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FACULTY OF DESIGN

DEPARTMENT OF FASHION AND TEXTILES

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AN EXPLORATION OF THE HISTORY AND DESIGN OF

IRISH DANCING COSTUMES

FROM 1890 - 1999

BY

GAIL FLOOD

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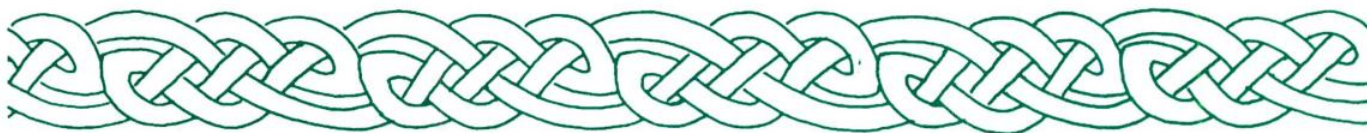


INTRODUCTION

To trace the origins of Irish dancing costumes and to examine the changes that they have undergone up to the present day are the objectives of my thesis. The Irish dancing costume is investigated by examining the structures and forms of dress which have evolved from the revival of ancient dress into contemporary dance costume. The adaptation of Celtic imagery and nationalist ideas as motifs for surface decoration of the costumes is discussed. This is intended to be an overall look at Irish dancing costumes and a detailed discussion of the changes that have occurred recently. The crafts involved with the production of such costumes are also briefly looked at.

The lack of reference in 20th Century literature to Irish dancing costumes has led me to explore Irish dancing costumes and to use my own research and personal experiences in relation to Irish dancing today, using references both written and visual from previous decades. Availability of documented information in relation to the history and development of Irish dancing costume is limited. Most research on the subject has been carried out by Dr. John Cullinane, author of Aspects of the History and Development of Irish Dancing Costume, (1994), and Irish Dancing Costumes, their Origins and Evolution, (1995). Cullinane's work provides some insight into the development of Irish dancing costumes from the turn of the century to the present day. Work has also been carried out by a former National College of Art and Design student, Ms Martha Robb, in the form of her thesis completed in 1995 and her published book, Irish Dancing Costume, (1998). Her thesis looked at the idea of Irish dancing costume as a symbol of National dress. In contrast, my thesis is a more detailed look at the costume itself, the embroidery and the individual features of an Irish dancing costume such as its incorporation of fabric, colour, designs and motifs. Perceptions of 'fashion' in Irish dancing dress will also be discussed.





To further my investigation of the development of Irish dancing costumes, it was necessary to study dress style dating back to the period of the Celtic revival. The examination of photographic records and information gathered from correspondence and interviews also formed part of my research. Information questionnaires were circulated throughout Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales to Irish dancing teachers and also Irish dancewear companies. Enquiries were conducted in Wexford, Wicklow, Dublin, Longford, Meath, Louth, Cork, Limerick, Newry, in Swansea (Wales) and in England. Dancers, dance teachers, adjudicators, costume designers, embroiderers and dancewear companies as well as the Irish Dancing Magazine's UK editor, were all contacted and interviewed.

During my visits to Irish dancing groups and my participation in competitions throughout Ireland, England and Wales, I was able to photograph contemporary and older costumes. Interviews from dancers, dance tutors, adjudicators and costume makers proved helpful. My participation in various cabaret shows in Dublin City Centre, e.g. Knightsbridge, O'Connell Street, Dublin, and in competitions throughout Ireland and Wales as well as exhibition dancing tours to the London Irish Festival (1994), to Chicago, America for St. Patrick's Day (1995), Canada (1996) and recently to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam (December 1998), dancing for a charity appeal in aid of the Christina Noble Children's Foundation, have provided me with first hand opportunities to witness how Irish culture, focusing on Irish Dancing is packaged and received by tourists at home and abroad.

The ensuing chapters will examine how aspirations for national independence, based on a rich national heritage, were to affect the developments of a distinctive costume for Irish dancing.

The establishment of the Irish Arts and Crafts and Home Industries movements shall be considered for their contribution to the development of dancing costume in this century.





I shall examine the continually changing trends in Irish dancing costume, style and consider colours, fabric and surface decoration. The ensuing discussion will comment on how an increase in the numbers of competitive dancing events, dancing styles, as well as advanced technology, have affected evolution of the design of costumes.

Finally, I shall look at the effect that the 'Riverdance' show has had on the ever-expanding world of Irish dancing and the involvement of other nations in the development of Irish dancing and Irish dancing costumes, and discuss the effect the style of costume in 'Riverdance' has had on Irish dancing costume.





CHAPTER ONE

The following analysis of Irish dancing costume will illustrate how its fabric, structure, colour and style emerged with the growing desire to revive Irish traditions and cultures; how, over the past two decades, Irish dancing costumes have changed dramatically with the continuous influence of fashion trends and demands.

At the turn of the century, the conscious development of the Irish dancing costume was assisted by the development of home industries, schools, classes and guilds involved with the production of Irish textiles, lace and embroidery.

Prior to this century it could be said that there was no such thing as a dancing costume. Early literature includes little or no reference to the dress of dancers. Descriptions, when given in regards to the clothes worn by dancers, indicate that they wore the ordinary clothes of the period. Dinely (1681) refers to dancers at a wake as wearing "holiday apparel", (1). Of the performance of the rinne fada (long dance) on May Day of 1812, "the girls were in their Sunday garb, their hair decked with ribbons", (2). It can be concluded that the ladies and gentlemen wore their Sunday best. The dancers in Fig. 1 are wearing their everyday clothes and customary at that time, are set dancing out of doors.

The central figures of 18th Century Ireland, as far as dancing is concerned, were the dancing masters who travelled from place to place. Although very little is known about them, it can be said that they were the creators of the step-dance. In days of old, dancing masters were necessary members of the community; to have the services of a good dancing master was regarded as a triumph for the Parish. "The teaching of Irish dancing, both step and figure dancing, was regarded as a profession", (3). Those who devoted themselves to this occupation used to adopt a quaint and distinctive dress (Fig. 2) as an indication of the honour attached to the profession.

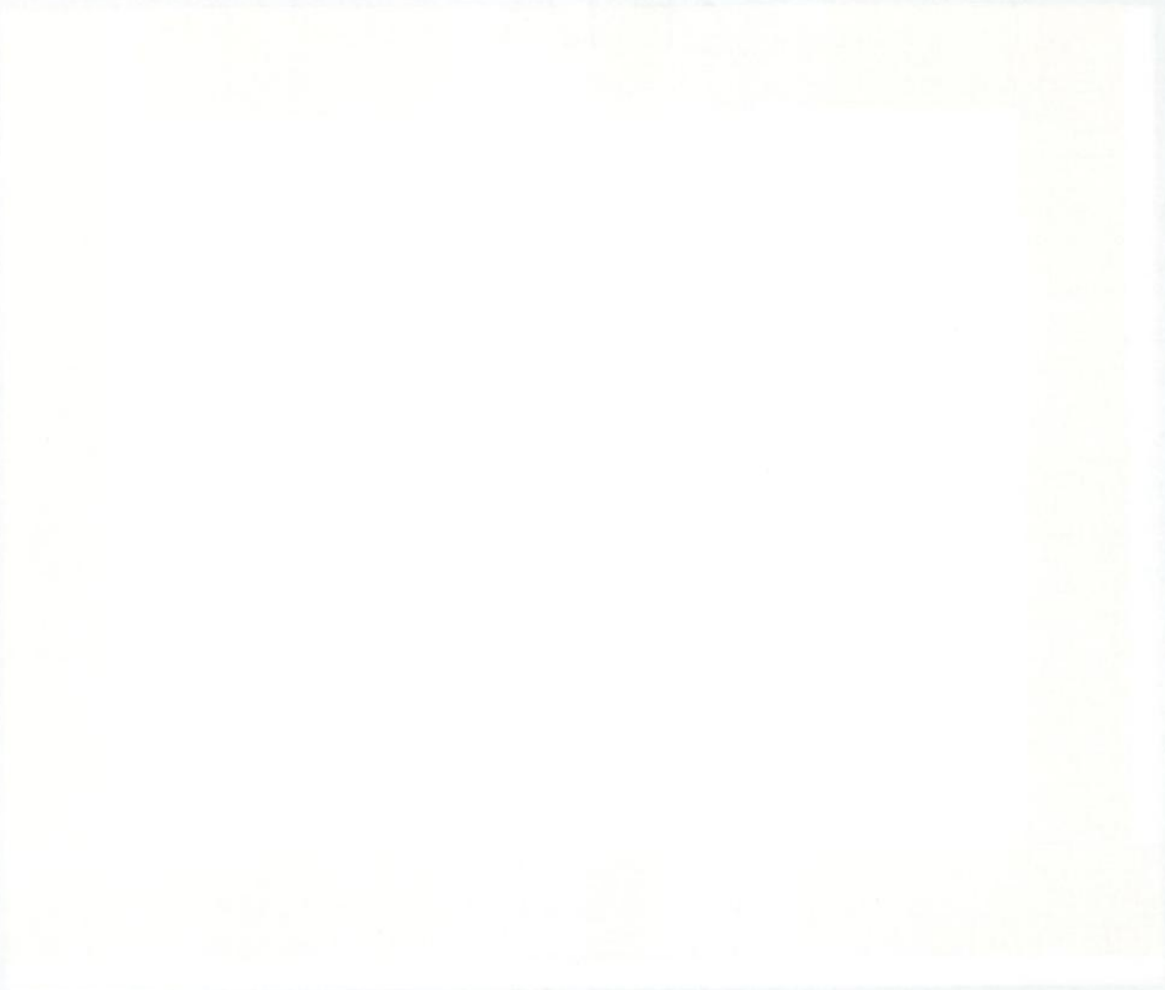




Figure 1:

Dancing at the Crossroads, 1920's, Glendalough, Co. Wicklow.







