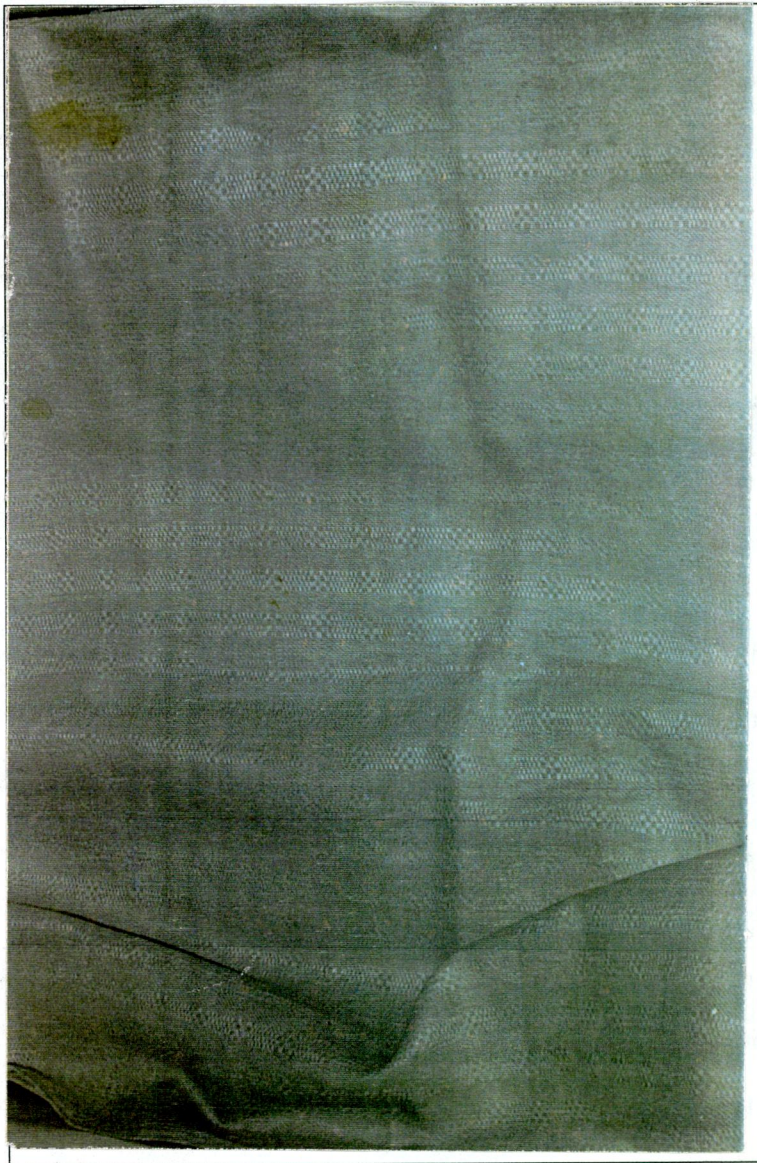


Fig.10 Linen sheet woven in a diaper pattern.



It is considerably coarser than the example in fig.10 of another linen sheet.<sup>2</sup> Fig.10 was handspun and handwoven and is in excellent condition. The donor related it was given to her great grandmother as a wedding present, therefore the sheet was made in c.1870.<sup>3</sup> The weave is a small diaper pattern about 3mm wide. The sheet consists of two strips of 70cm. sewn together. According to Mr.Lucas at the National Museum "...Linen of this kind was a standard production on hand-loom and was made commonly in the country by the hundred thousand yards in the last century"<sup>4</sup> The sheet still has a beautiful lustrous appearance after all the years. Although the sheet was woven in c.1870, it continued to be in full use up until the 1950's.

With rationing in the 1930's and 1940's, fabric was difficult to source or to buy and considered an unnecessary luxury. Therefore people used what they had to compensate. Flour sacks were used all over the country as a source of fabric.

According to Mrs.Eva Cobbe, flour sacks were cut open, and by using a run and fell seam, were stitched together, resulting in sturdy sheets for the bed, which became softer each time they were washed. The dye on the flour sack was bleached off using washing soda and boiling water.

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<sup>2</sup>In Appendix III, fig.10 is referred to as a tablecloth by Mr.Lucas, but is described as a linen sheet in the Museum records in Appendix IV.

<sup>3</sup> Appendix IV is a record from the National Museum which details the origins of the linen sheet.

<sup>4</sup> Mr.Lucas at the Museum in a letter to Mrs.Delia Arkins, the donor, thanks her for the donation, proceeds to describe how this particular type of linen was commonly produced, and how it was only worth £15. See Appendix III.





Fig.11 Flour sack, pre-bleaching. Author's own.

