National College of Art and Design
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Irish Mills Today: Production, Fabric, Fashion and Retail

By

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Introduction

This thesis is a critical account of the position of Irish fabric production and retail in today's world market. It is proposed to investigate the Irish fabric market and discuss the qualities Irish fabrics possess that make them sell.

The fashion fabric world market is very extensive and competitive. One of the aims of this thesis is to try to determine what influences a buyer to purchase an Irish fabric as opposed to the fabric of any other nationality. A popular theory is that Irish fashion fabrics sell because of the romantic notion of rural Ireland. It is planned to research this theory and if possible to draw conclusions.

In order to research this hypothesis an investigation of mills currently in production in Ireland will be undertaken to determine what is currently being produced and for which markets. With an understanding of the current situation it is hoped that this knowledge will inform the rest of the thesis.

A brief review will also be undertaken of the history of woven fabrics in Ireland. The review focuses on the development of woven woollen fabrics that have been manufactured in the Republic of Ireland. Further research will be undertaken into the aesthetic qualities of Irish fabrics and the influence of Irish fabric and Irish culture on fashion. It is proposed to find out who uses them and where, which Irish and foreign fashion designers use Irish fabrics and if there is a reason.

Finally it is important to appreciate the retail aspect of Irish fabric and fashion design. It is one thing producing designs but these have to be attractive and competitively priced to attract buyers. Ultimately the purpose of this thesis is to determine exactly what the Irish fabric market has to offer.

One of the things about Irish fabrics and tweeds in particular is their identification with rural Ireland. "He hauled his tweed coat more firmly over his head to protect himself from the horizontal rain". (Hoad, 1987, p1)

There are rustic impressions associated with Irish fabrics. Rural Ireland has remained unaffected by a great deal of activity in the rest of Ireland for many hundreds of years. Geographically inaccessible, positioned beyond bog and mountain and not on the road to anywhere else.

This association with rural Ireland has sparked my interest and I intend to pursue it until I discover the truth about Irish woven fabrics; the notion of rural Ireland that sells millions of lengths of Irish woven wool to countries worldwide every year. In most fashion capitals fashion and fabrics have been influenced by urban society however Ireland seems to be the only country that derives its inspiration from unspoilt landscape. It seems that Ireland has portrayed a rustic, homespun, country lifestyle to fashion markets worldwide and this idea has influenced designers across the world.

Chapter One

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Production

The current situation in Ireland

The Irish Textile Industry consists of many firms operating throughout the entire country. I chose to concentrate upon those operating in the Republic of Ireland where historically and most predominately woollen and worsted fabrics have been and still are in production.

Many Irish mills have continued production in the most remote areas of Ireland where Irish is the predominant language of the community. Údarás na Gaeltachta was established by the Irish Government to promote the economic, social and cultural development of the underdeveloped areas of Ireland and helps Irish weaving firms to creating employment. This is why so many mills are situated in the remote rural areas, in addition there are many labourers in need of employment.

Nowadays, many people are required to ensure the production of fabrics and the smooth running of a mill. Initially, the designer creates something unique in his head, which is marketed. When a sale is agreed the designer makes a promise to a buyer to deliver the cloth on time, to a quality and for a price.

It is now the designers' responsibility to order sufficient batches of yarn and ensure that these arrive on schedule. There are a very limited number of suppliers of quality yarn in Ireland. The main provider is Herdsmans of Northern Ireland who cannot supply all the mills in Ireland. They produce only linen and are renowned as being

the best linen suppliers in the world, yet they are also known to charge unrealistically high prices. There are no linen spinners in the UK and because of Sterling's current strong rate against the Irish Punt, wool is too expensive to be imported from Britain. Yarns must then be ordered from countries such as Italy, Belgium, France and Russia where the exchange rate is more advantageous. There are often complications and yarns are not delivered on time. Fabric producers cannot put up the price of cloth, so long delivery dates have to be compensated for. (Botany Weaving Co Ltd, 10/12/97).

While on work experience in M^{c}Nutt's of Downings, Co Donegal in the summer of 1997 I saw the process at first hand. Once the yarns arrive the stock room sorters take over and allocate a pattern and yarns to the warper. Following the pattern, the warper then puts his cones on his bank and warps up his beam with the required amount of threads and to the correct length. This is all done in keeping with the directions from the designer.

This warped beam is then delivered to the weaver. Now the weaver is under pressure to reach the deadline. The speed at which progress is made is heavily dependent on the quality of the yarn. If the yarn is poor then the loom has to be slowed down.

When the weaver has finished, the beam is sent to the darners where mistakes are corrected. Once this is complete the beam is normally taken many miles away to be finished, washed and steamed before returning to the mill, where it waits in line for a final inspection.

Quality control staff then takes over and checks the fabric for flaws. The piece is checked to see if it has been woven to the correct pattern and that it has the stipulated

packaged and labelled for the long journey to its buyer. There are many processes involved in the production of fabric in mills and it is up to the designer to ensure a satisfied customer who wants to return and do further business. In today's business environment the buyer's priorities are of the highest importance.

In order to keep his customer happy the designer will have to provide the best quality product at the appropriate price and complete and deliver the product on time. He must also provide a comprehensive after sales service.

Case studies of Irish Mills

Twelve firms were identified as being the major companies involved in the Irish apparel trade. It is considered that the responses from these twelve are a good representation of prevailing attitudes within the Irish fabric industry. A majority of the firms were referenced in the most recent Irish Trade Board's "Directory of Irish Textiles" published in December 1994.

All twelve firms were invited to complete a questionnaire. Two returned a completed response by facsimile without discussion. These questionnaires were filled out by Robert Eadie of 'Robert Eadie and Co' in Kerry and by Philip Cushen of 'Cushendale Mills' in Kilkenny.

A further five were interviewed based on the guidelines contained within the questionnaire and full notes were taken during these discussions. Interviews were undertaken with John M^{c}Nutt of 'M^{c}Nutt's' in Donegal, with Dominic Dunphy of 'Emblem Weavers' in Wexford, with David Lawson of 'Botany Weaving Co Ltd' in Dublin, with Timmy Costigan of 'PC Weavers' in Dublin, and with Bernie Condon of the 'Porterhouse Ltd' in Drogheda.

It is hoped that seven responses from the sample of twelve represent an acceptable proportion in relation to this survey. The following descriptions are based on visits to the mills and interviews.

M^{c}Nutt's, Downings, Co Donegal

John McNutt is the chief designer of fashion fabrics at M^{c}Nutt's in Downings, Co Donegal. His brother Scott M^{c}Nutt from the same mill produces handwoven interior fabrics. Aisling O'Connor is the assistant designer for John M^{c}Nutt. This firm designs and produces woven cloths in linen and wool aimed at the middle to upper end of the fashion market. The majority of cloth is produced for the export market mainly because of good bulk orders. However, they have a few Irish designers buying fabric mainly in wool, for example, Edel MacBride, John Rocha, Paul Costelloe and Pat M^{c}Carthy. M^{c}Nutt's distribute worldwide to Japan and USA through direct sales and they sell to mainland Europe through agents. The company of thirty-five workers has been in production since 1991 and in recent years old looms have been replaced and a twisting machine has been installed.

New designs are produced twice a year. The first is the linen collection for Spring/Summer brought to Premiere Vision in March and the second is the wool collection for Autumn/Winter brought to Premiere Vision in October. John M^{c}Nutt carefully markets his products by exhibiting at Premiere Vision International Trade Fair twice a year, through designers visiting the mill and through their agents selling in Japan, Italy, France and Germany. John M^{c}Nutt also sells his collections to Japan and the USA through personal visits to agents and buyers.

John M^{c}Nutt has tried using synthetic fibres such as microfibres however without the right machinery it is hard to produce and they are expensive to buy. The company is continually improving it's products and expanding machinery and workforce and in the past year turnover has increased two and a half times.

Emblem Weavers, Whitemill Industrial Estate, Wexford

Emblem Weavers is situated in Co Wexford. Jim Conway is the Chairman of the company and Dominic Dunphy is the designer. They produce 75% linen and in the past few years have introduced a pure new wool winter collection for apparel fabrics. 95% of fabrics are exported and are aimed at the middle to upper end of the market.

There is a workforce of thirty eight men. Normally linen is delivered only between September and January but Emblem deliver linen all year round. Two collections are produced for Premiere Vision, linen in Spring/Summer and wool in Autumn/Winter. He has seven agents around the world. Germany requires two agents, one for the North and one for the South. Fabric is sold to Japan through trading houses and agencies.

At one stage Emblem Weavers was one of the only companies selling their colour wovens in Japan. Fifty years ago there were no linen checks anywhere, only plain style linen so for Emblem this was a huge business in Japan until the end of the 1980s.

Emblem has experimented with weaving linen blended with tencel. Dominic Dunphy describes tencel as being "basically tree bark, timber waste and cellulose fibre". He says that "tencel is just viscose and is being hyped by a brand name" and believes that people prefer linen as linen tencel is too expensive. He plans to return to using pure linen for his next Spring/Summer collection after three years of mixing with tencel. He also says that "Americans love linen and the rest of Europe couldn't care less" (Interview, 15/11/97).

Dominic Dunphy describes Emblem's livelihood as being linen and fears that the Irish linen trade is getting smaller and smaller everyday. Their linen sells at between £8.50 and £10.00 per metre and according to Dominic "Americans would laugh at that price. The most Americans would pay for linen is £7.50 per metre" (Interview, 15/11/97). Unfortunately Ireland cannot produce linen at this price, as overheads are too high.

Porterhouse Ltd, Flax Mill Lane, Drogheda

Bernie Condon and Susan Maxwell design the fabrics for the "Porterhouse Ltd" in Drogheda. They produce fabrics for accessories and outerwear apparel and for interiors, also upholstery fabric predominantly for airlines. Not only is the fabric produced but also garments and interior items are made up within the one factory.

The Porterhouse bought the designer Jim Orr in 1990 who designs the upholstery fabric. The company was set up in 1982 and there are approximately seventy people working there. They have six agents in the UK, three in France, one in Ireland, one in Japan and a company office in New York. They export 85% of their goods and the product is aimed at a middle price range.