We learn that the importance of appearance was relevant as early as 1915 with regard to Irish dancing. Each master wore a Caroline hat, a long tail coat, knee breeches, long stockings of the finest texture, and a good pair of lightly-soled shoes, but his chief pride was his staff - his wand of office, (4) (Fig. 2). There was set-dancing at fairs, at sporting events and at weddings with the emphasis placed on camaraderie rather than competitions, national celebration rather than nationalist fervour.

Dancing at the crossroads became the expression of the natural exuberance of the Irish in this period, (Fig. 1). In the 1930's Eamonn de Valera used the phrase, "dancing at the crossroads" as a metaphor for an idealised Ireland, invoking folk memories of frugal self-sufficiency and innocent entertainment. There is a sad and pitiful tale behind the disappearance of our 'crossroads dancing'. Some of our spiritual rulers held the view that "dancing was a frivolous waste of time", (5). Others regarded it as childish, but worst of all, those who were regarded as leaders condemned the practice of crossroads dancing as being demoralising. It was a result of this latter attitude which caused such a radical change in the social habits and customs of the Irish people during the latter half of the 20th Century.





Figure 2:

Traditional Irish Dancing Master.

Painted by Anne Farral, 1997.







Irish culture, tradition, industries, pastimes and dress have been suppressed continually during a lengthy period of English rule in Ireland. “Naked aggression and bald contempt may describe the mutual regard of the Irish and English during the early years of English colonisation in Ireland, (6). Irish dress had been outlawed by Henry VIII who became King of England in 1485, in the decree that “no man or mankind [should] wear no mantle in the streets, but clothes or gowns shaped after the English fashion”, (7). A campaign against the traditional wearing of saffron had been initiated by English rule in 1466, (8). A popular song of the late 19th Century relates how they “were hanging the men and women for wearing the green”, (9).

The Celtic revival which began in the 1880’s was primarily an attempt to regenerate Irish tradition and culture. The Irish language, names, music, literature, sport, dance and also dress styles were to be revived. In 1892 the Irish Literary Society was founded. In 1893 the Gaelic League came into being and in 1894 the Gaelic Athletic Association was inaugurated. Together they rallied in the name of Gaelicism and Nationalism in support of an Irish Ireland. They were reacting primarily against England. Douglas Hyde, a founder member of the Gaelic League, spoke of the need to “de-anglicise the Irish nation”, (10). Nellie O’Brien, an executive committee member of the Gaelic League, declared in 1911, “The man who has the Irish language on his lips will wish also to have Irish clothes on his back”. (11)

The Gaelic League stimulated a renewed interest in the Irish language and culture and was an important element in the Celtic revival movement. The first Ceili (dance) event organised by the Gaelic league was held in London in 1897, (12). Soon Ceilithe (dances) were being held in Dublin. As they grew in popularity, attempts were made to make these events truly Irish. During the Gaelic revival, nationalists in Ireland aspired to re-establish pride in Irish traditions. The wearing of distinctive Irish costume was encouraged as one of the symbols of the growing spirit of national consciousness (Fig. 3)(13). “Green for old Ireland” was a well used slogan at the time; the colour green had a great significance in Ireland as far back as 1681, (14).





Figure 3:

Batik Dyed Costume, Batik Printed Tea-gown and Tunic, 1905





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Consequently, the Gaelic League encouraged ladies attending Ceili events to wear green skirts as an expression of their national identity. The concept of wearing a symbolic costume for Irish dancing may have stemmed from this. In an attempt to revive old Irish traditions, the first Oireachtas (Irish cultural festival) organised by the Gaelic League was held in Dublin in 1897. An Oireachtas was a national festival of Irish dance, music, song and literature and was reminiscent of the ancient Tara feis (festival/competition), as described by Cullinane, (15). It became an annual event and, in later years, also featured art and industrial exhibitions. The first Gaelic League Industrial Exhibition took place at the annual Oireachtas in 1904 in Dublin.

The first modern feis was held in Macroom, Co Cork on March 20th 1898 and was organised by the Gaelic League. The programme acknowledged the importance of Irish dancing and competitions included those for best hornpipe, reel and jig. The feis (festival) movement quickly gathered momentum and soon became an established section of the Gaelic League calendar. Provincial feiseanna (festivals/competitions) were held for the first time in Belfast and Cork in 1900.

With the revival of Irish dancing, the distinctively Irish costumes that were worn as an expression of nationalism were also worn for dancing. Dancers had traditionally worn their Sunday best or everyday dress to dancing (Fig. 4), but in 1901, the Gaelic League began a campaign to revive Irish industries with the rule that “no prize be awarded to a competitor in an Oireachtas unless they were dressed in clothes of Irish manufacture”, (16). The Gaelic League believed that in order to combat emigration, both the revival of Irish pastimes and Irish industries was necessary.

Celebrating the inauguration of the Irish Industries Association in 1886, Lord and Lady Aberdeen requested that guests attending Viceregal Lodge festivals should array themselves in garments of Irish materials, (17). Textiles being manufactured in Ireland at this time included wool, linen, poplin and lace (see Fig. 5). Ishbel Aberdeen maintained a whole-hearted commitment to organising, developing and finding markets for Irish industries.

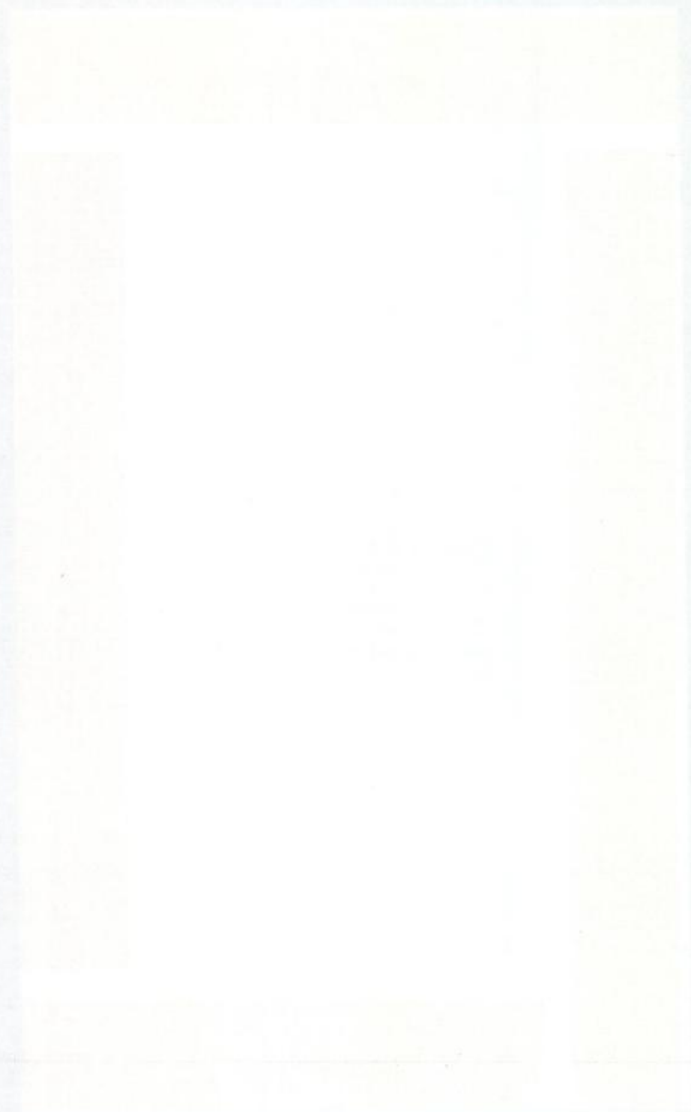




Figure 4:

Cassie O'Neill wearing her everyday or Sunday best dress, which is probably of Irish manufacture, Glenarm Feis, 1904.





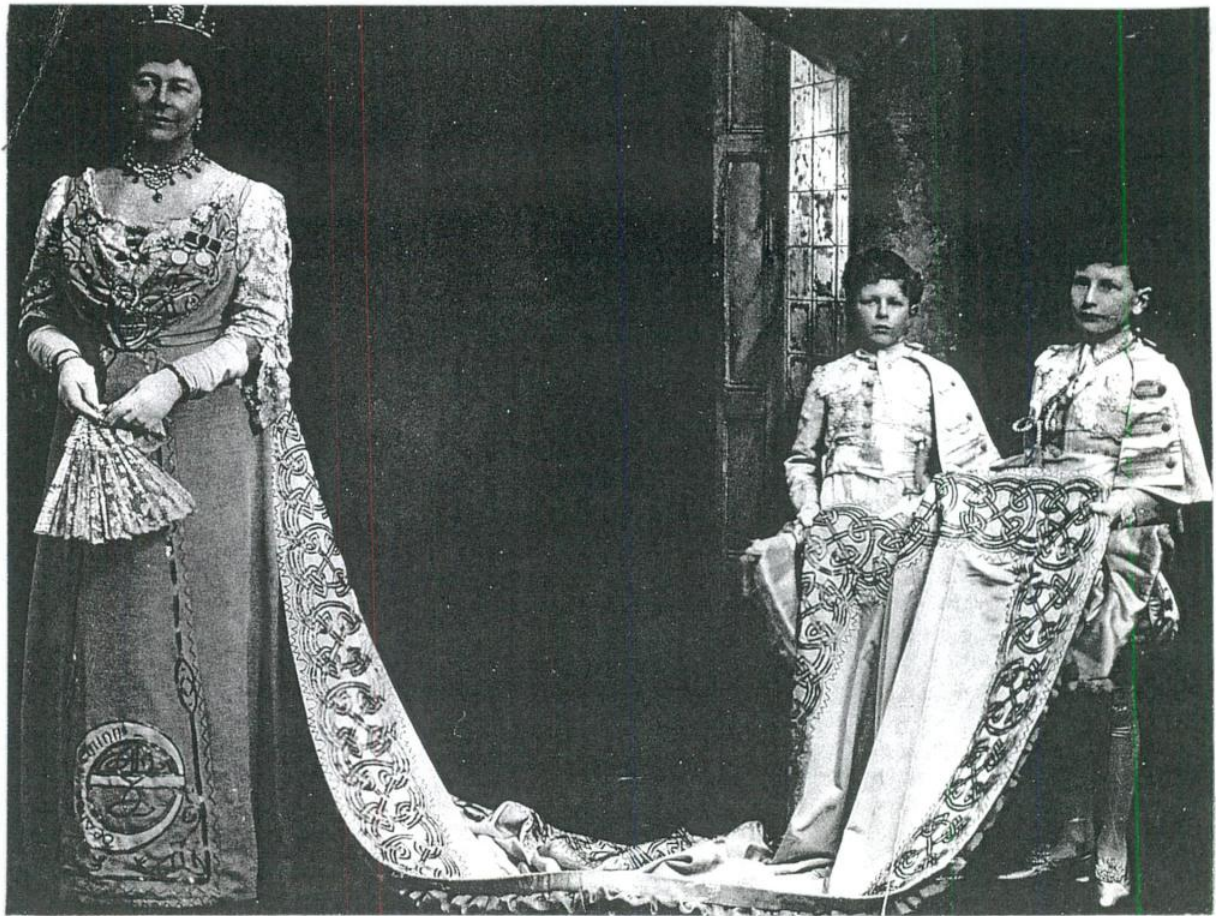


Figure 5:

Lady Aberdeen photographed in her Irish poplin and lace embroidered dress incorporating the Irish Trademark, 1907. Courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.







Examples of the Irish crochet industries around Cork and Monaghan had been exhibited at the Great Exhibition in 1851. These needlework industries were set up to bring relief from poverty caused by the disastrous potato famine. This had brought profitable and satisfactory employment to women of all classes, particularly during the bleak winter months.

The inauguration of the Royal School of Irish Art Needlework in 1882 stimulated the establishment of other schools in Ireland. Mrs Ernest Hart, who established the Donegal Industrial Fund in 1883, was responsible for the development of “Kells” embroidery inspired by the revival of Celtic ornamentation taken from the Book of Kells. This style of embroidery was carried out on hand spun and vegetable-dyed linen, wool or Galway flannel, using polished flax thread. “Kells” embroidery was displayed for the first time at the Inventions Exhibition in London in 1885, where it was awarded a gold medal, and it became a feature of many Irish dancing costumes (Fig. 6).

While many of the urban middle classes were content to demonstrate their affiliations with the Revival Movement by wearing fashionably tailored everyday clothes of Irish manufacture, supporters of Gaelicism wanted to have a national costume for special occasions that demonstrated a more overt sense of Irish identity. A 1919 edition of Leabhar na mBan advocated the wearing of Irish costumes: “Apart from the national idea expressed in the Gaelic costume, it is very practical and economical. The ideal thing is to have the dress and the brat (shawl) of Irish material”, (18). The journal also included an advertisement for ‘embroidered Irish costumes’ made by the Dun Emer Guild.

Costumes were inspired by medieval dress and ancient Irish dress styles from the Early Christian period. Research completed by Eugene O’Curry during the 19th Century concluded that the léine (shirt) worn in early Christian Ireland by both men and women, was actually ankle length; it was a tunic type garment made from



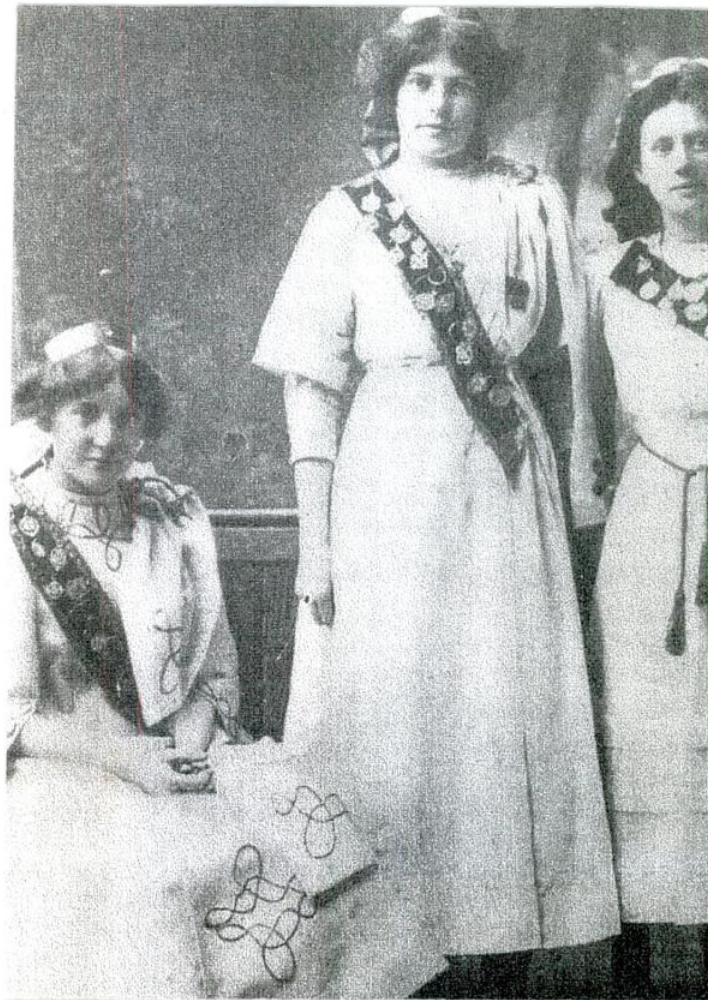


Figure 6:

Mazie McCarthy, prize dancer, piper and drummer; Alice Dunne, prize drummer and dancer; and May McCarthy, union piper, wearing brat and léine style costumes and 'Tara broaches' (1906). Early example of Celtic-style or "Kells" embroidery.







unbleached or dyed linen. It could be slipped over the head and gathered at the waist using a crios (belt). A brat (cloak) was rectangular in shape falling to the ground from the shoulders where it was fastened with a Tara brooch. Shorter tunics reaching to the calves were worn by people involved in physical work or by the poor. The length and quality of the brat was indicative of social class.

The costumes worn by the dancers in Fig. 7 constitute little more than everyday dress of the period. The women wore long frilled dresses to ankle length, with large white aprons over the dresses, with small shawls hardly even covering the two shoulders and crossed at the front. The shawls were so small as to hardly warrant being referred to as shawls or braths in the Irish dancing sense. The men wore knee breeches, waist bands and shirts with bow ties.

Female dancers of the 1890 - 1920 period often wore a hooded cloak, frequently green in colour over a white dress, in a style often referred to as a 'colleen bawn' (literally white girl). This custom was widespread throughout Ireland, (see Figs. 8 and 9). There was no distinct Irish dancing costume for the men of this period. They wore knee breeches as illustrated in Fig. 7. The knee breeches along with the colleen bawn style of costumes became too state Irish and gradually went into decline around 1915 - 1920. The question was what would replace these costumes and could be accepted as national dress.

The prototype for today's female Irish dancing costume seems to have originated in the period about 1915 or even slightly later. The dance costumes worn today owe their origins to the Gaelic revival. The female dress adopted by the Gaelic league was often of white bawneen material, sometimes worn with ribbons in both the hair and on the shoes. The old style of Celtic brath or shawl attached at the shoulders replaced the hooded cloak. The Tara brooch was usually used to attach the shawl. The "Irish dress" was frequently worn on Sundays, first Holy Communions, weddings and other special occasions (Fig. 10). These Irish or Gaelic costumes were also favoured to be worn by younger children when being confirmed.





Figure 7:

Group of dancers and musicians who toured America, 1900.

Photo courtesy of Michael O'Connor.





Figure 8:

Irish dancing costume: Worn by Mrs K Whelan (neí Moran).

Presented by her daughter Mrs B. Boyle to the Enniscorthy Public Museum, Wexford.

Dates from early 1920's.





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Figure 9:

Hooded cloak over dress, very heavy fabric, chain stitch with wool type yarn.

‘Tara’ brooch attaching cloak to dress.





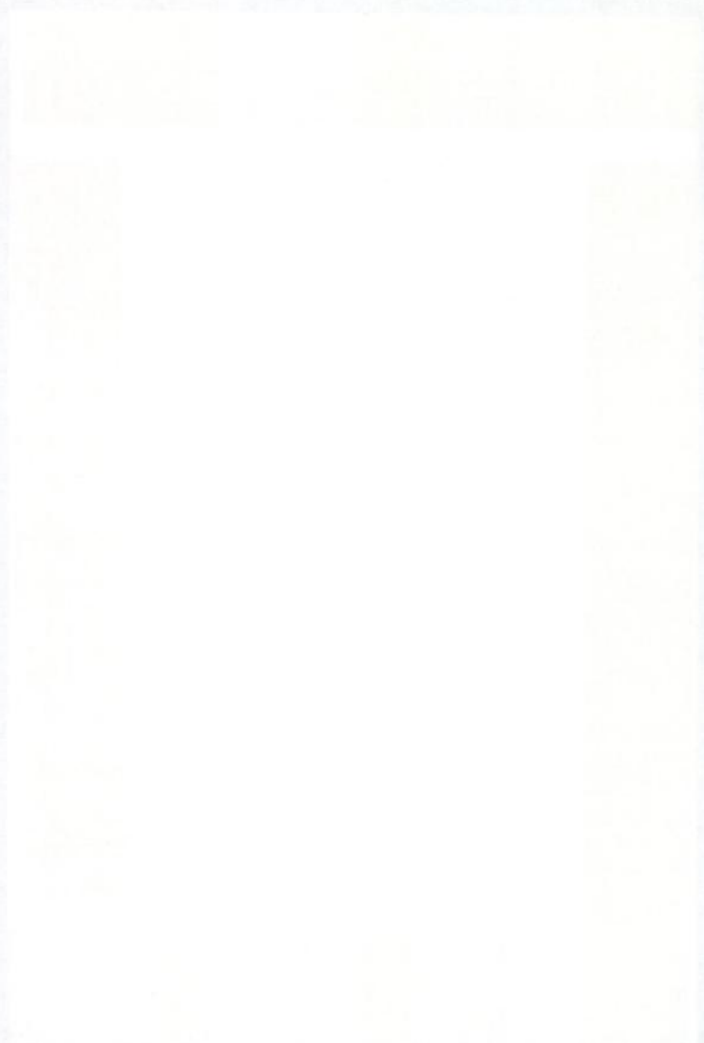


Figure 10:

1918, Annie Philpott, mother of Dr John Cullinane, in her “Irish dress”, as distinct from her dancing uniform.