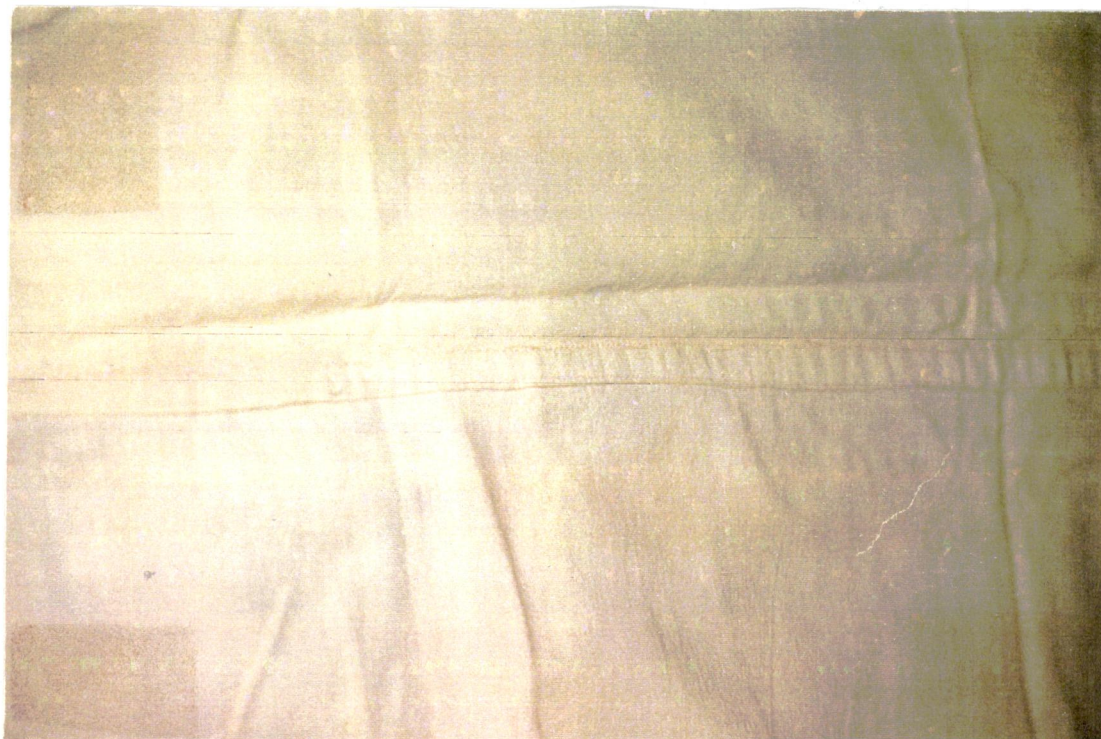


Fig.12 Detail of a run and fell seam on a flour sack. Author's own.



In fig.11 the flour sack is cut open and the dye has not yet been bleached off. It measures 98cm. x 120cm. The sheet made from flour sacks in fig.12 is joined on the width, by a run and fell seam. It measures 93cm. x 231cm. and is hemmed at either end. The dye has nearly been fully erased from the sheet but there is still a shadowey image of the maiden advocating "Irish Purity", flour from Odlum's Mill in Portarlinton, Co.Laois.

It was their durability and softness that lead to flour sacks being used as sheets a long time after rationing had stopped. Dr.Roberta Roberts, originally from Carrickmacross, Co.Monaghan, related that flour sacks were also used for tea towels and aprons. According to Danaher;

*Worn out bed sheets, old garments and the like were torn up into handy pieces to serve as dish-rags and cleaning cloths, which might be seen to descend in the social scale until finally discarded, first used to dry the tableware, then to scrub pots and so downwards until, torn and stained they were grabbed up to wipe tar off hands or old grease off a cart axle (Danaher, 1985, p.75).*

There is and has been for centuries, an abundance of wool in Ireland due to a heavy reliance on sheep farming in the agricultural sector. According to Mrs.Kitty Huddleston, her father kept sheep, and shored them himself in the summertime. He then brought wool to Hills Mills in Lucan, Co.Dublin and as well as some payment in money, he would receive in exchange, woven fabric for mens' suiting, rugs and blankets. In fig.13, there is an example of one such blanket that her father received in





Fig. 13 Detail of Mrs.K.Huddleston's blanket woven in Hills Mills,  
Lucan, Co.Dublin.



exchange for wool. Ms.Sallie O'Sullivan, Head of Woven Textiles in NCAD, believes that the blanket is a double fabric in self stitched twill on both layers and was used on Mrs.Huddleston's bed for many years. When it became shabby, she gave the blanket to her dogs, who still sleep on it today. Mrs.Eva Cobbe recollected that her uncle, who lived in Lucan, sold wool to Hills Mills also, and received blankets or tweed in exchange.

Dr.Anne O'Dowd of the National Museum stated that nearly every household in Ireland had a red woollen blanket quilt, such was the availability of wool. Red dye was readily available in shops, and because of its depth of shade , it was known as turkey red.

The quilt in fig.14 measures 193cm.x174cm. It consists of a red flannel material with a dark grey linen backing and black padding stitched between. It is quilted with a running stitch the length of the quilt, each row approximately 2cm. apart. It is in a poor condition, with the padding becoming exposed in certain areas through the linen backing. On touching the padding which was exposed, it felt similiar to cotton. A "rich black was achieved by soaking wool for a time in a boghole, or by boiling it in bog water. Chips of oak added to the water gave an even glossier black and a mixture of indigo and urine produced a blue-black" (Sharkey, 1985, p.65). It is possible that the padding was bog cotton and was dyed by soaking in a boghole.

The most well known type of quilting are those worked in patchwork. Numerous books have been written on the subject, therefore I only intend to give a brief summary of this craft.



Fig.14 Reverse of a Red Woollen Quilt showing its linen backing.



Ironically, it was poorer people who bought fabric for patchwork, or acquired scraps from textile factories. This was because their clothes would have been too worn to use as a fabric, as opposed to the middle or upper classes who bought new clothes frequently which meant that there was always had a ready supply of fabric (Shaw, 1984, p.30). Patchwork can be made in various ways, but the most commonly used methods of construction were applique, mosaic or log cabin. The log cabin technique was one of the few methods which enabled the use of men's woollen suiting, which produced warm quilts popular in winter (Shaw, 1984, p.31).

Wool was used for stitching heavier quilts, while cotton yarn was used for lighter pieces. The design was chalked onto the material, the most common pattern being the zig-zag. Circular effects were achieved by using pieces of domestic ceramics as templates.

Quilting was sometimes carried out on a quilting frame. The function of the frame was to bear the weight of the materials and to hold them secure while they were being quilted together. Quilting parties were sometimes held and up to six women could work at one time on a quilting frame. Four women worked on the main part of the quilt, while the other two women worked at either side on the borders (Morton, 1959, p.64).

This section deals with special occasion cloths which were used in association with death or marriage customs.