They sell a product rather than the fabric. The product sells under the name of "Weave of the Irish" and is sold in Dublin shops such as Kilkenny Design, Dublin Woollen Mills and the Sweater Shop. The fabric sells at between £8.00 and £12.00 per yard. They sell to a very varied market through showcase, agents, and their New York office and through working specifically with important customers to develop their look.

Once a year they produce new designs for their core range, which is their stock, supported range of about forty to forty five fabrics. Their private label designs progress all year round. Their stock yarns are wool bouclé and acrylic chenille and their private label yarns are rayon chenille and fine bouclés. Bernie believes that "Irish mills have a very good reputation for imaginative use of colour and design" (Interview, 15/12/97).

Botany Weaving Co Ltd, Vauxhall Avenue, Dublin

David Lawson is the designer from Botany Weaving Co Ltd. He works alongside design consultants in London. The company sells into three main market areas, uniform fabrics representing 15% of sales, contract furnishing fabrics representing 45% of sales and aircraft upholstery fabrics representing 40% of sales. They provide British Airways with all their woven fabric needs for female staff uniform. They sell to all the leading wholesalers in the USA and supply some twenty airlines worldwide.

The company was set up in 1934 and started producing heavy overcoats for ladies however there was a decline in the need for heavy overcoats and they went on to design uniform fabrics, then contract furnishings for America and eventually aircraft upholstery. As the market changed and what they used to produce wasn't going to sell anymore they had to change. They buy Ecru yarn, which is dyed in Britain, and fabric is sent to the finisher in Kilcar.

The staffing levels are sixty-five men. They have agents in certain markets where necessary but they prefer selling direct. They produce 5% of their fabric for the home market, which is used by designers such as Paul Costelloe. They produce fabric for

the uniforms of the Bank of Ireland, Allied Irish Bank, Northern Bank, General Post Office and the Garda. Their fabric sells at between £9.00 to £14.00 per metre. David says he intends to explore twisting types of yarn. He plans to experiment with lycra in furnishing and is trying to create machine wash/tumble dry fabrics as dry cleaning is bad for the environment and is expensive for the consumer. He produces new designs everyday, they are constantly changing.

P.C. Weavers, Fumbally Lane, Dublin

Timmy Costigan of P.C. Weavers has a small operation in Dublin consisting of three workers. He is a commission weaver and weaves mainly wool, silk, linen, cotton and alpaca. His scarves are sold from the factory or can be bought in several craft shops around Ireland including Dublin Woollen Mills and Kilkenny Design. They retail from around £12.00 to £30.00 for a scarf. Being a small firm he has only three looms and one warper. He says "it is a family tradition, my father gave this to me and now I have given it to my daughter and her husband" (Interview, 26/11/97).

He says you can make a living out of being a weaver but you will never be rich, yet he would do it for nothing, as he loves it so much. He uses no computers or technology and designs and prices are all done in his head in the traditional way.

Commissions must be at least 800 yards and depending upon the number of ends per inch it will cost between £5.00 to £8.00 per yard to be woven up plus the cost of yarns. He has a new range of scarves out and this year he plans to start promoting them more actively. When weaving his scarves he uses one warp and changes the weft yarns which gives him lots of different variations.

Cushendale Woollen Mills Ltd, Graig-na-Managh, Co Kilkenny

Philip Cushen is the designer for Cushendale Woollen Mills in Kilkenny, which has been a family, run business for over one hundred years. There are eight people employed in the business. The company produces wool and wool/mohair blankets, throws, scarves and caps and also some fabric for Irish trade.

All of his fabric is produced for the home market and he sells in department stores, speciality shops and Irish shops. He sells through showcase, agents and directly to Irish customers. His fabric would sell at between £8.00 to £13.00 per metre and he is the only designer interviewed who says that the Irish market offers low prices compared to other countries.

He is currently experimenting with cotton chenilles and rayon chenilles. He produces new designs at the very least once a year if not twice. His designs change as things evolve his colours change constantly and the production of new raw materials is constantly improving.

Robert Eadie and Co, Co Kerry

Robert Eadie is the designer of Robert Eadie and Co in Kerry. The company has been in production for over three hundred years and produces mainly woollen goods. In recent years there have been continuous changes in production, design and customers. The fabrics are designed by freelance designers and by themselves. There are over twenty staff working for the company.

They sell to their customers directly and through trade fairs. Robert Eadie says he markets his products through "many methods using research, targeting and planning".

He produces 60% of his fabric for the home market and 40% of his fabric for the export market. He produces new designs annually at least. He believes that price, colour, quality and design combine together to create a good product.

Looking at the firms as a whole

Through an analysis of the firms we can see some common threads running through each of the replies. Most notably six of the seven designers surveyed are men, although it is possible in the future this will change.

They all produce wool and some produce linen. They have all been in production for at least decades if not hundreds of years. Recent changes in the companies include modernised looms and machinery, new customers and expanding markets. Most have in-house designers, although some employ freelance designers. The staffing levels range from three to seventy.

All but a few have agents who work world-wide for them promoting and selling their cloth in many foreign countries most popularly the United States, Japan and Europe. However, it seems common that a majority like to sell their own designs personally through trade shows and customer visits.

Research, targeting and planning are very important factors in marketing products however David Lawson of Botany Mills relies on a "sound reputation, being user friendly and having good quality of product" (Interview 10/12/97). All agree that they target customers and they are always looking for new customers - but not aggressively. Government funding or FÁS training grants have at one point or another benefited the workings of all the mills, however this grant aid is not necessarily ongoing.

There was no agreement amongst the interviewees as to whether Ireland has a high profile in the market it is serving. Aisling O'Connor, assistant designer at M^{c}Nutts answered that "Yes, in design, quality, colour, texture and in doing specials, yet financially no, because of the costs of fabrics and deliveries" (Interview 15/7/97).

There was also a mixed reply to the question of "What percentage of fabric do you produce for the home market and the export market?" It was a surprising fact that some companies such as Cushendale Woollen Mills and P.C. Weavers supplied only to the Irish market, and others such as M^{c}Nutt's and Botany Weaving Co Ltd supplied only 5% to the home market. Irish fashion designers mentioned as buying fabric from these Irish mills include Paul Costelloe, John Rocha, Edel M^{c}Bride and Pat M^{c}Carthy.

There was an overall agreement that one cannot produce cheap fabric in Ireland and that Irish fabrics are expensive selling at from £8 per metre to £14 per metre. In compensation though, good quality seems to be the answer to "What does the Irish market have to offer?" David Lawson of Botany Mills replied that "the Irish market has nothing to offer in addition to any other country apart from the personalities of Irish people" (Interview 10/12/97).

One hundred metres seem to be the minimum length that a designer will weave up for a buyer and there is certainly no maximum. New fabrics, yarns and finishes referred to in the questionnaires include lycra and tencel mixes of yarns, twisting different yarns together, cotton chenille and rayon chenille, and making sure that fabrics are able to be machine washed and tumble dried as dry cleaning is bad for the environment. Also it is off-putting for consumers as dry cleaning is expensive and people prefer to have clothes they can wash and dry easily at home.

All of the mills are experimenting at present with new yarns and finishes to create something really different. Ireland uses wool and linen for many reasons, the most significant being tradition. Wool is home produced and there are many colour possibilities with natural fibres. Also silks and cottons require different manufacturing processes which can be produced much cheaper elsewhere. Eric Eadie predicts that for economic reasons "soon Ireland will have little or no textile industry" (Questionnaire 11/12/97).

Although Ireland uses mainly wool and linen it does also use synthetics such as polyester, nylon, polypropylene and acrylic. It is suggested that a small percentage of buyers choose wool and linen above manmade fabrics, which have now the same qualities. This is probably because of the good colour range of cloth, the drape, texture, handle and warmth of natural fibres.

Each mill produces new designs annually at least; others produce their woollen designs for their Autumn/Winter Premiere Vision Collections in October and then again their linen designs in March for their Spring/Summer Premiere Vision Collections. David Lawson from Botany Mills says that he produces new designs "constantly" and "every day". "Fashions change and there is a desire not to stay the same, there is a desire for individuality - to have what nobody else has" (Interview 10/12/97).

There are many elements which come together to create a good design: colour, colour proportion, finish, price, quality of design, visual interest, texture, weave construction and use of yarns. There is no real limit to the number of colours used in design for mass production however Philip Cushen of Cushendale Mills advises "that good

design gets maximum variation from a minimum range of colours" (Questionnaire 13/12/97).

In fabric designs, buyers will look for something new, a unique product that might fill in the gaps in the collection, but it has to be good quality at the right price. In an international market, tweed fabrics no longer seem to be recognised as Irish. Donegals are types of tweeds, which are not necessarily woven in Donegal. In addition to Ireland, the Scottish and Italians manufacture tweeds as well. There were very few comments to the question about Irish fabrics traditionally expressing a romantic rural notion. Philip Cushen agreed saying that "Irish design and fibre quality do portray a rural or ethnic country look" (Questionnaire 13/12/97).

Finally, the designers of Irish mills have suggested that fabrics of the future will include textured fabrics, fancy yarns, and microfibre fabrics with peach skin touch and intelligent fabrics that respond to body temperature and movement.

The consensus is that Irish fabrics are expensive. Dominic Dunphy of Emblem Weavers explained that he is currently producing 65,000 metres of plain white linen to be delivered to the USA. He would normally sell linen at between £8.50 and £12.00 per metre however Americans will not pay that price. The most Americans will pay is £7.50 per metre. This is because there is a lot of competition for the Irish industry. Americans can buy the same white linen from China at £3.50 per yard. So why buy Irish linen?

Unlike Ireland, China has the very best of modern machinery but poor quality control. China is a communist society, wages are low and workers aren't motivated to produce high quality goods. Many buyers don't think of quality, they only think of price and although £3.50 per metre instead of £7.50 per metre of white linen is a huge saving when ordering in bulk, when the linen arrives it will not be of good quality. There may be many mistakes and flaws and much of the cloth may be useless to a fashion designer cutting out garment patterns so a lot of fabric may be lost.

Last year Emblem Weavers actually received "after orders", when fashion designers received their fabrics which had been ordered from the third world countries. The fabrics were of such poor quality the fashion designers were desperate, so they turned to Emblem Weavers for help.