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The white 'bawneen' dress was worn for this occasion and sometime later it was adopted as a dancing costume. The white bawneen Irish dress was worn for special occasions, yet the Colleen bawn hooded cloak and skirt with apron was worn as the Irish dancing costume. This however only happened at the beginning, as later in the period the bawneen white dress was shortened and adopted as the dancing costume. From about 1920 onwards when the colleen bawn style was abandoned, it was these "Irish costumes" that were adopted for Irish dancing. Likewise, the knee breeches were shed and were replaced by kilts as male Irish dancing costumes. Kilts (like Irish women's costume) had been accepted as dress by male members of the Gaelic League for many years prior to their being accepted as Irish dancing costumes.

At the Gaelic League's Oireachtas Exhibition of 1911 in Dublin, models of Irish national costume made by the Dun Emer Guild and Cuala Industries were displayed and similar costumes were worn by many women attending the event, while some of the men wore kilts (favoured at the time as a form of national dress for men). Convent schools were often thought to be involved with the making of national costumes. An Claidheamh Soluis, the Gaelic League's national paper, reported on 3 July 1915, that the Carlow Feis 'attracted hundreds of competitors'. The dress competitions were thought to be a challenge to the tawdry foreign fashions that were imported at the time. Costume competitions became a regular feature of feiseanna and supporters of Gaelicism including Irish dancers, were encouraged to wear styles of dress which demonstrated affiliation with the nationalist cause.

The Dun Emer Guild (named after Cú Chulainn's wife Emer, who was endowed with "the gift of embroidery and all needlework") (19), was a crafts workshop adhering to a broadly based Arts-and-Crafts ideology. It was founded in 1902 by Evelyn Gleeson, a follower of the Gaelic League and supporter of the Arts-and-Crafts movement in Ireland, and the Yeats sisters. Girls at the guild were employed to make beautiful things in the spirit and tradition of the country. "Irish material honest and true" with "deftness of hand, brightness of colour and cleverness of design" in "the spirit and tradition of the country" (20). The guild used Celtic embroidery in its





work. (See Fig. 11). The dresses made at Dun Emer were worn primarily by those attending Gaelic gatherings and by those members of the literate.

The decoration of the costume was an integral part of its appearance by the middle of the 19th century. The application of motifs such as shamrocks, round towers, the harp, wolfhound or sunburst became a renowned way of expressing Irish nationality (Figs. 26 and 27). At the turn of the century, however, these Irish symbols were not incorporated into the decoration of dancing costumes. This seems to reflect the opinion of the Celtic Renaissance generation who felt that the application of such symbols, e.g. the harp, often portrayed 'a shallow', sentimental feeling for Ireland, (21).

Findings of Irish antiquarians during the 19th Century had provided an insight into Ireland's historical past. George Petrie organised a museum collection for the Royal Irish Academy. This included the acquisition of the Tara brooch, found in 1850. Replicas of this brooch were often worn by members of the Gaelic League and used by Irish dancers during the Celtic revival period (Figs. 10 and 11). These brooches were symbols of a glorious past and its art skills. The wearing of Tara brooches continues and is integral with many contemporary Irish dancing costumes (Fig. 39). According to Marianne Quinn of the Cara School of Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, the brooches are not used as much now, for practical reasons, as the continuous pinning can damage the fabric; so they are pinned in place for decoration and the shawls are attached to the costumes by means of metal fasteners.

I have discussed how, prior to the kilt, the accepted dress for the men dancing was the white shirt and knee breeches (later on long trousers) with a green or black waist band. The knee breeches sometimes had ribbons at the knees and during exhibition dances the dancers often wore their most distinguished medals on the waistband, as seen in Fig. 12. The practice of wearing medals to adorn costumes for festive and exhibition occasions seems to have begun at the turn of the century. Medals won



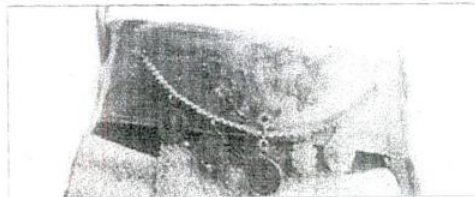


Figure 11:

Cora Cadwell, winner of National Costume competition, Tailteann Games, Dublin 1924. Her costume of green, purple and gold embroidery on green poplin was made by the Dun Emer Guild. Socks were crocheted by the nuns of Beaumont and her shoes by Whelans of Parnell Street. She later wore this dress for Irish dancing.







Detail of Cummerbund.
It appears to be embroidered
with a harp motif.



Figure 12:

The male dancer, accompanied by Thomás Mac curtain on the violin, is wearing fall breeches, shirt and bow tie (Cork, circa 1915). Fall breeches evolved in the early 18th Century, had a 'fall' or 'flap' buttoned up to waist level, covering the central opening of the trousers.







were attached to sashes or bodice fronts and for male dancers, to the cummerbunds or kilts - as illustrated in Figures 13 and 14. It is very uncommon today.

In 1901, responding to a request for his opinion on suitable garb for wear at nationalist functions, Padraic Pearse was influential in having the kilt adopted as a national costume for men, (22). The notion that the kilt was authentically Irish was popularised in Eugene O'Curry's Manners and Customs of the Ancient Irish of 1860. But, H. F. McClintock, author of Old Irish and Highland Dress of 1943, provides strong evidence that the kilt had never been worn in Ireland. A kilt is a type of pleated skirt which does not reach above the waist; it consists of one wide single piece which, when worn, is wrapped around from the waist with an overlapping piece in the front.

W. S. Joyce was an influential man at the time of the Gaelic League revival and an accepted authority on many aspects of Irish culture. He was President of the Royal Irish Society of Antiquarians from 1906 to 1908. His book The Social History of Ancient Ireland (1903) was an extremely popular and influential work at that crucial time, (23). Joyce's work did much to popularise the adoption of a saffron coloured kilt as a form of national dress for Irish pipe bands and a decade or so later Dublin Irish dancers (and possibly the Belfast Irish dancers) adopted the kilts with the subsequent spread of this dancing costume throughout the rest of Ireland. The most popular shade in the Irish kilt has been 'saffron' (a colour outlawed in Ireland by Henry VII) and a shade of dark green. It appears that we have based our male dancers' costume on the Scottish national dress just as we fashioned our first Ceili on the first Scottish social evening being held in London, (24). Kilts had been worn by members of the Gaelic League for some 30 years before they became accepted as Irish dancing costume.

Cullinane, (95) tells us about a newspaper article in Anon Cityweek, 1969 about Peadar O'Rafferty when he was 82 years old; it shows a photograph of him in 1911 "on winning the first Ulster Championship" (Fig. 15). In that photograph, Peadar is





Figure 13:

Group of Essie Connolly's dancers, 1925.

The dancers are wearing aprons of dark material over their costumes to display their medals. These aprons and medals were not worn during dancing competitions.





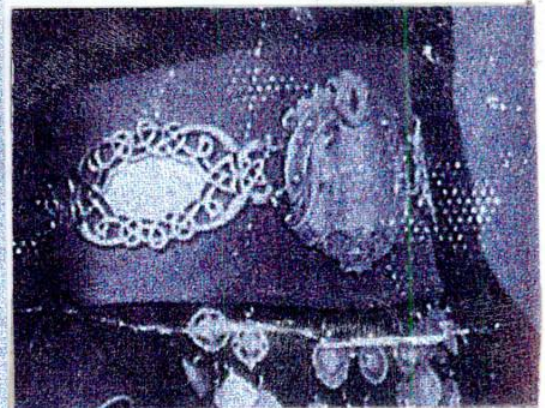


Figure 14:

Brigid Kelly, wearing the class costume of the Johnston School, Belfast (1930's).

Detail of the All-Ireland Championship belt worn.