After life had ended, the prescribed religious and cultural ritual in Ireland was the wake. At the wake, the corpse was laid out, more often than not, on a bed. The body was presented so that it appeared natural and comfortable for its last public appearance. As well as allowing the dead person's family and community to mourn publicly, it was a great social gathering. In pre-electrification times, the main social gatherings in the year were weddings and funerals. According to Mrs. Peggy O'Brien, Wexford:

*at funerals, would be when most people would meet, or weddings. Funerals were a big occasion at that time of course. It was like a party. The wake went on for a couple of days and the men stayed up all night drinking. So that's the time you heard stories, ghost stories, you'd be afraid to go to bed (A Fitting Image Production, 1996).*

There was a tradition throughout Europe to be buried with cloth instead of a coffin. There are records of this since the 17th century, when in Scotland, the Proclamation of the Council in 1684 forbade the use of elaborately decorated coffins. Those parishioners who would have had highly ornamented coffins found that a good substitute was "a handsome mortcloth" (Gordon, 1984, p.52). The mortcloth gave a touch of dignity to burials and to a poorly made coffin. Therefore, the mortcloth was used in conjunction with a coffin and not on its own. There is proof of this practice in Ireland, according to a writer for Dublin University Magazine;



*I have myself known cases of paupers in the hospital wards who were accumulating under their pillows a little store to save the disgrace of a parish coffin, that being the greatest and last misfortune that could befall them..."I see you take in plain sewing ; this is some bridal grandeur," he said, taking up what he thought an elaborate nightdress. "Tis no wedding grandeur" replied the girl proudly. "Shure 'tis my own shroud; let life bring what it may, plaze God I'll have a dacent wake" (Dublin University Magazine, 1876, p.296).*

James Mooney in 1888, also talks about clothes relating to death kept by most families.

*The corpse is generally drest[sic] in a shroud, together with the scapular or other insignia of any religious order of which the deceased may hav[sic] been a member. The shroud, towels and other clothes used in connection with the funeral ceremonies ar[sic] all of linen and ar commonly preservd[sic] in each family for this purpose alone (Mooney, 1888, p.27).*

Miss Aphra Earle remembers when she was young, in the 1920's, people being buried in a dark brown fabric, known as a habit. Perhaps these are the sort of things mentioned in Nuala O' Faolain's autobiography, Are You Somebody?, where the author refers to her grandmother "running a tailloress operation in the front room of the red brick terraced house in Clonliff Road, sewing shrouds late at night for the dead of the parish" (O'Faolain, 1996, p.13).



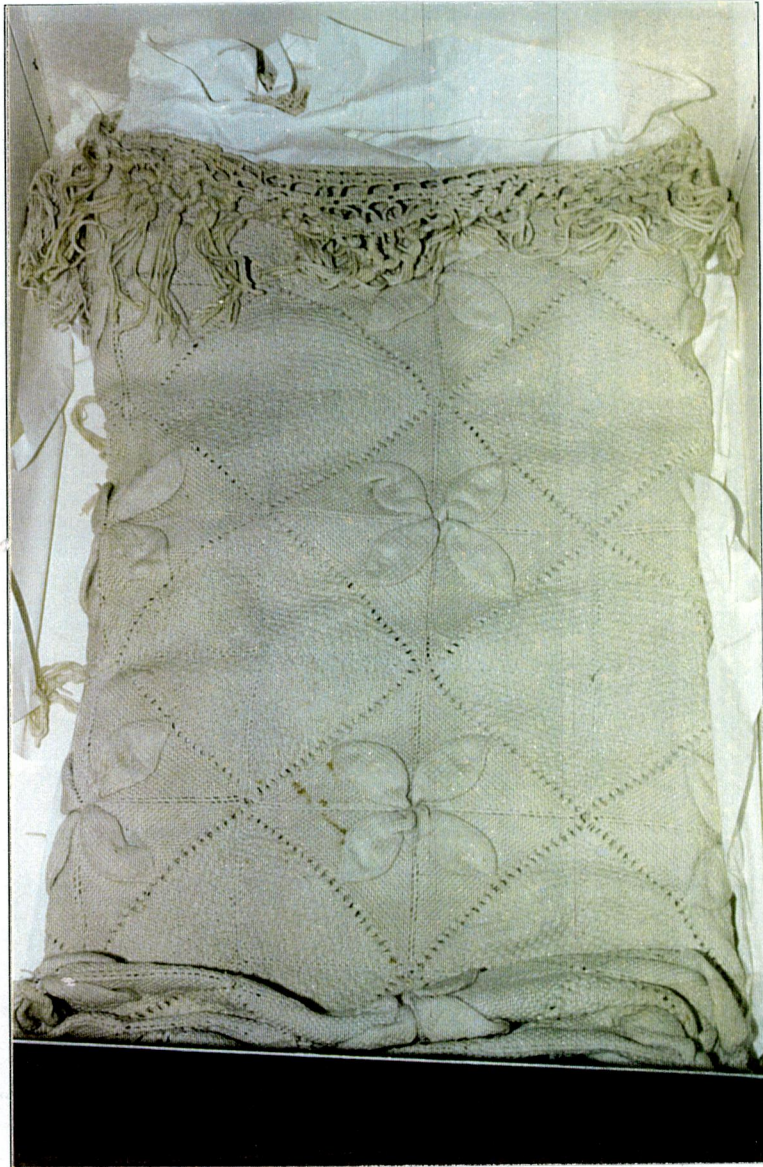


Fig.15 Section of a white knitted bedspread.



Bedcovers which were knitted or crocheted in white cotton yarn, survive in large numbers today, most of them dating from the late 19th century and early 20th century. While knitted bedspreads are not necessarily associated with death, there is a fine example of a woman who made a white cotton crochet bedcover intended for her own laying -out after death in Co.Kerry (Monaghan County Museum, 1981, p.34). Most of the knitted or crocheted bedcovers were constructed with squares or strips sewn together, like the knitted example in fig.15 from the collection in the National Museum of Ireland.

The knitted bedspread measures 214cm. square, including a fringe. The piece is made up of 49 squares in which the pattern is repeated in each. Each square is approximately 20cm.x20cm. Every large square consists of four smaller ones, each worked on a diagonal. The bedspread contains three forms of stitching - a moss stitch forms large diamond shapes which contrast with diamonds created with plain stitch. The latter diamond shape surround a four leaved flower motif formed in purl stitch.