At the same time Americans and Japanese love to put labels on things so they might choose to pay extra for Irish linen if the fabric is to be made into garments for the "Brown Thomas" style of department stores within Japan or America. Unfortunately Dominic also believes that "when the Chinese get it right they will take over the linen industry" (Interview, 15/11/97)

One of the major problems identified in the textile industry is piracy of other companies' fabric designs. Every designer has mentioned stories of how their designs have been reproduced. This is one of the pitfalls of working in this industry. Designers from foreign countries find a design that they like, acquire a sample of this fabric and often reproduce it claiming it to be their own.

I saw an example of this at Porterhouse Ltd where a company in Germany cheaply reproduced a scarf from their collection and the quality of colour and yarns was very poor. There was an extremely obvious difference in quality and Bernie Condon explained that "it's sometimes flattering to have your designs imitated especially when they aren't as nice" (Interview 15/12/97).

When something like this happens an enraged designer may want to bring a company to court for forgery, however there would be no case. Premiere Vision offers a service whereby if you see your designs copied they will supply lawyers, but one would never dream of using this facility. Dominic Dunphy advises to "never deal with the law – the case will drag out for years and you'll always lose" (Interview, 15/11/97). By the time the court case is settled, the design will have gone out of fashion anyway. The only comforting matter in this scenario is that everyone does it and to bring someone to court would be like "the pot calling the kettle black" (Bernie Condon, Interview 15/12/97)

Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Chapter Two

Fabric

A history of and the aesthetic qualities of Irish woven woollen fabrics

Rural Ireland developed in relative isolation from the rest of the world. It is to rural Ireland that we look for one main strand in the lineage of Irish weaving. In Ireland craftsmanship has been recognised and valued worldwide since ancient times. Throughout the centuries woollen cloth has been woven in Ireland and successfully exported. (Dunlevy, 1989, p90).

Weaving in Ireland grew out of a peasant craft. It began as a handspun technique for everyday use and the people of Ireland were given no choice but to weave their own wool for clothing, warmth and protection. Men out in the fields collecting turf for the fire would have worn heavy hand spun and woven trousers, jackets and caps for protection against the rough and windy Irish climate.

The women of the house did the carding, spinning and dyeing using a mixture of local vegetation to produce the actual dye. Originally brews of moss and lichen were made into which to dip and dye the pure new wool from the household sheep. Early and natural blends of colour were created and spun to echo their hillside environment. The husband would then weave the unique family product into cloth to be sold at the tweed market. Everything was done by hand and it is interesting that many weavers today still weave on ancestral looms.

The most distinctive item of woollen clothing from pre-Christian times until the seventeenth century has to have been the "mantle" or large, enveloping weatherproof cloak wrap. (Fig 1)

> "They have woollen jackets, but very short; plain breeches close to their thighs; and over these they cast their mantles or shag-rugs ... fringed with an agreeable mixture of colours, in which they wrap themselves up and sleep upon the bare ground" William Good, 1566 (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p3).

These cloaks were constructed using a 3:1 twill with a tightly spun warp and loosely spun weft that, after being woven was worked up into a curly nap on one surface. The mantle was very much a badge of Irishness and was exported to Southwest England and Wales and also to the continent where they were much prized. (Dunlevy, 1989, p42.)

Figure 1 Dinner c. 1581, illustrates the shaggy mantle.

During much of the nineteenth century famine, trade barriers, seasonal emigration and, above all poverty hampered the development of home weaving even in parts of Ireland where it had been traditionally strong. Individuals, through private schemes, intervened to help the trade from time to time, but it was the creation of the

Congested Districts Board in 1891 which proved of most help in turning the tide of rural poverty in the West of Ireland. The Congested Districts Board was dissolved in 1923, but the Gaeltacht Services Division of the Department of Lands reorganised the hand-woven tweed industry in 1930. The Division established a marketing department which became Gaeltarra Eireann in 1957, and Údarás na Gaeltachta in 1980. (M^{c}Crum, 1996, P2)

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a major influence on clothes was the increasing demand for fashionable dress for sports. Doeskin, a popular weather-resistant and strong fabric used for outdoor sport trousers started to be replaced by tweed from around 1950.

The Anglo-Irish and English began to appreciate the tough wind resistant qualities of chunky warm tweed and suddenly there was a market from royalty for country wear for hunting and fishing. Landed gentry appreciated the good quality, warmth and beauty of Irish tweed jackets and would have worn them horse riding or fox hunting and sports such as shooting, boating and golf. Consequently this ensured a demand for traditional Irish, and Donegal in particular tweeds in the fashion centres of Europe and America. (Dunlevy, 1989, p151)

> "The revival of the tweed industry in the mid-nineteenth century was largely due to its suitability to garments worn for the newly fashionable sporting, country and travelling activities. Previously, fashionable people would not have exposed themselves to the elements to the extent that they needed stylish waterproof and weatherproof outfits. Donegal tweed then began to be exported as a uniquely Irish cloth to France, England and America by Logue of Killybegs and Magees of Donegal town among others."
>
> (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p2)

Before the completely effective waterproofing of cloth in the twentieth century, the weatherproof qualities of properly fulled and napped wool were more highly regarded than now, when the warmth of wool is its chief association.

Manus Ferry from Donegal was a master weaver who won many awards for his hand weaving and his fabric was used by royalty for such sportswear in the early 1900s. (Fig 2). It was a family run operation consisting of himself, his sister Sophie and brother Paddy. Paddy looked after the sheep and produced the fleece, Sophie hand spun and dyed it with vegetable dyes and Manus used to weave it. However, the introduction of machine woven lengths took away most of their trade in the years around 1928. (Verbal information from Sallie O'Sullivan)

Figure 2 Manus Ferry with some records of a few of his many prizes won for his hand weaving.

Sybil Connolly was the first Irish fashion designer to give Irish fashion an International profile. Her clothes were well received in the 1940s proving that an Irish manufacturing company could produce couture quality garments. She was also

the first Irish designer to break into the American market. (Fig 3) (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p14). From the late 1940s Irene Gilbert was a major influential force in Irish fashion. She noticed the fashion potential of Irish fabrics and this became a dominant feature in her designs. She acquired richly coloured tweeds which were light enough for dress use by working closely with mills. (Fig 4) Another Irish couturier who used native materials effectively was Neilli Mulcahy. She was one of many Irish designers who agreed that the cloth always dictated the design of their garments and she worked alongside mills such as McNutts, Avoca and Molloys. (Fig 5) (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p20). In the 1950's designers used the fact that their "Irishness" was their great marketing strength.

Figure 3
Cossack suit by Sybil Connelly, winter 1956. A Striking day suit in which the fabric is a strong design element.

Figure 4
Day Suit by Irene Gilbert, winter 1954, showing the effective use of obviously Irish fabric.

Figure 5
Tweed suit by Neilli Mulcahy, early 1960s. Good example of a classic tweed suit with a knitted section of the same tweed yarn.

The original Irish tweed was a white warp, usually with speckled weft across it. It can easily be seen where this idea of speckled tweed arose. Take a piece of granite which abounds on the Donegal hills and if you examine it you will be amazed at the likeness between the rock and the original Donegal handwoven tweed which is still woven. This plain weave tweed was named "Pepper and Salt" (Fig 6) because of it's light warp and dark weft. The warp was always whitish in colour however the weft could have been either a natural brown or an indigo dyed blue colour. A prime example of where this fabric would have been used is in the wide legged trousers of Aran fishermen (Fig 7). These trousers would have been traditionally worn with a woven belt, an Aran sweater, a heavy double breasted waistcoat and a 'bainin' which is a white flannel collarless jacket which appears to be an original response to local conditions. This bainin would be handspun woollen yarns woven in a plain weave and then felted or milled and would typify Aran Islanders dress.

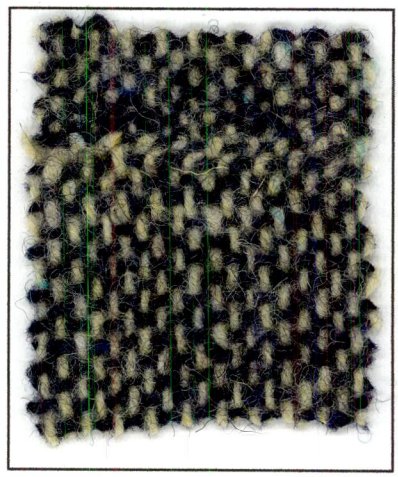


Figure 6
Pepper and Salt Weave

Figure 7
Group of Aran Islanders, c. 1910.

Another traditional Irish look in woollen wovens would be the Donegal nep tweed (Fig 8). This Donegal tweed would be characterised by the coloured 'neps', which are spun into the yarn. 'Neps' are short, brightly coloured fibres that are rubbed into little balls and inserted at the last stages of spinning.

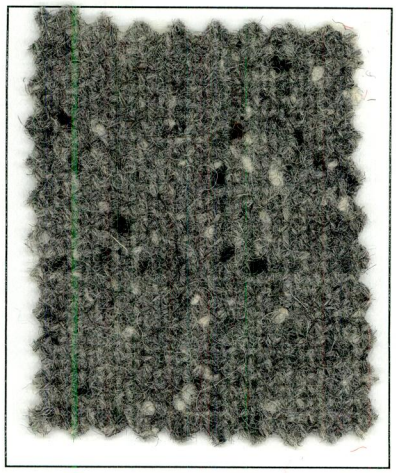


Figure 8
Donegal Tweed

Irish weaving in general was known for its 'fibre blending' (Fig 9) where coloured blends of fibres are carded and mixed together to create depth and a more vibrant colouring. "Thornproofing" is another typically Irish technique where yarns are highly twisted and woven tightly to create a really hardwearing fabric suitable for working jackets.

Figure 9
Fibre Blending

In Ireland wool was in abundance and inexpensive and produced most of the traditional Irish fabrics. Wool proved to be suitable for rural conditions and was used in much of conventional Irish rural dress. (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p4).

One example of rural dress is the red flannel petticoat, which is a survivor of the seventeenth century. (Fig 10) The flannel used would have been similar to that in (Fig 11). Flannel is made from loosely spun woollen yarn, which is heavily felted or milled and which provides warmth and is hardwearing.