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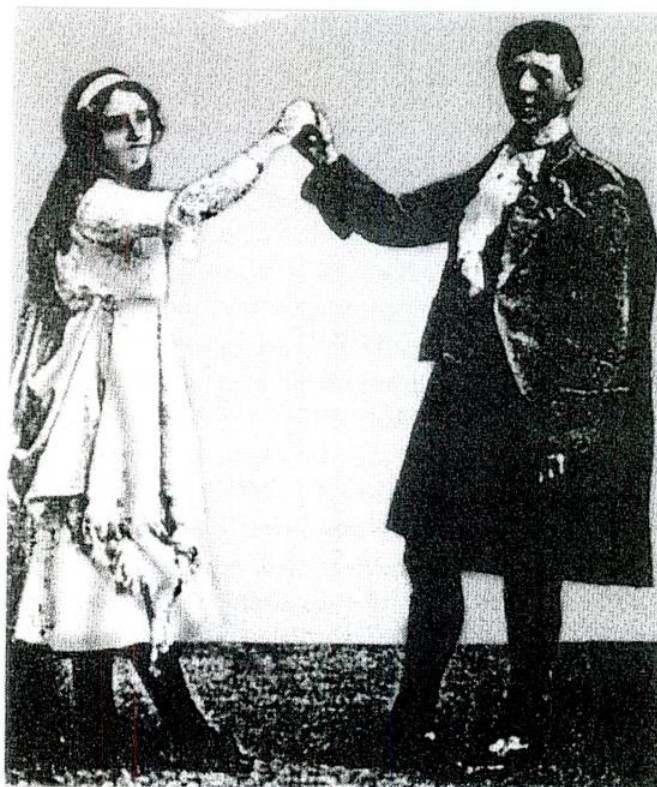
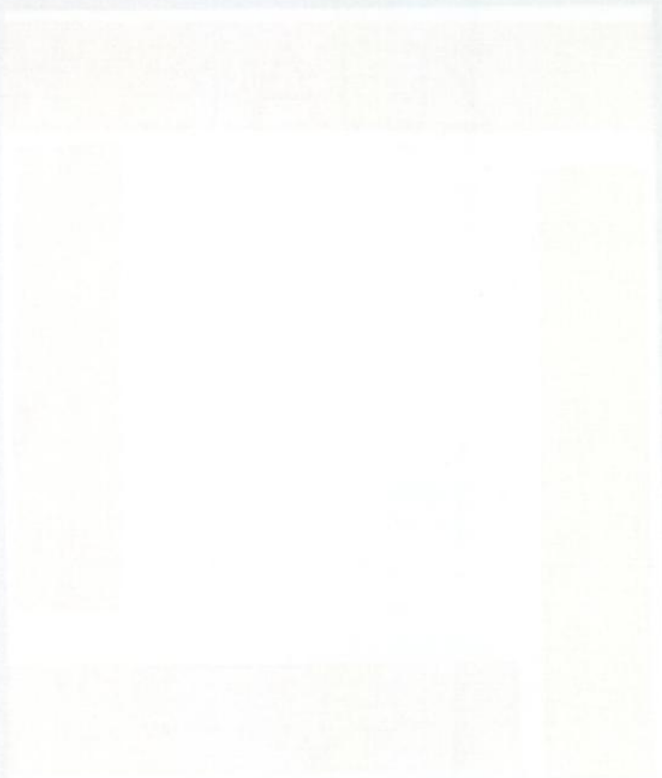


Figure 15:

Peadar O'Rafferty on winning the first Ulster Championship along with Maire McStocker. He is wearing a most interesting costume, including a kilt, 1911.

Possibly the earliest record of a dancer wearing a kilt.







shown wearing a kilt, although there is no reference made to the fact. This record in Cullinane's opinion appears to be the earliest record of a kilt worn as dance wear. While kilts are still worn as Irish dancing costume, those associated with the Gaelic movement have abandoned them for everyday wear.

The popularity of feiseanna led to an increase in the demand for tuition in Irish dancing. The national School of Irish Dancing was opened in Dublin in 1913. Schools began to open all around the country. Cormac Mac Fhionnlaoich, now one of the leading members of An Coimíún le Rincí Gaelacha, (The Irish Dancing Commission), opened his school of Irish dancing in Dublin in 1915. By then, costumes derived from the brath and léine were worn by Irish dancers. These costumes were made from wool, bainín, linen and poplin. Favoured colours were green, saffron and white. The brath, which is often referred to as the shawl, was rectangular or square in shape; it became popular in the 1920's and continued to be so in the 1930's and 1940's also. Braths were draped over both shoulders and secured at each side with Tara brooches. Alternatively, two corners were pinned together on the front of the dress at waist level. Over the years a cape version, attached to the dress at both shoulders, became popular, (Fig. 16). Shawls, fastened at one shoulder with a 'Tara brooch' and secured at the waist at the opposite side at the back, were another common variation (Fig. 29). Motifs on female costumes at this time featured small Celtic shapes or areas of interlaced designs (figures 6 and 8), harps, shamrocks and Tara brooches being the most common illustrations. Traditionally, everyday shoes were worn by both male and female dancers. By 1924 light ballet pumps were being worn by female dancers performing the reel and slip jig at the Tailteann Games in celebration of the new Free State, held in 1924, 1928 and 1932. The light pumps or ballet shoes that were first introduced in the 1920's were not of the laced type. They were held on the feet by a single crossed looped elastic which was attached to the back part of the pump (Fig. 17). Costumes worn for Irish dancing continued to draw inspiration from authentic or imagined ancient dress styles, rural peasant dress and fashionable European dress.



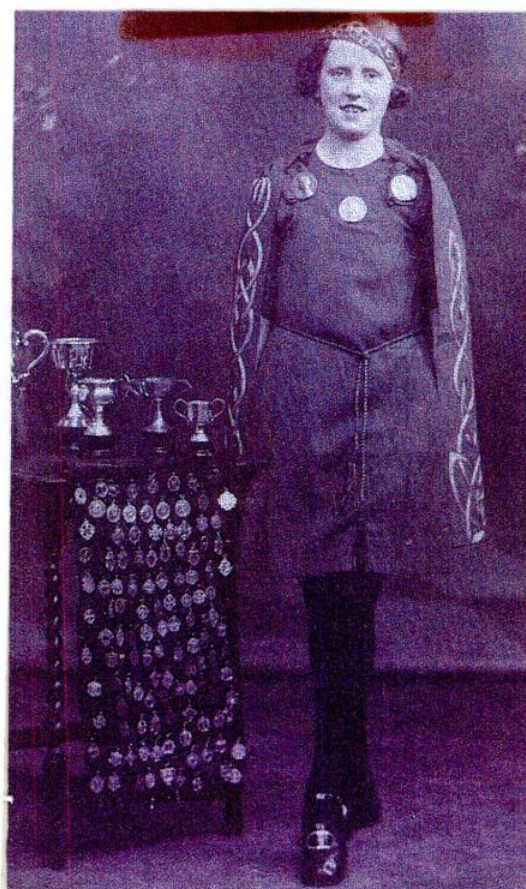


Figure 16:

Mona Kinsella, pupil of Essie Connolly, Dublin, wearing a green costume and three Tailteann Games medallions (1934), John Cullinane Archive Collection.







Figure 17:

Dancer wearing large shawl over dress, distinct embroidery on corners of shawl and on the top of the dress, showing between the dress (1920s).







Competitions for best Irish costume continued to be held at feiseanna. Costumes of this type worn in dancing competitions at the Mater Carnival, Dublin, 1922 were illustrated in the Irish Independent of 27 September 1922. Girls competing in dancing competitions at the Tailteann Games, wore similar costumes. After the creation of the Irish Free State in 1922 enthusiasm for Irish dancing continued to grow so that in the 1920's more dancing schools were established.

Lily Comerford opened a class for children in the early 1920's in Dublin. She was the first person to make a career out of teaching Irish dancing. Lily Comerford was the person responsible for the introduction of the class costume. She was the first to adopt kilts for dancing costumes. In the case of both her male and female dancers, the costume consisted of kilts with blouses and jackets (no coatees), (see Fig. 18). The jackets did not button or close at the back. This style of costume became very popular. The popularity of the kilts and their universal acceptance as Irish dancing costume was due largely to the work of Lily Comerford. One of her famous pupils was the well known Rory O'Connor, who did much to popularise the kilt in a typical Irish dancing costume. He also popularised Irish dancing on the radio programme 'Take the Floor'.

Lily Comerford's dancers, along with the legendary violin player Mae Keogh (O'Brien), toured Germany in 1936, the year of the Berlin games. They performed live for Hitler and other well-known members of the Third Reich, (25).

An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha was established in 1929 in order to promote Irish dancing and to improve the organisation of dancing groups and competitive events. In 1931, the rules of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha were approved by the Gaelic League. This indeed was a step to a powerful future for Irish dancing.





Figure 18:

Group of Lily Comerford dancers, with girls and boys wearing kilts as a dancing class costume. 'Tara brooches' also worn.





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Figure 19:

Circa 1929: Connolly dancers, wearing white loosely pleated dresses, green (open) jackets, white shawls attached by a Tara brooch on the left shoulder only and black berets with a feather.







Figure 20:

Early 1930's: Mona Kinsella (left) and Evelyn O'Connor in jacket and dress style costume, but without berets.