Dr. Anne O'Dowd believes that often women made these bedspreads in the first year of marriage, before they started to have children. Bedcovers of this type were easily washed and retained a crisp, clean appearance. "Ease of laundering was a prime consideration in the choice of colour and fabric" (Monaghan County Museum, 1981, p.35). It was due to this ease of laundering that these textiles were frequently used for laying out the dead.



Fig.16 Section of a white cotton woven bedspread used for laying out the dead.



White linen or cotton bedcovers with heavily textured embroidery in white threads were used in upper class houses from the early 18th century onwards. Their original use was not confined to laying out the dead, unlike examples from the late 19th century and late 20th century which were specifically designed for this purpose and were part of whole sets of special bed linen.

In fig. 16, there is an example of a white cotton woven bedspread which was specifically used for laying out the dead. It belonged to Mrs. Muriel Henry (born in 1910 and died in 1984), who was born and lived in Carrickmacross, Co. Monaghan for many years, before moving to live in Dublin. According to her niece, the bedspread was shared amongst friends and neighbours in the Carrickmacross area. A laying-out bedspread of such quality and sophisticated design was highly valued for it gave an air of grandeur to the send off of a loved one. It was also appreciated by those families, who could not afford or did not possess an elaborate laying-out bedspread.

The origin of the bedspread is unknown, but Ms. Sallie O'Sullivan, believes that it is unlikely that the bedspread was created in Ireland due to the complex pattern, which would have required a more technically advanced loom than was available in Ireland at the time. She speculated that the bedspread was woven on either a Dobby or a Jacquard loom. The bedspread is constructed of fine and coarse yarns, woven in a complex double layer.

Loose coarse threads are left in certain areas to form a sort of wadding. There is some stitching on the wadded areas to create a quilted effect. The pattern consists of

geometric abstract shapes in a small diamond formation, working as a border to the almost square bedspread, measuring 204cms.x 187cms. A secondary border is organic in contrast, comprising swirling leaves and flowers. The centre of the piece is in a circular composition enclosing more abstract patterning of leaves.





*Matchmaking was here, as in other parts of Ireland, the usual prelude to marriage, and the dowry and wedding gifts followed the same homely and useful lines (money, livestock, beds, etc.) (O'Suilleabhain, 1945, p.172).*

Textiles were given to brides as wedding presents, either created by close family members or by a group of women in the community.

Two textiles already examined, were significant in marriage ceremonies. In fig.10, the linen sheet from the National Museum of Ireland, handspun and handwoven, was given to the donor's great grandmother as a wedding present. In fig.9, there is another example of a homemade linen sheet which was presented by the donor's grandmother to his mother on the occasion of her marriage.<sup>5</sup>

Miss.Aphra Earle recalls heavy linen being given as wedding presents in her day. Pillowcases with personalised initials and lace edging were popular and were made by the women in the village of the bride. This practice is reiterated by Dunlevy;

*...more elaborate in the later 19th century, the wedding dress for a young bride followed suit. Apart from splendid wedding attire she also required a trousseau. It was put on display in her home with the presents. Newspapers frequently listed the items - particularly if there was a quantity of good quality*

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<sup>5</sup> Mr.J.J.Mahon of Drumshambo,Co.Leitrim writes in a letter to Mr.Lucas in the National Museum of Ireland, on the custom of a mother giving textiles to daughters on the occasion of their marriage. See page two of the letter in Appendix I.





Fig.17 Centre of coverlet, showing initials GAO, alongside shamrocks.

*linen, hand embroidered monograms, and items trimmed with lace or with tucking details* (Dunlevy, 1989, p.172).

In conversation with Mrs.Kitty Huddleston, she recalls how her mother made a coverlet and two pillowsheets to match, using the drawn thread work technique. Mrs.Huddleston's mother produced the set, when she was young, with the intention of using it during her married life. She married in 1917.

The coverlet was the textile which was seen when the bed was made. It was laid on top of either a sheet of green or pink linen. Coloured linen was used, as it emphasised the intricacies of the drawn thread work, which was executed in white linen. The pillow sheets are miniature versions of the coverlet. They were designed to sit on top of the pillow. Again, a coloured linen sheet in smaller dimensions were placed underneath the pillowsheet. The ticking fabric of the pillowcase was hidden from view with a cotton pillowcase.

Mrs.Huddleston is sure that her mother produced the linen coverlet from designs in a book, where samples of letters of the alphabet were shown, along with basic design layouts. At the centre of the design, fig.17, is her mother's maiden name initials - G. A.O., amongst stems of shamrocks. The drawn thread work is limited to the borders and edges of the coverlet, while the initials and shamrocks are created using satin stitch with white cotton thread.



The coverlet was left on the bed during the daytime, with the purpose of being seen. It was folded back at bedtime to protect it, due to its delicate and intricate nature. Sheets and blankets were used underneath the coverlet to provide warmth.

There were many marriage rituals or customs, some of which were indirectly linked to the bed; Mr.J.J.Mahon refers to the custom of the farmer's wife giving a trunk containing blankets and sheets for each of her daughters on the occasion of their marriage.<sup>6</sup> Also many hours were spent trying to foretell the identity of one's future husband. According to Kevin Danaher;

*In addition to the apples, the cabbage head and the spade, other things which might be put under the pillow or under the head of the bed to induce a dream of the future partner were bairin breac, or the first spoonful of colcannon from the supperdish and the last left on the plate, both put into the girl's left stocking and tied with her right garter (Bluett, 1995, p.29).*

Other customs were related to the wedding night, which involved playing tricks on the married couple. Mrs.Charlotte Watkins recalls that people would put things like thorny bushes into the bed of a newly wed couple for a joke, on their wedding night. She said you'd be terrified to get into the bed when you got married, and that it was a popular custom in the North West region. She remembers friends of hers being caught out on their wedding night in Sligo.

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<sup>6</sup> Mr.J.J.Mahon writing to Mr.Lucas, providing details of marriage customs in the Leitrim area. Details in Appendix I.