Figure 10
An Irish Woman c. 1700
An example of the red petticoat worn in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in Ireland.

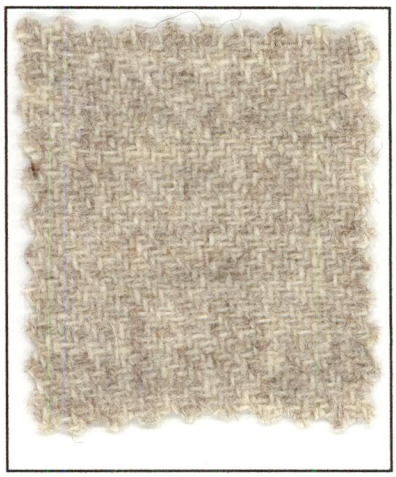


Figure 11
Flannel

The mantles of early Irish dress were highly regarded for their weatherproof qualities of properly fulled napped wool when the warmth of wool was it's chief association. (Fig 12) The brushed Shetland in (Fig 13) is similar in that the brushed surface made the patterns fuzzy and created a fabric that was warmer to handle, had good insulation and was hardwearing.

Figure 12
Shaggy
Mantle

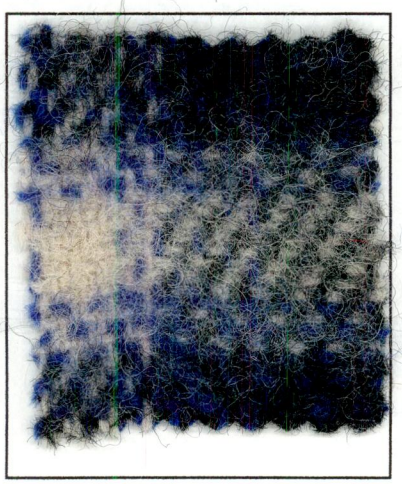


Figure13
Brushed
Shetland

In today's mills linen fabrics are produced for the Spring/Summer fashion collections and woollen fabrics are produced for the Autumn/Winter fashion collections. However, the range and variety of fabrics and fibres available grows every year and the competition between fabric producers intensifies. Mixtures of manmade and natural fibres are being produced keeping the best qualities of both elements. It is often hard to distinguish natural or manmade fabrics nowadays.

Basic twills (Fig 14), herringbones (Fig 15) and plain weaves (Fig 16) are used today in Irish mills combined with variations of colours, stripes and checks. Designers combine and change each season these few basic elements in interesting and innovative ways by changing colours, thickness of yarns, check sizes and twill ratios.

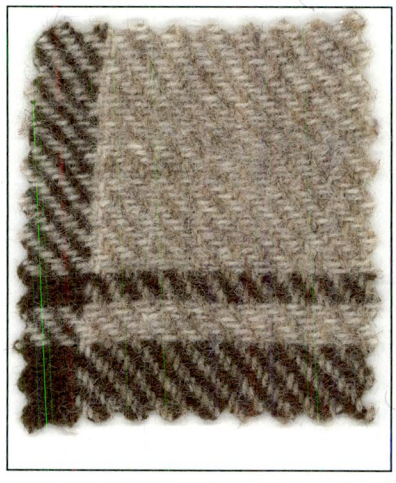


Figure14
Twill

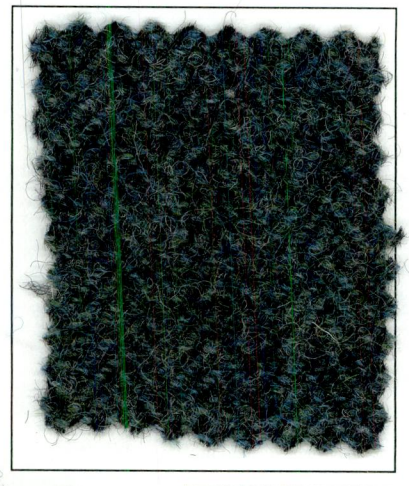


Figure15
Herringbone

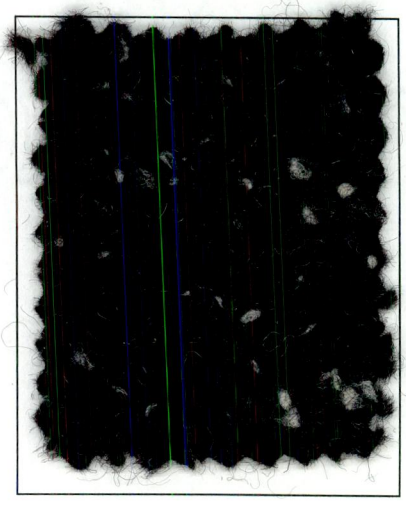


Figure16
Plain

The main fabrics being produced in today's Irish mills are mixes of wool, linen, silk, lycra, lambswool and shetland. Lambswool is an expensive yarn and has a soft feel to it like cashmere. It is used for mens suits and womenswear. It dyes well and its smooth, soft texture makes it easy to wear and foreign markets love it. (Fig 17). Shetland is rougher than lambswool yet it is hardwearing and durable. It is more of a mens fabric for suiting as opposed to womenswear. It is a natural fibre and dyes well. (Fig 18). Donegal Tweed is used for both men's and women's suits. This fabric is slightly cheaper than lambswool or shetland because it is looser with a setting of 10 ends to the inch instead of 25 ends to the inch. This fabric offers an extremely Irish tweedy look because of the looser setting this must be heavily milled to make a consolidated fabric. (Fig 19). (Work experience, M^{c}Nutts).

Figure 17
Lambswool

Figure 18
Shetland

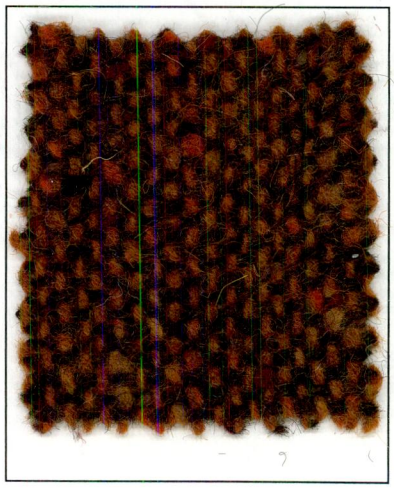


Figure19
Donegal Tweed

There are two main ways of spinning wool into yarns that make very different types of fabric, these are the worsted spinning and the woollen spinning. In the production of worsted yarns, the wool is combed and the fibres are spun parallel. This process produces fine smooth yarn. (Fig 20) Woollen yarns are spun without undergoing the combing process but they are carded and, in general, are fuller as the fibres are rolled into rolags and spun with the fibres more random giving a more fibrous surface to the cloth. This is Irish tweed. (Fig 21) Worsted fabrics are perfect for mens suits, they are tightly woven giving a strong durable, hardwearing fabric that is soft to the touch. (Fig 22).

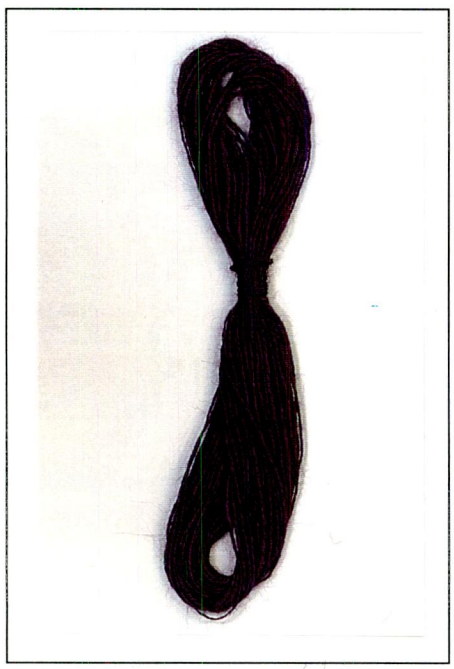


Figure 20
Worsted Yarn

Figure 21
Woollen Yarn

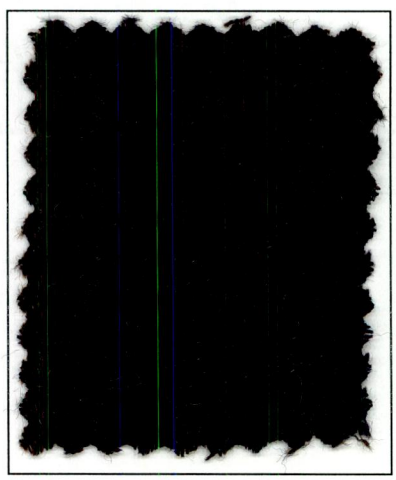


Figure22
Worsted

In recent years lambswool has been mixed with lycra as part of a new revolution in hi-tech fabrics. (Fig 23). This fabric would be comfortable to wear and has a lovely solid soft handle however shrinkage is a problem. When returned from the finishers this fabric has been reduced from the standard width of cloth that is 150cms wide to 130cms wide. This is too narrow for fashion designers to cut out patterns. They must buy more fabric and it becomes more expensive. M^{c}Nutts have tried this and found it unsuccessful. (Work experience, M^{c}Nutts).

Figure 23
Lambswool/Lycra mix

Wool and silks are sometimes combined with wool in the warp and silk in the weft (Fig 24). Silk is unique because it is a natural fibre and gives a dry feel to the fabric.

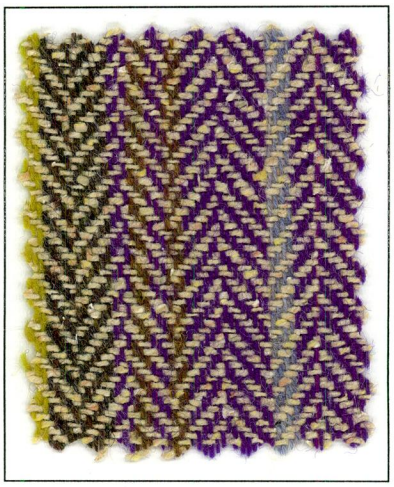


Figure 24
Wool/Silk Mix

Linen is a very good quality hardwearing fabric produced in Ireland for centuries. It is cool to wear and the fact that it crumples is considered part of the beauty of linen. A process called aero finish, which blows hot air onto the linen under pressure, finishes linen. Linen wears extremely well, it feels good in the heat and the more it is washed the softer and more comfortable it becomes. (Fig 25).