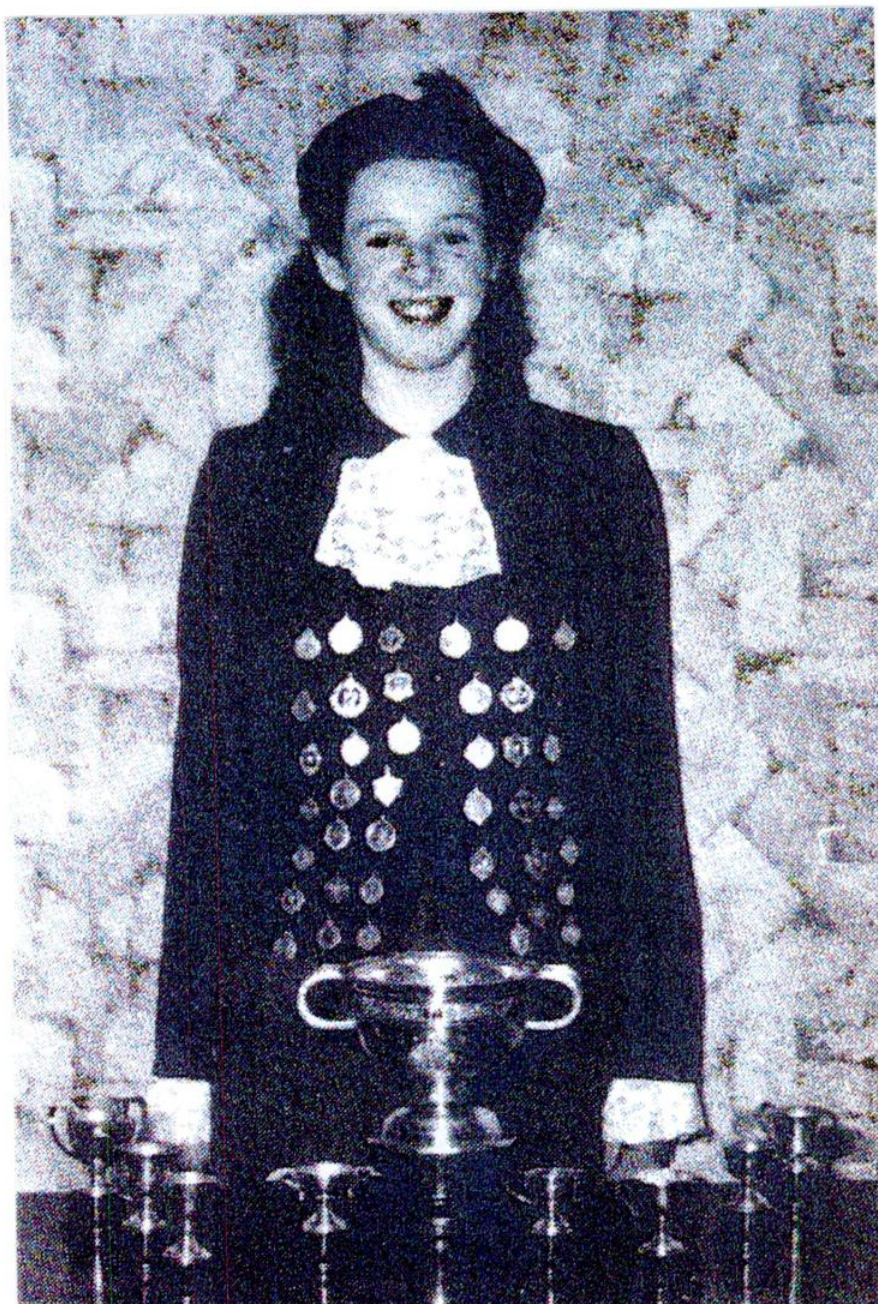


Figure 21:

Brenda Springer, winner of Feis Matthew, Cork, Junior Championship, wearing skirt and black jacket, lace ruff and cuffs, beret with feathers.

Class costume of the Nugent School of Dancing, Mallow. No embroidery.







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CHAPTER TWO

The rules of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha (established in 1931) directed that dancers entering competitions contrary to its rules would be unable to compete at its feiseanna. Before this, the British Federation of Music Festivals' programme included dancing competitions, so now dancers who continued to enter these festivals in the North of Ireland were unable to compete in feiseanna. The result was a split in the Organisation of Irish Dancing which remains today.

In 1972, the Festival Dance Teachers' Association was formed in the North of Ireland. It organises four festivals and an Ulster Championship annually. Until the late 1970's, the styles of dresses worn by Coimisiún and Festival dancers were similar, the circular skirt remaining popular. But festival dancers tended not to have any solo costumes and wear their class costumes for solo dancing. The rapid development of An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha's class and solo costumes in the last two decades can be attributed to increases in the level of competitive dancing. With these increases both nationally and internationally, dancers are continually seeking new and exciting costumes.

A dispute with An Coimisiún le Rincí Gaelacha in 1968 led to the foundation of a breakaway group called An Comhdháil Muinteoirí le Rincí Gaelacha (Confederation of Irish Dancing Teachers), which has groups throughout Ireland. The costumes of An Coimisiún and An Comhdháil are very similar.

Another organisation, Cumann Rince Naisiúnta, was established in 1981 and has, like the other organisations mentioned, groups throughout Ireland, England, Scotland and Wales, also reaching as far afield as America, Canada and Australia. This organisation, although smaller, tends to promote a more traditional style of dancing and costume.





The Feis

The feis, which originally from 1897 combined competitions in music, dance, song and literature, now only holds competitions in Irish dancing. The feis in Ireland has for a long time been an important part of the cultural life of rural and, nowadays, urban communities. It is popular now even for each dancing school to hold its own feis and invite other schools to compete. There is an independent adjudicator who awards medals to the winners from beginners upwards. At local feis level and at the national and world championships, there are separate competitions for solo female and male dancers, depending on the organisation. In group competitions, both sexes can dance together.

The major dancing competitions in Ireland are the four provincial competitions of Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connacht, the Dublin Championships and the All-Ireland Championships. The All-Ireland and World Championships are held annually at various locations around Ireland with approximately a thousand competitors entering the All-Ireland Championships.

The competitors for the World Championships held for six days at Easter, come from England, America, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, Scotland, Wales and of course, Ireland. Any Irish dancer can enter the All-Ireland and World Championships, but usually the teacher will only enter the best pupils due to the extremely high standard (Figs. 22, 23 and 24). Entry to the provincial championships is strictly limited to dancers within the regional catchment area; for example only dancers from schools in the nine counties of Ulster are eligible to enter the Ulster Championships.

Only dancers who have entered the Dublin or provincial championships can enter the All-Ireland and World Championships. Competitors from outside Ireland must have entered equivalent competitions in their own countries, such as the All-England, or the All-America Championships. The competitions are conducted bilingually in Irish





Figure 22:

Bernadette Chainey - Senior All-Ireland Girls Champion 1963.



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Figure 23:

All-Australian Championships (1998).







Figure 24:

Prize giving at the Irish Open Championships (C.R.N.).

Showing a variation in Solo Costumes in one age group.





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and English. The competitions range from under-5 for beginners to over-21 for adults (Fig. 25).

Class and Solo Costumes

With the increase of dancing schools in the 1920's, each school endeavoured to design their own distinctive costume. It was around 1922 that Lily Comerford introduced a class costume for all her dancers; "she was the first teacher to dress her pupils in a distinctive dancing costume" (26). By 1930 the wearing of a class costume was an established practice. The class costume Lily Comerford introduced for her dancers consisted of the kilt with a blouse and jacket; the jacket did not button or close and had a small shawl attached to one shoulder only. This style of costume became very popular with other classes later on. It was adopted and modified by Essie Connolly's dancers in Dublin around 1928 (Fig. 19). They wore the coatees over a dress and wore berets on their head with feathers in the berets, but sometimes the dancers abandoned the berets and feathers (Fig. 20). Teachers such as Cormac O'Keefe (Cork) and Peggy McTaggart (Cork) also used this style of costume. The Nugent School of Dancing in Mallow, Co. Cork, continued to wear black jackets over pleated dresses, along with berets and feathers, up to the 1960's but included a lace ruff around the neck and lace collars around the sleeves (Fig. 21).

In the 1950's and 1960's very finely accordion-pleated dresses were popular. They were usually worn with jackets or coatees and fine-pleated shawls. This style of costume is very rarely seen nowadays.

A combination of style, colour and decoration used in the design of the class costume allows the dress to carry the identity of the particular school. The pleated dress and shawl, with coatee style costume was an accepted class costume of many schools with slight additions and variations in accordance with the teacher's taste. Erin O'Daly used this style of class costume as late as the 1970's (Figs. 26 and 27). The class costume seen here is slightly more modern than before, but the minimal amount of





Figure 25:

Inside a Feis, St. Brendan's School, Shankill, Co Dublin, January 1999.

Competitions range from Under-5 for beginners to Over-21 for adults.





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Figure 26:

Ashlen O'Rourke (nee Flood) from the Former Erin O'Daly School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, wearing class costume (1975).







Llangollen International Eisteddfod 1984



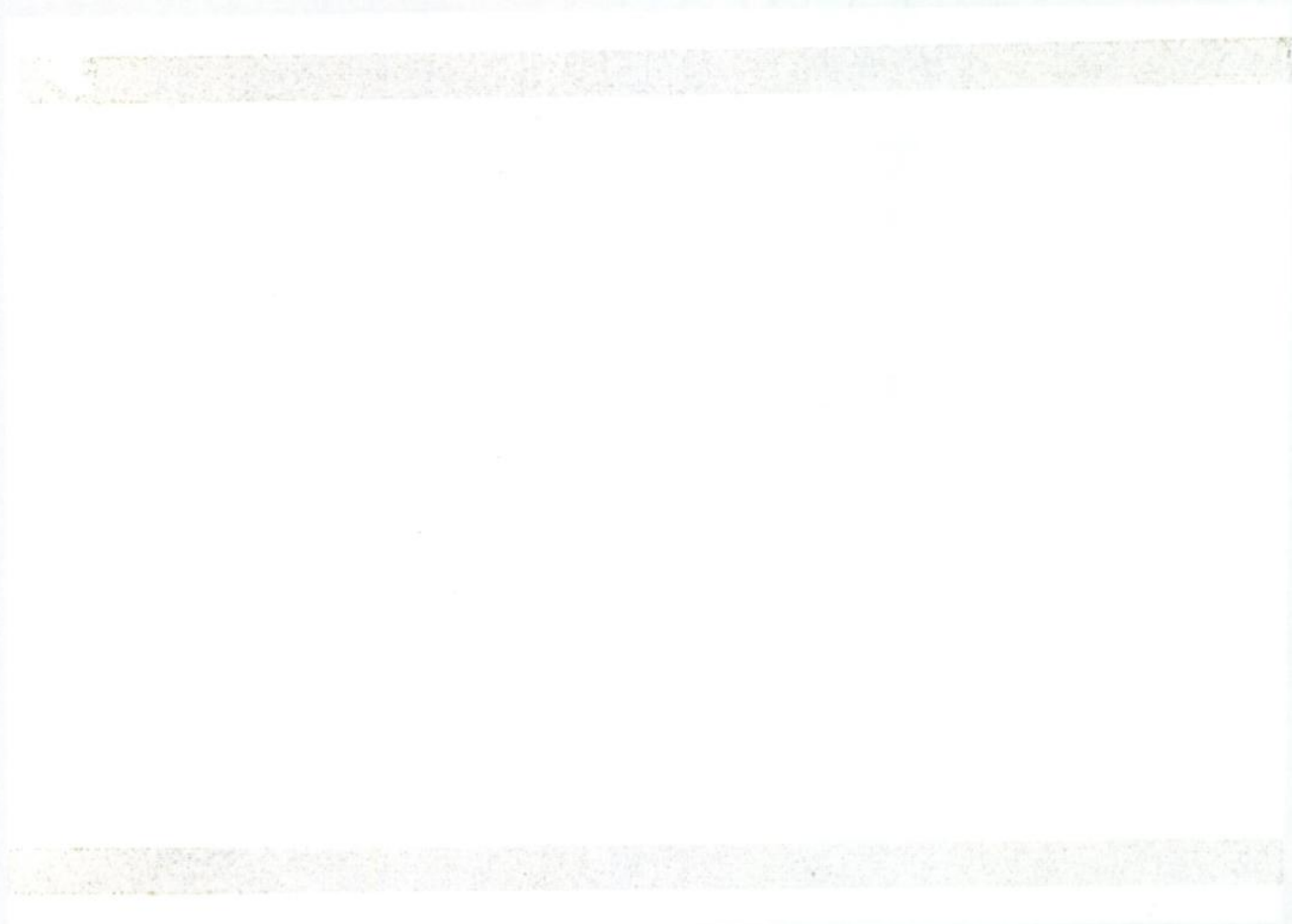
Figure 27:

Senior dancers from the Former Erin O'Daly School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, in class costume, who took part in the Llangollen International Eisteddfod (Celebration) in 1984.