This section introduces the later half of the 20th century which saw the demise of hand-made bed cloths and the invention of sprung mattresses. These factors are outlined below.

As a result of the Economic War in the 1930s and The Emergency in the 1940s, poverty struck all classes of Irish society. It was no longer feasible to employ servants or a hired hand, as in former times. Previously, housework and cooking chores in certain houses were taken care of by maids, which provided leisure time for the woman of the house to indulge in embroidery, quilting or knitting.

Electrification is another factor in the demise of handmade articles, as it brought about new sources of entertainment, such as radio, television and dances, which eventually replaced the crafts, as things to do with spare time.

With people travelling outside Ireland on holidays for the first time, cultural influences began to affect bedding patterns. The ease of bedmaking with a duvet and laundering the duvet cover, enticed many people in favour of the duvet.

There is also the notion of product development. People were unhappy with the hard and thin qualities of the horsehair mattress, therefore it is only natural that someone should try and develop a more comfortable mattress.



With the invention of the duvet or the Scandinavian "Dyne" or "Downlettes", came the demise of sheets and blankets. Miss Aphra Earle remembers sleeping under a duvet for the first time in Austria, in the late 1950's. She recalled two elderly ladies on the tour refused to pay their bill, as their beds were not made properly! The manager then explained to the group about the duvet, and how it was traditional for it to be folded down on a bed for airing purposes. It was almost two decades later when Mrs. Charlotte Watkins, then aged 58, bought a duvet for the first time in 1978. The majority of people, like Mrs. Watkins, did not have the means to travel in the 1950s, therefore they did not use the duvet until it appeared in shops in Ireland in the 1970s. Clearly the duvet took some getting used to; in an article on the "Gen on Holidays Abroad", it stated that:

*In Austria and Germany the bedclothes consist entirely of a floppy and rather unmanageable quilt stuffed with feathers, under which the sleeper lies. As it can't be tucked in, it tends to slip up, down or even off, but you'll get to like it in time, especially if you have a couple of outsize safety pins with which to anchor it either side (Model Housekeeping, 1962, p.317).*

The bedcorde which was in use in Europe since the 17th century, was replaced by iron bed frames in 1826 with springs, which served the same purpose as before (Conran, 1978, p.105). The hair mattress was then placed on top of the springs.

Mrs. Gwen Watkins, (born in 1944), originally from Portarlinton, Co.Laois, remembers her parents buying her a new bed after an operation on her appendix, in 1953. It was a solid base bed, meaning the bed frame did not have springs, but had an



Fig.18 Side view of bed with wooden headboard and end.



iron bar with wooden slats resting on top. A piece of wood lay on top of the slats, which supported the mattress ( fig.18). The bed illustrated in fig.19 had a wooden end and headboard, Nobody had seen the likes of it before. The novel aspect was the shiny wooden headboard, which Mrs.Watkins felt to be extremely glamorous compared to the heavy iron bed she had used previously. There was also the fact that the mattress contained springs for the first time. This was known as an interior sprung mattress. As mentioned earlier, previously it was possible to replace part of a horsehair mattress with springs, but these new mattresses were entirely sprung which provided great comfort.

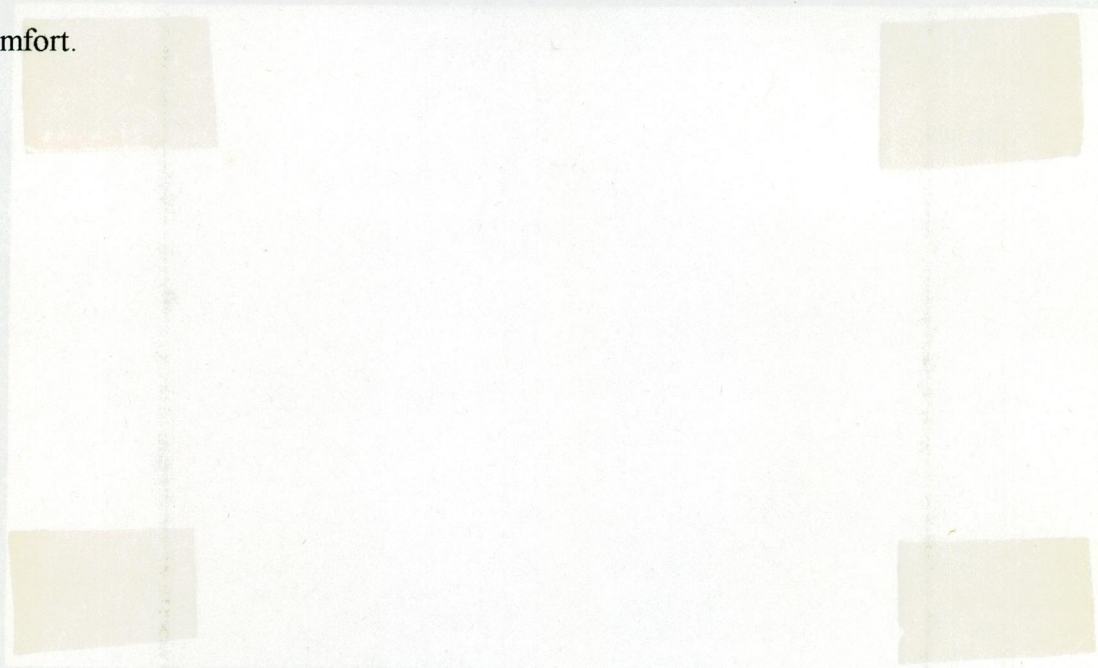






Fig.19 Bed from 1953 with wooden headboard and end.



The factors that changed Irish society during the later part of the 20th century, will be discussed, encompassing the Economic War, the Emergency, the effects of electrification, new housing schemes, new house structures, new family structure, consumerism and the role of the bedroom in the late 20th century.

There was a decline in people making their living off the land during the 1930's. For many preceeding years, children would work on the farm with their parents and make a living in that way. Due to a disagreement between the Irish and British governments over the payment of Land Annuities, a 20% duty was imposed on the import of Irish butter, eggs, poultry, game and live animals, into Britain (Tierney, 1988, p.302-304). This was known as the Economic War and it had a devastating effect on the livelihoods of a great number of Irish families, both big and small.