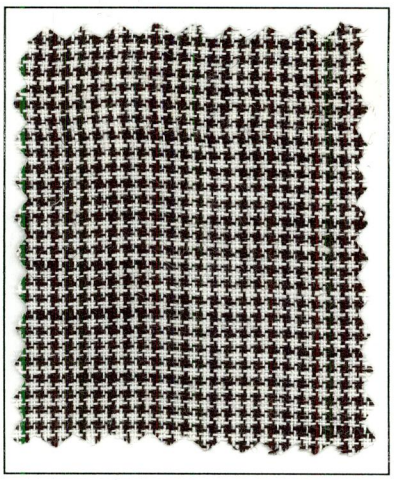


Figure 25
Linen

There are many reasons why fibres are mixed together: to give them stability, to make them crease resistant, to make them cheaper to produce and to make them easy care. Companies have woven linen blended with tencel to make linen more crease resistant. However, linen tencel is dearer to produce and people will simply choose to buy linen as the crease is part of the whole look of linen. (Interview, Emblem Weavers).

Everybody knows that woven woollen Irish fabrics are quality products. From looking at the industry we can see that it is the good quality of raw materials and natural fibres that make Irish tweed so internationally famous.

There are many reasons that make Irish woollen fabrics so special. The history, perseverance and tradition of weaving in rural Ireland and the personalities of the Irish people combined with high quality designs weave constructions and yarns, and the warmth and practicality of wool together create good quality fabrics. Natural fabrics seem to be used now more than ever before even though manmade fabrics have similar qualities and are comfortable and warm.

With many Irish people immigrating to America at the start of the century Irish fabrics became in great demand for the Irish Diaspora. With a potential market of eight million people in America, Irish garments made from Irish fabrics gained an International reputation.

Irish tweed has a universal appeal and fabric neither looks feminine or masculine. It is hardwearing and robust. It has water repellent qualities, it doesn't get dirty easily, has an excellent handle and is loved by many for its warmth. Wool is suitable for all

weather conditions particularly the cold. The properties of warmth suit the West of Ireland's climate where one needs protection against the rain, damp, cold and wind.

Wool's natural fibres dye extremely well and therefore can be made available in a wide range of colours which often echo the nature and rustic environment of the West of Ireland. The hard wearing quality of Irish woollen fabrics was suited to rural Ireland where garments would have been subjected to the rigours of many hours of manual labour and hard work.

My father himself bought two suits from the House of Magee, the first was bought eight years ago and is a tightly woven plain weave, white warp and black weft. It is a classic double breasted suit and is exactly the same style as the one he bought only four years ago which is a navy twill with a fine white pinstripe. Both are worsted pure new wool and both cost around £200 each.

My father explained to me that he was "sick to death of both of them" but that he simply cannot wear them out. He describes them both as excellent quality material that will not go out of shape and does not go out of fashion.

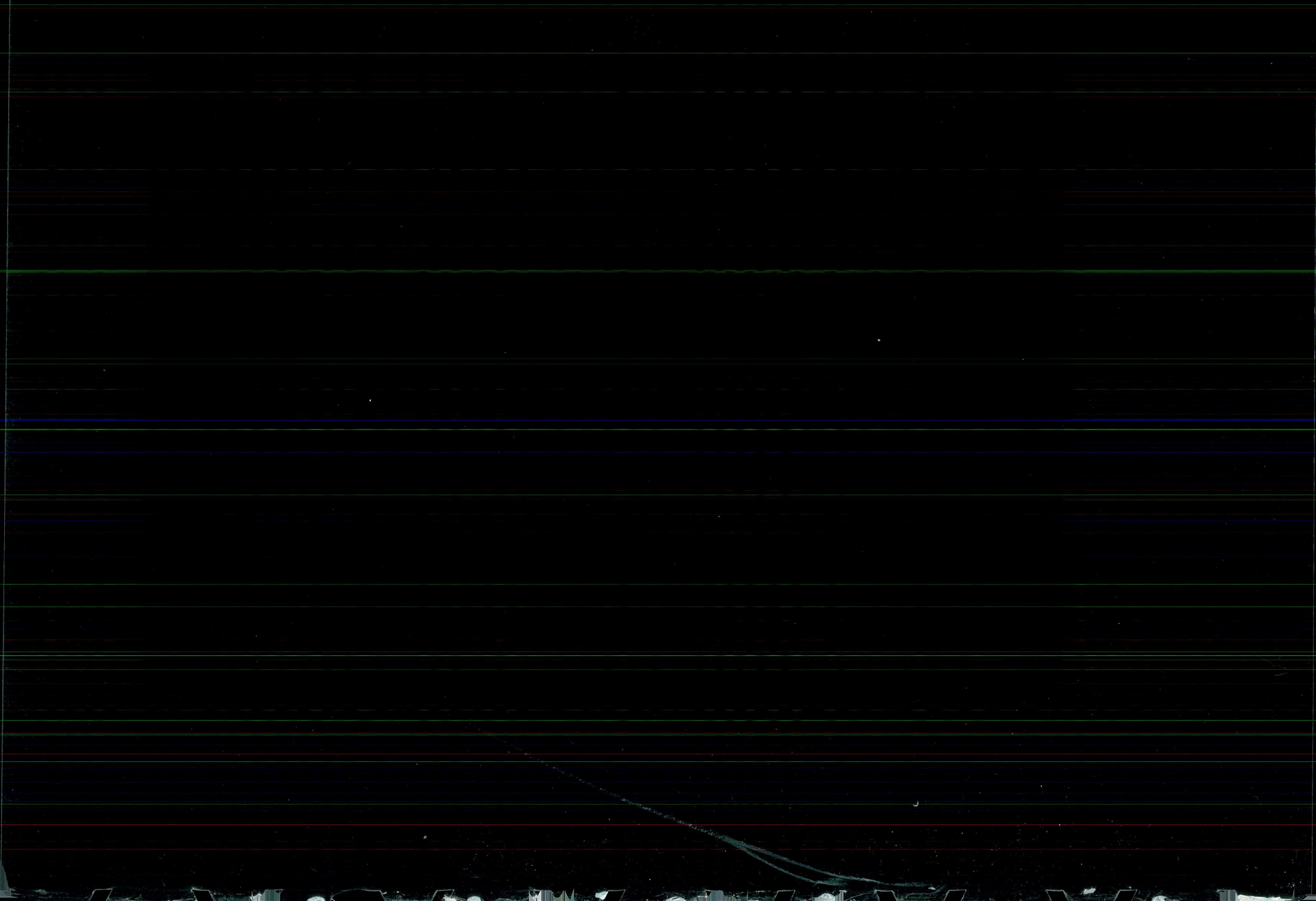
"Magee and Co" is now the largest makers in Ireland of mens quality clothing. "The company manufactures stylish suits, jackets for both men and women, trousers and skirts, as well as the prestigious Donegal Tweed" (Fig 26) (M^{c}Evoy, 27/1/98, p4). Visitors to Ireland might find that a Magee Donegal Handwoven tweed jacket is one of their best buys. They are described as beautifully cut, faultlessly tailored and they are of "a standard of excellence".

To many people the word "Donegal" immediately revives memories of a comfortable suit or sports jacket made from Donegal tweed, or an overcoat, which stood them well over a long period of time.

Figure 26
A Magee suit, 1998

Chapter Three

Chapter Three



Chapter Three

Fashion and Retail

Fashion: The influence of Irish fabrics and Irish culture on fashion

Historically the cloth of Ireland has been an integral part of the dress of the country. The marketing potential of Irish fabric gave rise to the first International showing of Irish fashion around 1950 and has ever since been Irish fashion's main inspiration. It is the fact that Irish designers look to their own culture for ideas that appeals to the international market and distinguishes late twentieth century Irish fashion.

One of the first designers whose use in this process resulted in her international success was Sybil Connolly. Seeing the potential of Irish fabrics she made them the dominant feature of her work and almost all Irish designers have followed her lead. The native fabrics of Ireland have been crucial to the success of Irish fashion, since their innate qualities are a direct source of inspiration for Irish designers. There are many reasons why designers would use Irish fabrics including their use as a marketing ploy or to support the Irish industry and economy. The use of Irish fabrics in garments began because people in Ireland had no choice due to economic reasons other than to live off the land.

The fact that many designers use Irish fabrics shows the importance they place on the material.

John Rocha is one of the many Irish designers to use Irish fabrics in his clothing. His degree collection featured Irish linen and this inspired him to visit Ireland and eventually move to Dublin to live. In 1995 Rocha broke his link with the A-Wear chain so he could develop his collection without any influence and established his own business headquarters in Temple Bar where he works alongside his business partner and wife, Odette Gleeson. Raised in Hong Kong "His designs combine oriental shape and Celtic embellishment, Irish fabric and international style" (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p58). Through an interview with John Rocha's personal assistant Monica Gumbrielle, I was able to find out that Rocha remains loyal to the fabrics and finishes of Ireland and to the country itself. He has long-standing relationships with yarn suppliers and mills in Ireland. Atlantic Mills in Northern Ireland specially designs the fabrics for his new jeansline collection.

He uses fabric as the foundation on which he builds his design ideas. The purchase of the fabric is the first stage; he collects fabric from Ireland and all around the world each season. "Fashion goes so fast these days that the only thing that can make a garment really special is the fabric. We have a studio dedicated to fabric design research". (Reed, quoting John Rocha, 1996, p20).