Note: The same costume as Fig. 23, but in a green colour with green stitching.

White trousers for the men.







embroidery is present as well as the pleated dress with coatee. Sadie O'Shea of Greystones, Co. Wicklow, mother of Jacqui O'Shea, tutor of the O'Shea School of Dancing, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, and past pupil of Erin O'Daly, told me how in the late 1970's the fabric for the coatees was sent to England to be dyed the pacific wine colour and shipped back before the coatees could be made, (27) (Fig. 26). In the 1980's the coatees were changed for a more traditional green colour (Fig. 27). Erin O'Daly taught Irish dancing in Australia from 1950 - 1958 and was responsible for introducing the first type of class costume to be worn in Australia. This coatee with pleated dress style of costume became very rare in the 1980's.

In the 1980's the tendency for a full sleeved dress (Fig. 28) and a more fully flared effect to the lower half of the costume became more popular. This type of dress has now been replaced by a more stiffened dress with a small number of pleats (Fig. 29). However, Irish dancing groups throughout England and Wales sometimes have this more old fashioned style of class costume with a minimal amount of embroidery, as they would not have developed what is not fashionably available. This is clearly illustrated by the Bernadette Morris School of Dancing in Swansea, (Wales), (Fig. 30) where accordion type pleated dress is now very rarely seen.

The introduction of the wearing of the cord around the waist, knotted in front, falling in two parts to near knee level, where it terminated in a tassel at either end, the cord usually being of a contrasting colour to the colour of the dress, became a popular feature of class costumes in the 1980's. Marianne Quinn, tutor of the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co Wicklow, used this as a feature of her class costume from 1983 for a number of years (Fig. 32) until the wearing of the cord fell into disuse. Nowadays, this is very rarely seen.

Due to the large amounts of Irish Dancing Schools throughout Ireland and also other countries, and the continuing increase in numbers, certain Irish dancing organisations have what is known as a costume register. According to Jacinta Lyons of Cumann Rince Naisiúnta, the teachers that are members of the organisation must check with





Figure 28:

Class costume of the Suzann Llewellyn School of Irish Dancing, W. Glamorgan South Wales, (1998) wearing an unstiffened, circular skirt, full dress, basic colours with minimal design work.



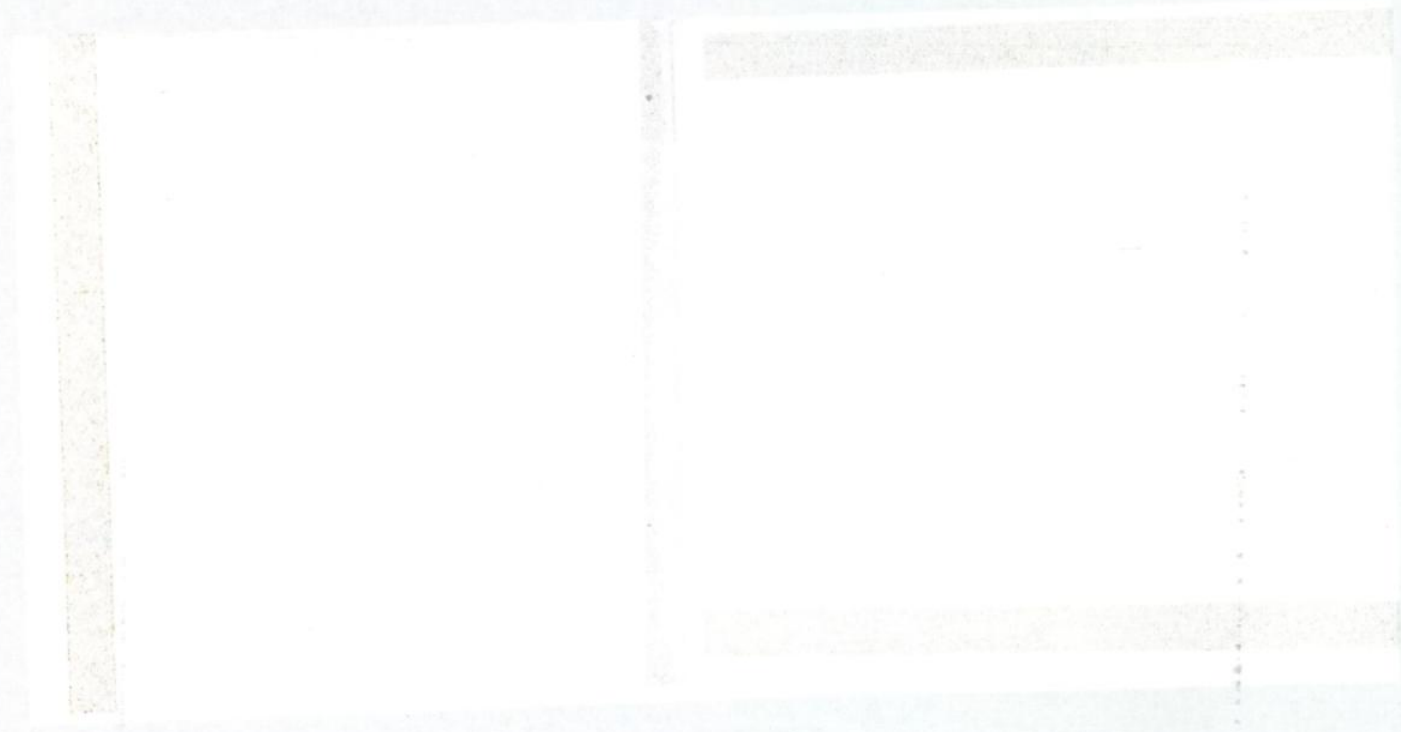


Figure 29:

Members of the Ní Aogáin School of Irish Dancing, Dublin in class costume (1998). Pleated centre navy gaberdine with white satin lining, unusual butterfly image used in the design for the front dress panels. Kite shaped brat with school name incorporated in the design. An example of a stiffened full dress.



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Figure 30:

Class costume of the Bernadette Morris School of Irish Dancing, Swansea Wales, (1992). Unstiffened basic full sleeved dress, lace collar and cuffs. Simple colours and design work.







Figure 31:

New class costume of the Bernadette Morris School of Dancing, Swansea, Wales (1998). Green velvet panelled dress with gold satin lining.





Figure 32:

Irish dancers receiving prizes at the Dublin Championships (1982), Dublin. Costumes feature the wearing of a cord around the waist.





the representing registrar before deciding on his/her costume colours and design to make sure that they are not duplicating another teacher's choice (28). This also adds to the continuous demand for variety in Irish dancing costumes.

In addition to class costumes, the majority of female dancers have solo costumes. These costumes are worn by the individual dancers when they perform solo. They became increasingly popular in the late 1970's and are the most elaborate Irish dancing costumes. The solo costume is dictated by the dancer's own personal colour preference, choice of design and embroidery motifs. The class costumes are still retained by the dancer to be used for group of figure dancing only.

The introduction of the solo costume, according to Cullinane (29), was not only due to the desire to be individual, but also to an effort to confuse adjudicators. It was often felt that when dancers wore all the same class costumes, judges could easily discriminate against them by maybe choosing not to place three dancers from the same school in the results. The solo costume made this type of discrimination more difficult. (Fig. 33).

Very quickly, a competitive aspect came into the designing of these solo costumes. Each individual desired to have an even better costume than other dancers. This rivalry has done a lot to give rise to today's extremely elaborate and extremely expensive solo costumes (Fig. 34). The cost has also more than doubled by the fact that most dancers require both a solo costume and a class costume for figure dancing. Even the class costumes have become extremely elaborate and decorative and, consequently, very costly (Fig. 35).





Figure 33:

Ken and Jacqui O'Shea, from the former Erin O'Daly School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, in solo costume, (1976).





Figure 34:

Solo costume in navy velvet, worn by Gail Flood (the Author), Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow. Featuring an inverted pleat, Irish crochet lace collar and diamonté. Made by Irish dancewear Ltd, Mary Street, Dublin (1993).

Turn-back triangular brat with scalloped satin edge, chain-stitch hand embroidery.