The Emergency and Post War Years in Ireland (1939-1948), were years of extreme hardship and poverty for most people. De Valera told the Dail on the 22nd of January 1947, that "the position regarding supplies essential to the life of the community is in some respects worse than at any time since 1939, and the possibility is that a period of even greater difficulty may occur" (Tierney, 1988, p.338). Ration books had been issued, making it possible to buy neccesary provisions such as bread, tea and sugar. According to Sylvia Dawson of the I.C.A., Longford;

*You were really living for the end of the War, because the rationing was something else. People don't realise the awful flour we'd to cook with, the fact that our tea was so limited. Really and truly it was an awful time of deprivation and an awful time of emigration. The countryside was being demuded of young people, young men (A Fitting Image Production, 1996).*





As a result of the Economic War with Britain, there was a depression in agriculture - Ireland's most important industry, the almost complete destruction of the cattle industry, a drop in the wages of farm labourers, and most importantly, a large increase in emigration to Britain. This continued on a large scale into the 1950's, and to a lesser extent today. There were many employment opportunities in Britain for uneducated people. Britain needed to be rebuilt after the War and Irish people were willing to work and cheap to employ.

One of the most important developments of the twentieth century, both in economic and social terms, has been the development of electricity. Dr. Tom McLaughlin, the founder of the Shannon scheme, predicted that electricity was a very cheap power, and that it would be cheaper to deliver electricity to towns and villages than for them (the villagers) to make electricity by any other means (A Fitting Image Production, 1996).

The Electricity Supply Board (E.S.B.) was set up in 1927 but few people felt the benefits of electricity until the 1940's. Due to Ireland's neutrality during the war years, the country had to pay dearly in terms of economic development. It was not until after the war a proper rural electrification plan was developed.

People were afraid of electricity and its advantages had to be canvassed to the local people by representatives from the E.S.B. and the local priest. If one household in a village did not want electricity, it could destroy the chances for the other villagers in getting electricity. This was the point when the parish priest played an active role in persuading individuals to change their mind.

Mr. John Cobbe (born in 1913, Geashill, Co. Offaly), remembers an incident regarding his neighbours, two brothers who lived together in Lough, Co. Laois. One brother had electricity installed without telling his brother, Mr. Bill Carter. Mr. Carter was terrified that with electricity, the house was liable to explode any minute, so he had the electricity removed from his house. Electricity was re-installed in the house in the 1980's.

A social revolution began with rural electrification. In a debate in the Dail on Rural Electrification, James Larkin Jr. T.D. said that "it appalls me to think in this country there are two million people whose intellectual development has been stifled by the want of a decent light to read. If we can get them that light, we will have brought a great change in rural living" (A Fitting Image Production, 1996).

With electricity came entertainment, such as the showbands, who played in town halls all over the country, bringing live music to young people as never before. Television became hugely popular. According to Jim Nolan, Storyteller, Kilkenny;

*ah, what a change from the time of the horse and cart,  
and you sittin' on the end of a slat/ everyone you meet  
on the road, there was always time for a chat./ But now  
if you went ramblin' to a neighbours house,  
disappointed that's what you'd be/ you'd know very well  
you weren't wanted at all, they'd rather be watchin' TV/  
Shhhhhh, That's the sort of welcome you'd get, the  
minute you'd step through the door/ and they wouldn't  
so much as turn their head, if you fell in a faint on the  
floor (A Fitting Image Production, 1996).*



It became possible to have industry in rural areas and reduced the competitive disadvantages of the more remote areas. A factory in Dingle or Gortahork could have its supply of power on the same terms as competitors in Dublin or Cork (Cullen, 1986, p.110).

In the cities, labourers got work with better pay, for large housing developments were underway with local housing schemes. Under Lemass (1959-1966) people were relocated from tenement buildings in the inner city of Dublin, to the new housing developments in Crumlin, Ballymun and Ballyfermot.

As more and more industry was developed in urban areas, due to an influx of foreign investment; particularly in Dublin, people moved towards the East in search of a better standard of living and higher wages. New housing developments began in areas previously thought as being in the countryside and too far from Dublin, such as Leixlip, Lucan and Tallaght in the 1970's. These new estate houses were either detached, semi-detached or terraced depending on the income level at which they were addressed. They were given romantic sounding names eg. Beechwood Grove, Cherry Tree Road, suggesting a link to grandeur, or living in the country, all of which is a far cry from suburbia.

Extensions were built onto houses to fit in new consumer products like large freezers or washing machines. Conservatories became popular as an added space in the home to relax. Bunk beds were popular as a space saving device. "Bunk Beds are a first-class investment, too. The newest are not too high for comfortable bed-making on

the upper deck. Safety rails are removable and there is a ladder" (Newnes, 1967, p.13).

From the 1970's onwards, a new family structure emerged. The household was no longer involved in production and the ideal of self-sufficiency. The emphasis shifted to the notion of the earner or the bread winner, who would leave the house every morning to work in the urban areas and return home to suburbia. There began to be an obvious decline in the birth rate, which was due to numerous factors.

When Ireland joined the E.E.C. in 1973, and with decimalisation in the same decade, the price of everyday items increased dramatically due to high interest rates.

People realised that their children would have a better chance in getting a job if they went to college or university. This brought about added financial pressure on parents which did not exist previously. Parents wanted to provide for their children.

Therefore, if they could support two or three children through to their college years, it was seen to be preferable, rather than not being able to financially provide for six children, who might not receive adequate education and end up being supported by the State.

The power of the Catholic Church over the Irish people began to dwindle during these decades, but laws on contraceptives were still in force. If one had a sympathetic doctor, it was possible to be prescribed contraceptives, but it was generally frowned upon, and by law one had to be married to avail of contraception. It was not until



February of 1985, that the Dail passed a Bill legalising shop sales of contraceptives (Legrand, 1988, p.854).