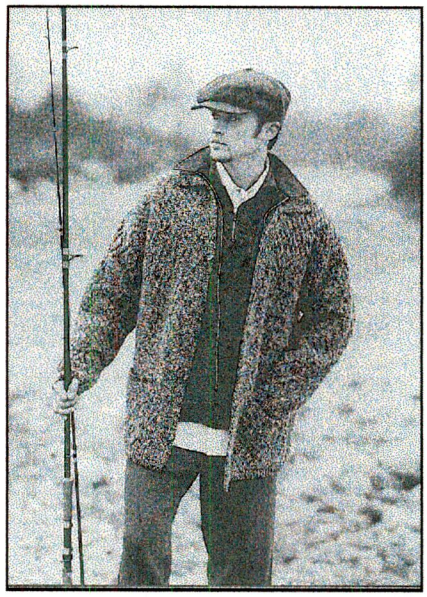
The start of the design process begins with those fabrics that most catch his attention. He makes a conscious effort to use Irish fabrics, however typically Irish fabrics are not always in fashion, so he only uses them when it makes sense within a collection. (Interview with Monica Gumbrielle).

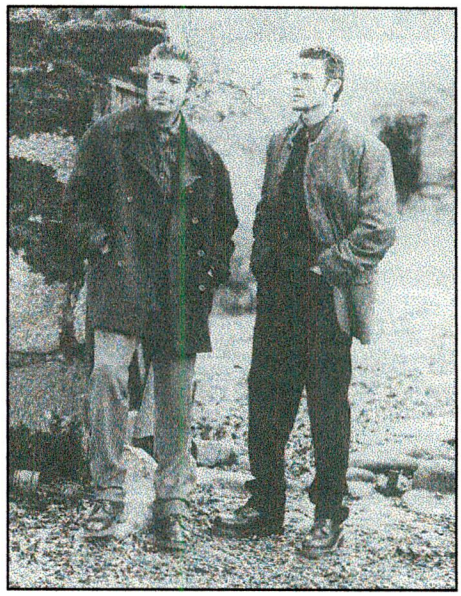
John Rocha is internationally renowned for his eclectic use of fabric and similarly so for his use of Irish fabrics. (Fig 27).

Figure 27 Designs from the first collection by John Rocha to be shown in London 1984

For his Autumn/Winter collection 1996/97 he sent down the catwalks of Paris male models in "suits in a nutty-textured black and white tweed, the jacket given a twist thanks to the strip of fake snakeskin running along the base" (O'Byrne, 1996, p7).

Unlike John Rocha, Pat M^{c}Carthy uses Irish fabrics every season and for every collection he produces. M^{c}Carthy designs clothes with a sophisticated country look, which can be worn by the city man as well as his country cousin. (Hynes, E, 1996). His designs are contemporary but their inspiration is from rural, traditional Irish dress. (Fig 28 and 29).





Figures 28 and 29
Two images from Pat McCarthy Autumn /Winter 1996 Collection

"Men are getting more and more concerned about how they look, but they don't want to compromise on comfort. My clothes reflect this whole change of lifestyle, the dressing down in the office and the leisure time at the weekend." (O' Byrne quoting Pat M^{c}Carthy, 17/3/96)

Through a questionnaire that Pat M^{c}Carthy filled out it is evident that his strategy is to re-work classic shapes with softer, lighter fabrics than the traditional wool's and tweeds used in men's tailoring. "M^{c}Carthy describes his clothes as being both very traditionally Irish and very different" (O'Byrne, 1995). His clothes are made up from woven blends of different fabrics that he has specially commissioned from Donegal Mills, such as M^{c}Nutts. They mix silk with linen, wool with cotton, or alpaca with mohair. "They're lighter and softer than the usual material used. You still have the look of a traditional Irish cloth, but without that scratchy uncomfortable element". (O'Byrne, quoting Pat M^{c}Carthy, 16/1/95).

"The basic weaves and colourings are very much what would be expected from an Irish manufacturer, but the material has a very unexpected softness and malleability" (O'Byrne, 16/1/95).

In the United States, Pat M^{c}Carthy has been claimed as the "Calvin Klein from Ireland" for his efforts to bring an entirely new look to menswear made from Irish fabrics. In his skilful mixture of texture and patterns he is known to use natural earthy shades such as khaki, olive and white mixed with bright colours and also his autumn collections are strong and bold. They have a richness and warmth that recalls the colours of autumn. (Hynes, 1997, p9).

Another Irish designer to use typically Irish fabrics is Pat Crowley who was born in the west of Ireland. Her first collection, which had a "Celtic" theme, was of Irish crochet tops, skirts and wedding dresses. She worked along with M^{c}Nutts of Donegal co-ordinating yarns for knitwear and crochet with tweed for skirts and trousers. (Fig 30) Through an interview with Pat Crowley she explained how in 1982 she won new clientele of American socialites as a result of a very successful fashion show and her business has continued to flourish with direct sales to personal American customers. She is unlike Pat M^{c}Carthy in that her work is not classically Irish couture however she does continue to use Irish fabrics in her designs – in particular linen and tweeds. Travel is a great consideration when designing garments. She uses uncrushable raw silks, fine wool's with gold threads, and light cottons, allowing them to pack well. (Williams, 18/2/97).

She is well known for her clothes being simple but not boring; beautiful clothes that the discreet rich would wear both here and in America. Her aim is to create garments

that are "all-day-into-evening-clothes". A lot of what she does takes a woman from one role to another without her ever having to set foot back home. This apparently, is a way of life very much in vogue in New York. (Williams, 11/10/96)

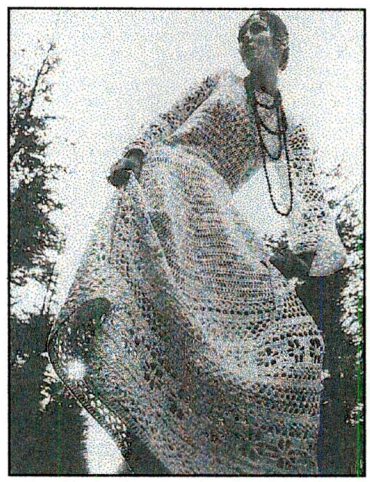


Figure 30
Crochet dress, 1971,
by Pat Crowley

She works on a commission basis and is like a tailor in that she makes up the clothes in the traditional, old-fashioned way. Throughout her years she has used some very strong and colourful tweeds, she has used woven raw silks which give the appearance of fine flecked tweed, pure Irish linens, hand crochet, lively tartans and also hand-woven tweeds for riding coats. A tweed jacket would have cost up to £700. (Interview with Pat Crowley).

"Make it simple, make something you can wear" is one of Pat Crowley's goals in designing. Ultimately she uses many fabrics from a lot of different sources and as she produces many evening gowns this requires luxurious fabrics such as silks, sheers and velvets. Therefore like John Rocha she can only use Irish fabrics when they work with the garment or collection.

Other designers such as Ib Jorgensen, Michael Mortell, Paul Costelloe and Quin & Donnelly and have all used their culture and the fabrics of Ireland to enhance and promote their garments. (Fig 31)

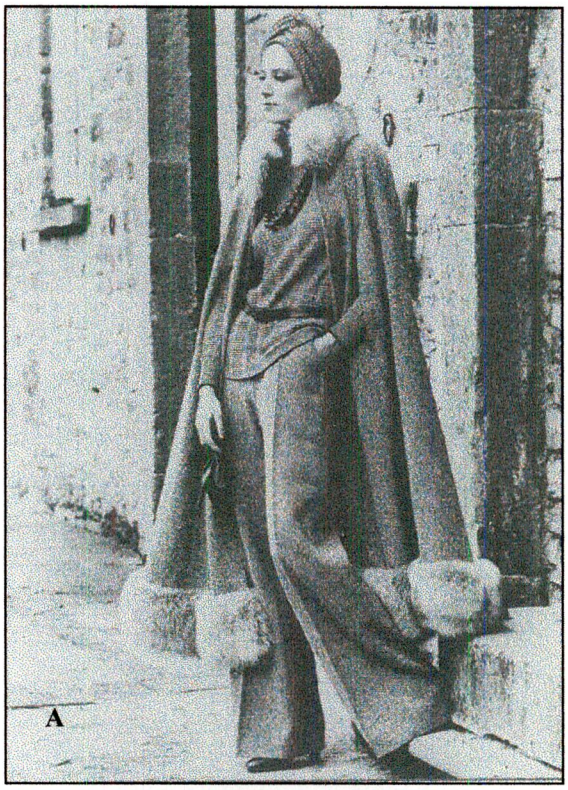


Figure 31 **A**. Ib Jorgensen, early 1970s, **B**. Michael Mortell, 1986, **C**. Paul Costelloe,1984, **D**. Quin & Donnelly, 1987

People use Ireland and its culture as a selling tool. Awareness of the cultural traditions of Ireland was unexpectedly raised by the success of "Riverdance". Irish dance traditions have since become internationally as well known and respected as Irish traditional music. The Irish couturier Jen Kelly designed the costumes for the show. (Fig 32) (M^{c}Crum, 1996, p98). Since the production of "Riverdance" Pat M^{c}Carthy has created new age Celtic style. In 1995 he came up with his own version of Aran fishermen's trousers, traditional waistcoats and chunky Donegal sweaters. His aim was to reflect "a new found pride in our heritage and a modern interpretation of our Irishness" (O'Shea, untitled, 17/9/95). His collection used the natural tones of the Irish countryside and featured specially commissioned lightweight fabrics with flecks, tweeds and herringbone. Walking coats were similar to old Irish hunting coats with big "cargo" pockets and horn buttons. The Aran fishermen's trousers are worn in traditional style with collared waistcoats or teamed with oversized chunky handcrafted sweaters.

Figure 32 Jen Kelly's costumes for Riverdance

As part of London Fashion Week February 1996, John Rocha presented his collection entitled "Love Comes to Town" and sent his models down the ramp wearing white ribbons pinned to their lapels. To underline the importance of Anglo-Irish associations he decided to return to London for the first time in two years. Irish celebrities were in the audience such as Mary McGuckian, Brian Kennedy and Michael Mortell watching models on the catwalk to the sounds of a song called appropriately enough "Peace and Love" (O'Byrne, 21/1/96, p7).

Unlike many designers John Rocha is renowned for not using sex to sell his clothing. He doesn't like his models to have a big bust because he feels his clothes hang better on flat chested women. Top fashion model Emma Balfour praises John for not using sex to sell his clothes, a strategy she despises. (Brankin, 30/4/95). However, he has used Irish celebrities such as Sinead O'Connor and Bob Geldof to model his clothes. (Fig 33 and 34) Both are now patrons of John Rocha's clothes and of Irish fashion. (O'Byrne, 30/1/95).