The impact of consumerism is evident with the huge influence of advertising through television, film and magazines. Parents began to feel pressured into buying the most up to the minute toys and clothes for their children. Christmas and birthdays became difficult times for many people.

In this new domestic structure with different house types and family structures, we note that the function of the bedroom in the late 20th century within the household has changed more than the role of the bed.

Apart from providing the body with a comfortable place to sleep, the bedroom offers a place of sensuous delights. Ms.B.Molnar writes "So if you have a bedroom that smells good, looks good, sounds good and feels good, and a good man to enjoy it with, "good taste" can surely go and sit in a book on the coffee table" (Conran, 1978, p.144).

With a changed society and five day week jobs, the weekend wind-down begins with a lie-in in bed. This is how breakfast in bed became popular. Swing over tables were devised to make eating easier in the bed, especially if there was an invalid in the house.

The bedroom has become electronically reliant. Many people have a second television set in their bedroom which they watch in bed. In addition to this, videos, computer games and stereos are also popular in the bedroom. Beds with remote controls are available on the market, making it possible to raise or lower certain regions of the bed with a flick of a button.

The bedroom is a place of refuge for teenagers. It is the one room in the family house in which they can have a say in the decoration of the walls, an extension of their personality. This generally involves posters of their favourite singer, group or film star.



The variety of bed types that are available today reflects one's lifestyle options. They can express a mood or a theme that is carried throughout an interior, such as romance, an old-fashioned feeling, modernity, or an ethnic mood.

It has become popular recently to buy brass and iron beds, where for years these same beds lay in old haysheds or ditches. This style of bed conjures up images of romantic old Ireland.

*"Returned to its former glory, a good brass and iron bed is not only an elegant and practical piece of furniture, it is also a sound investment. And while there are many fine reproductions to be had, they do not have the same intrinsic value as an original" (Massey, 1996, p.6).*

With more people travelling overseas and absorbing other cultures new influences on bedding can be seen - the earliest of which perhaps was the duvet. The futon originating from Japan, consists of "a mattress (shiki-buton) and one or more top quilts (kake-buton). The average mattress is a large rectangular cotton or silk case stuffed with cotton wadding" (Koizumi, 1986, p.103). The mattress is rested on wooden slats which can be folded into a low sofa. Because of this dual function, the futon is ideal for people living in apartments or small spaces.

Italian interior magazines are now featuring bed designs which are influenced by the futon. These new designs are low to the ground creating an illusion of space in the bedroom and are complemented by sparse decoration and limited use of colour in the





interior. Within the year these bed designs will be reproduced cheaply for the high street market.

The futon helped to realise the design of the sofa bed. These beds have a dual purpose, not unlike the futon. They are designed to look and function like a sofa, and are generally used in the living room area of the house as opposed to the bedroom. When a spare bed is required, the sofa can extend out, functioning as a double bed.

People are becoming increasingly aware of their health and the well being of their bodies. This awareness is evident in the choice of bed that people are buying. Orthopaedic beds and mattresses are recommended generally by the medical profession for the good support of the back. Although these beds and mattresses tend to be more expensive, they have become so popular that they have become the norm. These beds are not the first to have helped one's health. The water bed may seem a recent invention, but it has been in use since the 19th century in hospitals, to ease the pain of patients suffering from bed sores and bone fractures (Conran, 1978, p.105).

The bed that conjures up the most images of romance, opulence and wealth is the four poster bed. Its history dates back to the 16th century, when most four poster beds were made by Dutch craftsmen. These beds were extremely elaborate and an inventory of Louis XIV's belongings details 25 different kinds of state four poster beds. By the 18th century, the well to do in Europe and America would have had four poster beds (Conran, 1978, p.104). Nowadays, it is not unusual for someone to have a four poster bed in a small house.





Fig.20 Bed with wooden headboard extending into cupboards either end.



Most bed styles incorporate headboards in some format, as in fig.20, the headboard extends into cupboards and shelves either side of the bed. Wood is extremely popular, for it suggests a natural and environmentally friendly choice, with the hard wearing of the material being one of its greatest assets. Imitation hardwoods, such as reproduction mahogany, are also common. Hardwoods had a reputation as being the best that money could buy, but as a result of their popularity, many forests have been depleted.

Despite what trends may come and go, essentially the bed remains a rectangular, covered shape. What materials are used, how they are designed, and the cost, determine the final look of the bed.





Fig.21 A blanket in mixed fibres from the 1960's.



This section looks at the emergence of alternative bed covers that were developed in the second half of the 20th Century. The most significant changes in bed textiles in the later half of this century has been the introduction of man-made fibres, which give less heat than natural fibres and mass produced textiles, such as duvet covers.

The greatest threat to wool this century has been the discovery and manipulation of synthetic fibres which were cheap and plentiful. For the first time many houses had central heating, the fact that man-made fibres gave less heat than natural fibres became irrelevant. Fleece became a by-product of meat production, therefore it remained readily available, but prices dropped. Weaving mills closed down, such as Hills Mills in Lucan, Co. Dublin, in the 1970's.

According to Woman's Own "the warmest, lightest and most luxurious blanket can still be made of pure wool. But it can also be made of Acrilan, Courtelle or brands of a man-made acrylic fibre which has the warmth and soft "handle" of wool with a slightly lower density" (Newnes, Pub., 1967, p.116). Blankets of mixed fibres were moth proof, easier to care for, they could be put into the washing machine without worrying about shrinkage, and they dried faster. In fig.21, there is an example of such a blanket with a printed floral pattern and a typical satin border for decorative purposes.

The other significant change during the second half of this century, as mentioned previously, was the mass production of duvet covers, which occurred due to the popularity of the duvet. There are different weights of duvet available which is

determined by a tog number; the higher the number, the warmer the duvet. Fillings fall into two categories, natural and synthetic. Man-made fillings are cheap, non-allergenic and easily washed. Duvet covers are fastened by ties, buttons and snap fasteners.