Figure 33
Sinead O'Connor modelling for John Rocha at his first Paris show in 1994.

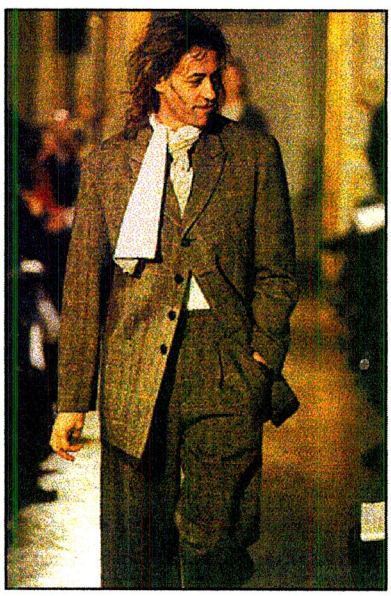


Figure 34
Outfit from John Rocha's autumn/winter 1995 menswear modelled by Bob Geldof.

There are a number of reasons why Ireland's national identity has been so important to its clothing industry. One is the country's idyllic, unspoilt, rural lifestyle and another is that emigration is important, particularly relevant with respect to the American market. Interest in Irish fashion from the American market has primarily been for patriotic and sentimental reasons. This interest was particularly strong in the 1950s. Since then the Irish fashion designers have taken advantage of this fondness.

In 1990 Senator Mary Robinson was inaugurated as President of Ireland. Her professionalism extended to the very effective promotion of Irish fashion. She wore a Louise Kennedy jacket for this inauguration and she wore only Irish designers' work on all state occasions. This gave Irish fashion an international profile at a high diplomatic level and also constant press coverage at home and abroad. The new President Mary M^{c}Aleese is also an ambassador of Irish fashion. On her inauguration she chose to wear an outfit by Irish fashion designer Miriam Mone. The 1997 Rose of Tralee wore a dress designed by Peter O'Brien who is an Irish fashion designer working for the "House of Rochas" in Paris.

At present there is a strong desire for Irish people to look Irish themselves. In the past few years Dublin has become known as "the hottest place on earth" and "the friendliest city in Europe". Dublin is hip for it's culture, great shops, restaurants, nightlife, atmosphere and Guinness. Strolling around trendy Temple Bar it is easy to see why so many Hollywood stars have recently bought new homes in the Dublin Area. This new pride in everything Irish also includes Irish fashion. (Upton, Cosmopolitan, Jan 1998, p194).

This interest in traditional Irish style has not only been reflected in Irish designers' garments but in fashion designers collections worldwide. The Irish textile industry was given a high profile in 1996 when French couture designer Christian Dior devoted his entire menswear collection to an Irish theme. The show was entitled "An Irish Ballad" and presented male models in "urban country casuals" tailored from Donegal tweeds and shetlands, set against a backdrop of music from U2, The Cranberries and traditional musicians. Irish textile companies such as Castle Island (no longer in production), John Hanly, John McNutt and the Connemara label supplied the fabrics. "I wanted to use textiles typical of Donegal, and to play with the colours of the Irish countryside", said Patrick La Voix who is the artistic director of the Dior collection. (Cunningham, 28/1/96). He stated that "The fabrics of Ireland have the most beautiful colours – the blue of the skies and the sea, the colour of the heather and the moss stones. They offer such a wonderful palette." He also stated that "the Irish fabrics are very strong, rough and very masculine, I appreciate the fabrics so much" (Fig 35) (Cunningham, quoting La Voix, 1996). It is certainly clear why La Voix appreciates Irish fabrics.

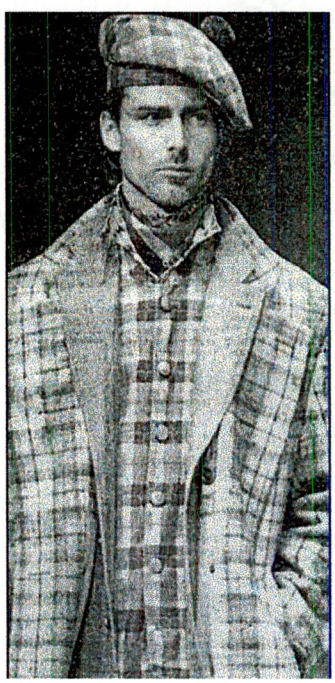


Figure
Patrick Lavoix
Interpretation of 'urban country casuals'.

Retail: The industry needs to sell

The fabric and fashion industry cannot survive unless it can market and retail its goods effectively. The Irish Countrywomen's Association was founded in 1930 by Dr Muriel Gahan to sell and promote traditional Irish crafts. This was the starting point when many shops began opening in Ireland to sell traditional handcrafted products. Catherine Ryan opened her shop 'Cleo' in Dublin in 1936 and began selling Aran sweaters. Her daughter Kitty Joyce now runs the business. Cleo is one of a large network of family oriented businesses based in Ireland selling Irish crafts to locals and tourists.

No books give information on retailing Irish clothing apart from McCrum. A survey was conducted of specialised shops in Dublin from which valuable feedback was gained through discussion and questionnaires about the retail of Irish products. The shops contacted are "Cleo" of Kildare Street, "Dublin Woollen Mills" of Lower Ormond Quay, "Kennedy & M^{c}Sharry", "Blarney Woollen Mills" and "The Kilkenny Shop" all of Nassau Street.

Cleo Ireland Ltd has two outlets one in Dublin and one in Co Derry, both specialising in men and women's outerwear. The company began in 1936, as there was an economic necessity. It began in Dublin as a tiny shop in South Anne Street and in 1950 it moved to Molesworth Street. There was an explosion of American customers in the late 1940s and it finally settled in Kildare Street in the mid 1970s. Kitty Joyce designs the garments, 50% of their produce goes to their customers in America, Japan and Europe. The shop claims to specialise in clothes made from natural fibres – wool and linen of Irish origin. They choose their fabrics for their beauty, quality and

texture and many of their designs are drawn from Ireland's past. Cleo is a company worked by three generations of the Joyce family and they describe their garments as "Wearable Art" to treasure and hand on. (Fig 36)

When designing, Kitty Joyce is not trying to create a sense of Irishness, she is only responding to her own identity. Joyce sells her garments through Showcase and other tradefairs but also directly to customers. Lively coloured hand knitwear is their best seller, these average at £140 each.

Joyce believes that people appreciate Irish fabric and garments for their quality and they are willing to pay the price. She buys hand-woven wool cloth where possible as "the Irish woollen cloth has a lovely springy feel and character" (Questionnaire, 23/1/98). Cleo is a distinctive shop in that Kitty Joyce actually runs the shop on a day-to-day basis as well as designing the garments.

Figure 36
Cleo Clothing

Blarney Woollen Mills is also a family run company, based in County Cork. It has now expanded into eight countrywide outlets, one of them being in Dublin's Nassau Street. It bought over the Kilkenny Design Shop in 1989 where it continues to sell top Irish design products. (Fig 37) Within the store it sells its own range of fashion under the label "Kilkenny Art of Dressing" designed by Oonagh Moriarty. The range explores beautiful textures in soft fabrics interpreted into relaxed tailoring clothes. They also sell a large quantity of designers' knitwear, ranging from £40-£150. Garments are designed by the design team using CAD (Computer Aided Design) and are aimed at different markets throughout Europe and Ireland, both tourist and non-tourist and would suit all ages and sectors of the market. The garments would be described as classic with a sense of Irishness and timelessness. They sell all over Europe through tradefairs like Showcase. The manager of the shop believes that people buy Irish "to cultivate the Celtic Tiger", and that although Americans love Irish fashion the Italians and French are also captivated by the rugged unspoilt countryside look. Much of the tweed used is Irish and the company works with weavers to achieve the right fabrics. (Questionnaire, Managers of Blarney Woollen Mills and Kilkenny Design Shop).

Figure 37 Kilkenny Design Shop Window

Another outlet in Dublin where conventional Irish crafts are sold is Dublin Woollen Mills. This is a company that has built a reputation by selling wool fabric by the yard. It now boasts the largest selection of Irish knitwear to be found anywhere. Dublin Woollen Mills close to the Ha'penny Bridge has lasted four generations of the Roche family. The company produces knitwear, accessories, blankets, skirts, crafts and tweed lengths. (Fig 38) A lot of the designs for knitwear have come from traditional Aran patterns. Edel McBride and Roisin Dubh design the garments aimed at the middle to upper end of the market. They sell to male and female between the ages of 18 and 40 years and they stock a lot of children's wear. In the garments they are trying to create a sense of practicality and warmth with an ethnic look: Irish but fashionable. A standard machine knit Aran sells at around £30-£35. Colour wise natural whites, earthy greens and charcoals are their best sellers. (Interview, Manager, Dublin Woollen Mills, 27/1/98).

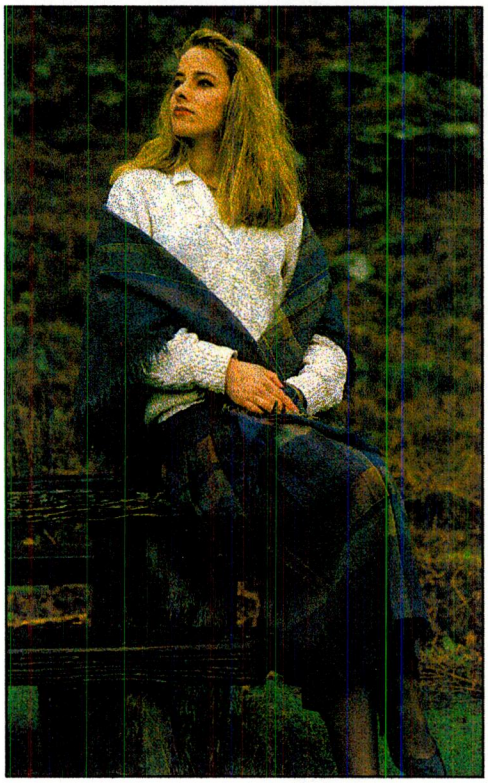


Figure 38
An example of Blarney Woollen Mills clothing

Kennedy and M^{c}Sharry, which retail men's clothing, were founded in 1889. It started in business at Westmoreland Street and extended into D'Olier Street. In 1976 the company moved to the present site on Nassau Street. The 'Kennedy' partner retired in the 1920s but a third generation of M^{c}Sharrys continues now. They retail men's clothing to Irish and visitors who are mainly European and American. Tony M^{c}Sharry claims to sell smart, quality men's wear that is moderately fashionable for the well-dressed man. They are classic garments with a hint of fashion. His best sellers are suits (£200-£350), jackets (£150-£250), shirts (£25-£70) and knitwear (£40-£90) in blues, greys, stripes and tweeds. (Questionnaire, Tony M^{c}Sharry, 25/1/98).