There is a huge variety of duvet covers on the market, many of which are designed within a range containing other items, such as curtains and wallpapers. Popular culture is a big influence on the range of designs which are produced for the bedroom. It is possible to buy duvet covers advertising Disney films, soccer teams or cartoons. These particular designs are aimed at children and companies market a range of other objects that can be bought such as curtains, wallpaper, clocks, lights, towels and clothing to complete the package.

In society today, the impact of industry and technology on our lives is evident with the mass production of everyday objects. In earlier times objects, such as textiles, were home produced. People have become aware of the value of handcrafted objects, and specialist shops sell and market Irish handcrafted artifacts to the home and export market. Many people with Irish ancestors have a great interest in Ireland and its culture and show this interest by buying Irish crafts. Qualities that suggest Irishness in a design would firstly be wool and then other qualities are warmth, colour and texture, often reflecting the landscape of the country. A quality label is given to garments and textiles, proving that they are constructed of 100% Pure Irish Wool. The monetary value of the garment or textile increases if this label is attached to it.



During the first half of the century, life was extremely hard for most of the population. Most people worked from early in the morning until late at night trying to feed their families. Creating textiles was a way of life and was an important part of the culture of Irish women. It was an opportunity for them to meet and work together and was the only form of self-expression and creativity

In the 1950's, many people moved from rural areas to cities and over a period of time skills, which were previously passed from mother to daughter, were lost. When women began to work outside the home, textile making was perceived as a submissive pastime and was therefore undervalued and became unfashionable.

Today there is the choice between upper and lower market bedding. People buying an upper market product may believe that they are purchasing a special piece of bedding, but the fact remains that all bedding, despite the price or designer name, is factory made and mass produced.

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## APPENDIX I

22nd Feb 1950  
J. J. MAHON,

W. J. J. J.

Mahanagh,

Drumshanbo, GLEITRIM

F135:50

6 - 10 - 1950

Dear Mr Lucas,

I got your letter and was pleased to learn your trip to Leitrim was successful. A man named James Musgrave of Dernascoo, Derry na gion Po. Coloscommon when cutting turf came on a wooden contraption in which was inserted a bunch of fine spikes. I did not see this find but from the description given me by a man who saw it - I am of opinion it was used in dressing flax - either hackling or scutching - were you notified? It is something you should try to acquire for your section. I am not certain which Po serves his townland but it is across the Shannon a few miles from where I reside. I had a look around my own place and I came across a discarded wooden vessel - bowl shaped - which was formerly used for processing butter with scotch hands or butter spades. It is in one piece but there are cracks which would need to be mended. It is about 14 inches in diameter at the top and has a depth of about 4 inches. If you have no article of the same kind you are welcome to it. I also came across part of an old horse fetters - the gadget that goes round the horse's fetlock and about 14 links of chain.



J. J. MAHON,

Mahanagh,  
Drumshanbo,

II

19

Would you be interested in a specimen of the type of blankets woven in the farm houses in this locality about 70 years ago? It was the custom then for the farmer's wife to give a trunk containing blankets, sheets, etc to each of her daughters on her marriage. She would spin the wool and flax and the weaver came to the farmer's house and did his work there. The specimen I have was made for a farmer's wife as stated above - There are four generations of her descendants living at the present time. It was in use during all those years - The part I could give is about a yard square in fairly good condition, it shows on one end tassels or sprigging, peculiar to the time. Did you come across a stone trough used for pig feeding in the old times in any of your travels? They were very symmetrical in appearance and those hollowed out stones showed good craftsmanship. There was a hole in the stone at one end to facilitate cleaning -

Very truly yours,  
J. Mahon

## APPENDIX II



F135:50

Mahanagh  
Drumshanbo  
Co Leitrim

22-11-50

Dear Mr Lucas.

I enclose herewith sample of a sheet woven in a Co Leitrim farmhouse many years ago. I got it from Peter Giblin, Ardcolumn, Drumshanbo, Co Leitrim. He told me it formed part of a box of blankets and sheets given by his grandmother to his mother on the occasion of his mother's marriage over 70 years ago. It has he informed me been in constant use during all that time - first as sheets - later as towels etc. I am sorry I could not procure the whole sheet - but I was told this was the last piece.

Sincerely yours  
J J Mahon.

## APPENDIX III



xxxx 65521

13 September, 1956.

Mrs. Delia Arkins,  
Knockroe,  
Kilfenora,  
Co. Clare.

Dear Madam,

Many thanks for the linen tablecloth which we received for inspection yesterday. It is a very nice specimen in excellent condition. It is, however, made of two lengths of diaper-weave linen, 27 inches wide, sewn together. Linen of this kind was a standard production on handlooms and was made commonly in the country by the hundred thousand yards in the last century. Since the cloth consists merely of two strips of this sewn together and hemmed and has no other decoration or feature of any kind it cannot be considered anything exceptional. The same sort of weave, you will remember, appeared in the linen towel which we bought from you some years ago. In these circumstances you will realise that we could not possibly pay £30 for it. The very utmost we could offer would be £15 and even at that we feel we are erring on the generous side.

Perhaps you will let me know if you would be prepared to accept this and if not I shall, on hearing from you, post the tablecloth back to you immediately.

With many thanks for offering the cloth to us.

Yours faithfully,

*A. T. Quinn*

Director.

## APPENDIX IV



Linen Sheet

Reg.No.F1955:30

Td : Knockroe  
Par : Kiltoraght  
Bar : Corcomroe  
Co : CLARE  
O.S.: 16

Linen Sheet, Handspun and handwoven. It is in excellent condition and measures 185 cm. in length by 140 cm. in width. It consists of two strips of 70 cm. wide sewn together. There is a hem about 5 mm. wide on the two shorter sides and a selvedge on each of the long sides. The linen is woven in a small diaper pattern about 3 mm. wide. The vendor states that, as far as she knows, it was given to her great grandmother as a wedding present. Her great grandmother, if now alive, would be 100 years old. Purchased from Mrs. Delia Arkins, Knockroe, Kilfenora, Co. Clare.

S2:11