These are but a few of the shops in Dublin specialising in retailing classical and traditional Irish crafts and clothing. Visitors enjoy these shops as they like to buy souvenirs that they can bring home knowing they are good quality and practical. Visitors are also attracted to the distinctive, colourful, durable, well designed, patriotic Irish products.

Patriotism, Celtic designs, shamrocks and the rugged earthy colours of the landscape all have a big impact upon what is sold in these stores. It is notable that the most well known shops have been in production through several generations of each family. Just like the mills in Ireland, the companies are generally handed down to offspring to continue as a family name and tradition.

It is important to mention "The Design Centre" in the Powerscourt Townhouse Centre which offers designer garments to the general public and provides a platform for Ireland's many new and upcoming designers such as Louise Kennedy, Mary Gregory, Lynn Mar and Miriam Mone.

Conclusion

Conclusion

Conclusion

The main purpose of this thesis is to evaluate the current position of Irish fabric production and retail markets. This evaluation is based on questionnaires completed by designers within Irish mills, compiled to help determine whether or not tweeds are still recognised as being Irish and what the Irish market has to offer.

Many mills have confirmed that the raw materials used for some Irish fabrics are sourced outside Ireland because they are cheaper to import than to purchase locally. Much of the Irishness in the product is often the skill and flair of the designer, who selects colours and patterns traditionally, associated with Irish weave in constructing the nature of the weave.

At the minute the eyes of the world are on Ireland and the fabrics it produces. People have become more aware of Ireland because of the European Economic Union. In recent years Ireland has acquired better communication, information technology and access to worldwide markets.

Fabric designers have built up relationships with customers such as retail outlets and fashion houses through personal contact. They use their personality, skill and experience to sell their own individually designed fabrics. The relatively small population of Ireland is inadequate to provide a large enough niche market to sustain its fashion industry therefore producers look to foreign countries for trade and there is a high emphasis on export promotion notably to Europe, America and Japan. Furthermore the ever-expanding tourist trade is adding buying power for the home market.

For hundreds of years Ireland has exported fabrics all over the world and is chiefly known for its high quality design and production. Traditionally, in Ireland there has always been an emphasis on quality rather than quantity. Within the world market Irish fabric producers were one of the first industries to introduce quality control, thus ensuring the standard of quality and design. . A primary drawback to the marketing of Irish fabric is that this high quality comes at a price.

Pat McCarthy has said that he could sell his clothing cheaper if he sourced his manufacturing outside Ireland, but he said that he wouldn't because quality control is better with local suppliers. (Mulcahy, 31/8/97).

As the global economy improves and people become more affluent, they are prepared to pay extra for the best. There is a thriving market for universally in terms of designer fabrics and clothes as society has more disposable income. People always want something different to satisfy their self-esteem. They are prepared to pay more money to make themselves feel good. Therefore, it is considered that there is a market for the Irish fabric industry, which offers more expensive fabric, for when the quality of the fabric is compared with others on a worldwide scale it is outstanding and speaks for itself.

Many haute couture designers such as Christian Dior use Irish fabrics and cultural influences to create an Irish theme in a collection. This idea has filtered down through the fashion hierarchy to designers such as John Rocha who sells to the public, affordable designer clothing using Irish fabrics as a marketing philosophy. High street stores such as Blarney Woollen Mills mass produce for a market that requires good quality Irish products.

Many Irish woollen fabrics are associated with providing protection against the elements and they are marketed against an Irish romantic rural backdrop, which contrasts sharply with an urban environment. This romantic rural notion stems from hundred of years of traditional weaving.

The industry of today has moved with the demands of fashion, the processes have changed with improved technology but the quality of the weave and fabric has remained constant and of a high standard.

Irish woven fabric is renowned throughout the world and is a survivor in the competitive world market.

Appendix

Sample Questionnaires

IRISH MILL QUESTIONNAIRE

Company Name:..... Designer .....

(1) What do you produce?.....

.....

(2) How long have you been in production? .....

.....

(3) In recent years, what major changes have been implemented within your company?

.....

.....

(4) Who designs the fabrics?.....

.....

(5) Are all the processes completed within the factory or do you have yarn suppliers, finishers etc? .....

.....

(6) What is the staffing level? .....

.....

(7) Do you have an agent(s)? .....

.....

(8) Do you receive any government funding? .....

.....

(9) How do you sell to your customers (Premiere Vision or other Trade Fairs)?

.....

(10) Who buys at Premiere Vision? .....

.....

(11) Do you think Irish fabrics have a high profile in the market you are serving?

.....

(12) How do you market your products? ……

……

(13) Do you market new customers aggressively? ……

……

(14) What percentage of fabric do you produce for the home market and export market?……

(15) Who do you export to?……

……

(16) Which Irish designers buy your fabrics? ……

……

(17) What does the Irish market have to offer relative to other countries?

……

(18) Are Irish fabrics expensive?……

……

(19) Approximately how much would your fabric sell at per yard? ……

……

(20) What is the minimum and maximum length you would sell to a buyer? ……

……

(21) What range of new fabrics, yarns, finishes are being produced?……

……

(22) Have you experimented with or used any of these new yarns?……

……

(23) Why does Ireland still produce mainly wool and linen fabric?……

……

(24) Does Ireland use other yarns e.g. synthetic? ……

……

(25) Why do buyers choose wool, linen as opposed to manmade fabrics?.....

.....

(26) How often do you produce new designs? .....

.....

(27) How have the designs grown or changed?.....

.....

(28) In your opinion what makes a good design?.....

.....

(29) Is there a limit to the amount of colours used for mass production?.....

.....

(30) What do buyers look for in designs? .....

.....

(31) When are orders placed and how long in advance? .....

.....

(32) Tweed fabrics have an international status, are they still recognised as Irish?

.....

(33) Traditionally Irish fabrics express a romantic and rural notion. In you opinion why do people buy Irish fabrics?.....

.....

(34) What do you see as futuristic fabrics? .....

.....

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Irish Fashion Designers Questionnaire

1. What do you produce? ……..

2. How long have you been in production? When did you start up and why? History of company and how it has changed over the years?……..

   ……

3. What is the design process? Where do you source yarns/fabrics? Who designs the garments?……..

   ……

   ……

4. Do you use Irish fabrics?…… Whose fabrics?…… ……..

   ……

5. Where do you purchase fabrics? ……

   ……

6. Would you create a whole collection using Irish fabrics or just bits and pieces? ……

   …… What % ……..

7. Do you use Irish fabrics every season? (Linens – summer, woollens – winter.)……..……

8. Do you feel Irish fabrics create an Irish feel to clothing or does it have to be cut to a particular style? ……

   ……

9. Why should fashion designers buy Irish fabrics? Are they expensive/inexpensive, good quality, easy to work with, they create a mood?

……

10. Who are you designing for? Target market?……

11. Who would wear these garments? Target customer?……

……

12. How would you describe your garments? Irish, timeless, classic, seasonal?……

13. Where do you sell? ……

14. Do you have any outlets abroad? Where? What percentage is exported?

……

15. How do you sell? (Brochures, catalogues, advertising, trade fairs.)

……

16. How many employees to you have? ……

17. Has your company profits increased or decreased in the past few years?

……

18. What changes have been implemented within your company in the past few years?

……

19. What are your best sellers? How much would they retail at?

……

20. What yarns/fabrics do you use? (Natural or synthetics.) ……..

……

21. What motivates people to buy Irish? ……..

……

22. What are the aesthetic qualities of Irish fabric?……..

23. What influences do Irish fabrics and Irish culture have on fashion? ……

……

24. Traditionally Irish fabrics express a romantic rural notion, do you think nostalgia sells? ……

25. American's love Irish, are there other countries that feel this way? ……..

……

26. What plans do you have for the future?……..

……

27. How do you think fabrics/garments will change? ……..

……

28. What do you see as futuristic yarns/fabrics? ……

……

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Irish Shops Questionnaire

1. What do you sell? ……..

2. How long have you been in business? When did you start up and why? History of company and how it has changed over the years?……..

   ……

   ……

3. What is the design process? Who designs the fabrics? Who designs the garments?……

   ……

   ……

4. What is Target market?……..

   ……

5. Who would wear these garments? Target customer?……

   ……

6. What are you trying to create in your garments? (Sense of Irishness/timelessness.)……

   ……

7. Would they be described as classic fabrics/garments?

   ……

   ……

8. Where do you sell your goods? Do you sell anywhere apart from in the store?

……

9. Do you have any outlets abroad? Where? Are they successful? What percentage is exported?

……

10. How do you sell? (Brochures, catalogues, advertising, trade fairs, showcase.)……..

……

11. How many employees to you have? ……..

12. Has your company profits increased or decreased in the past few years?

……

13. What are your best sellers? How much would they retail at?

……

14. Are there specific colours or designs that sell well?

……

15. What yearns are used in the fabrics? (Wool, Linen or synthetics.)

……

16. How have the designs grown or changed? ……

……

17. How do people perceive Irish fabrics/garments now? (Good quality/price.)……...

……

18. What motivates people to buy Irish? ……

……

19. What are the aesthetic qualities of Irish fabrics? ……

……

20. What influences do Irish fabrics and Irish culture have on fashion?

……

21. Traditionally Irish fabrics express a romantic rural notion, do you think nostalgia sells? ……

22. American's love Irish, are their other countries that feel this way? Where? Why?

……

23. What plans do you have for the future?……

……

24. How do you think fabrics/garments will change? ……

……

25. What do you see as futuristic yarns/fabrics? ……

……

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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