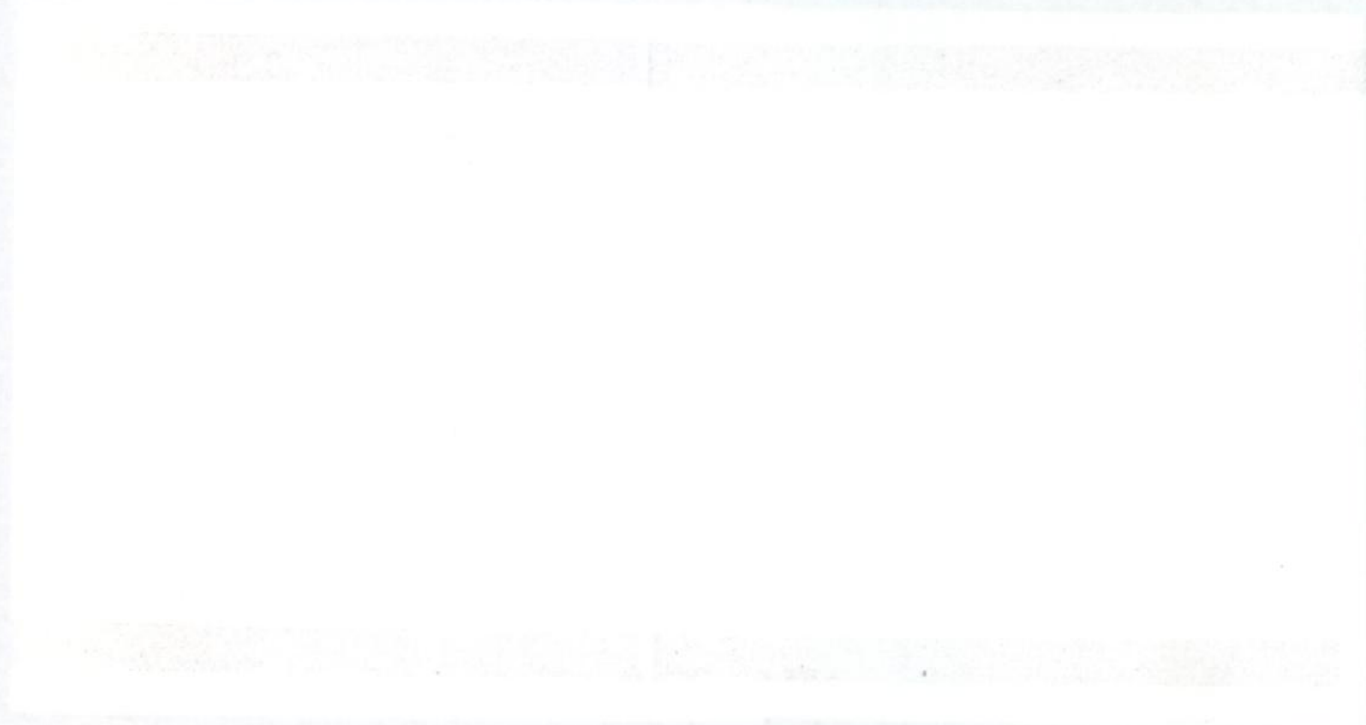




Figure 35:

Class costume of the Naomh Fionnbarra School of Irish Dancing, Santry, Dublin (1998). White gaberdine with mint green satin lining and wine velvet waistcoat. Hand-embroidered, featuring box pleat with turn-back triangular brat.







Features of Irish Dancing Costume

Fabric and Colour:

With the invention of synthetic fabrics in the 1940's, the woollen, linen and poplin industries went into decline. Trevira, made from polyester fibre, invented in 1967, and gaberdine are currently very popular. Vyella, polyester, twill, lirlle and terylene have all been used in making Irish dancing costumes. Velvet of synthetic fibre is very fashionable for solo costumes. Fabrics can be bought in fabric shops but the Irish dancing shops supply fabric that is most currently fashionable for dancing costumes. An Siopa Rince in Dublin supplies all the necessities associated with Irish dancing. It is run by two sisters, Phoebe and Siobhán O'Donoghue, and specialises in lightweight costumes. "As a qualified Irish dancing teacher, I noticed that dancers who lifted well in class, did not perform so well on stage, they were hindered by heavy dresses." (30). So they developed lightweight costumes (Fig 36). These enable the dancer to perform to the best of their ability.

The colour of the fabric of the dress is frequently chosen to highlight the enormous amount of embroidery and appliqué. Contemporary costumes appear in many colours. In the early 1990's, black velvet was the most popular material used for solo costumes as it allowed the bright colours to stand out more; now purples, reds, blues, greens and whites are very popular (Fig. 37). The earlier style of class costume in the 1970's and 1980's usually consisted of two or three colours at most, e.g. a jacket of one colour and the dress and shawl of another. Now, particularly with the introduction of solo costumes, there has been an explosion in the number of colours in use as well as in the various combinations being used.





Figure 36:

Phoebe O'Donoghue pictured in her shop 'Siopa Rince', with one of the new fashioned light weight costumes.







Figure 37:

Members of the Murphy-Brennan Irish Dance Academy, at the World Championships (1997) wearing class costume, by Christine Angliss. Appliqué is the main feature, birds are central motif for design.



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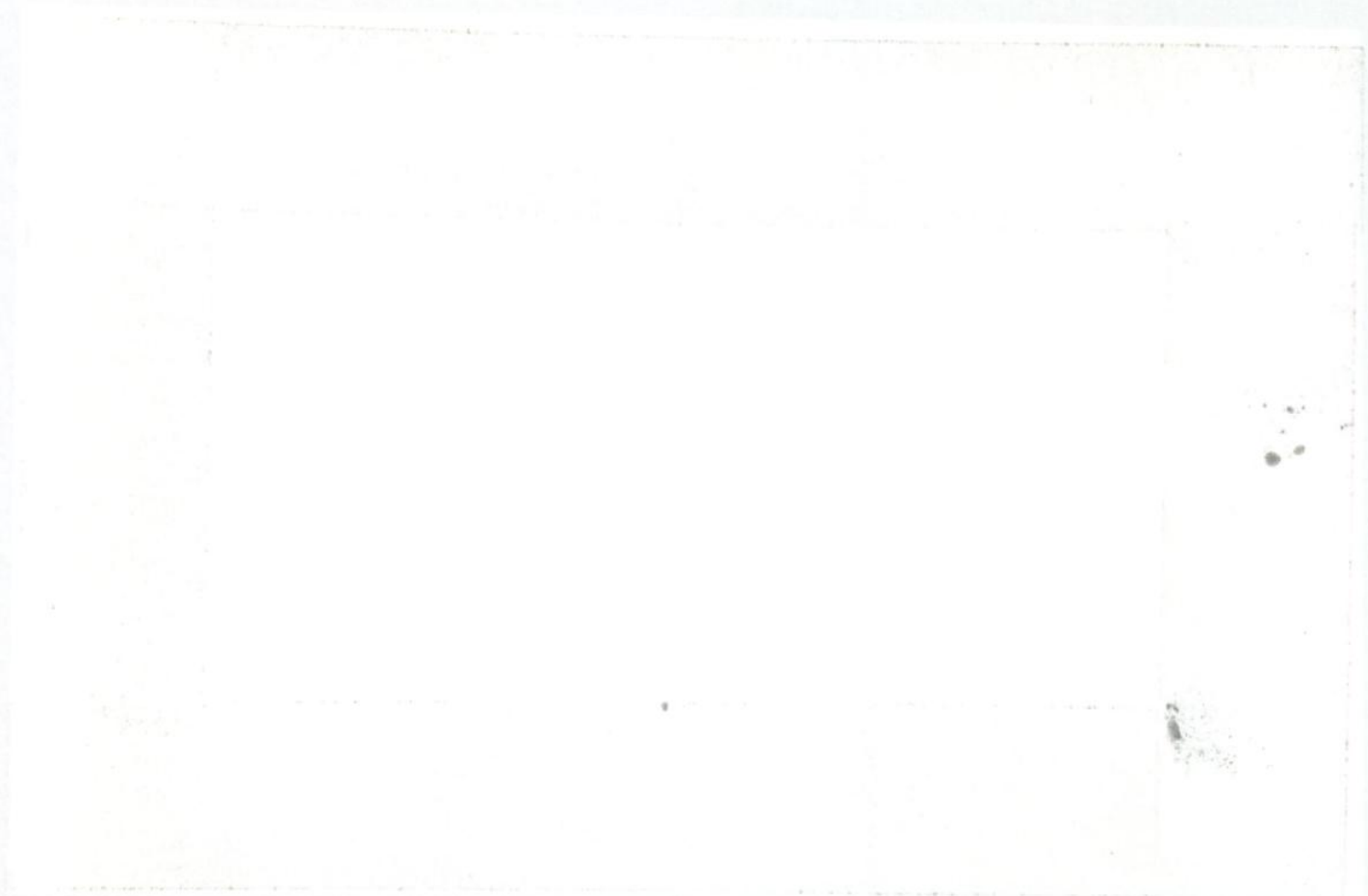
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Figure 38:

Members of the Fegan School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, pictured at the Wicklow Irish Dancing Championships 1998. Solo costumes, featuring variations of embroidery, appliqué, collars and motifs.





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Brat/Shawl Design:

Two of the most common and popular types of shawls worn by contemporary dancers are those of the turn-back triangular variety (Figs. 34 and 35) and the kite-shaped brat (Figs. 29 and 39). These shawls are what are now considered the most fashionable. Sometimes they are embellished with a scalloped edge. The size of the shawl has been decreased to facilitate vigorous movements in dancing, thus tending to become a neater and smaller accessory garment. Sometimes shawls are of a light, satin-like material or velvet and often unlined and softly draped from the left shoulder and attached at the right hand side, or from shoulder to shoulder (Fig. 40). Whether the shawl is of this type or the stiffened type, it is generally only attached at one shoulder. Shawls attached at both shoulders are rarely seen nowadays.

Most shawls nowadays are heavily adorned with embroidery and/or appliqué, and are frequently rimmed with a single scalloped border or even a double border (Figs. 41 and 42). The shawl has usually an over-all 'awl' shape, tapering gradually at the top where it is attached to the shoulder, usually by steel fasteners, as the 'Tara brooches' produced today are not made to take the weight of the shawl and so function only as decoration. The shawl tends to be tapered more abruptly near the end, although the end of the shawl may be straight, i.e. not peaked, and if so, the end line coincides with the line of the bottom of the dress. The shawl is attached to the left shoulder and the long tail end of the shawl is turned over to expose the colourful lining and attached near the right hip (Fig. 34). It may also be turned directly under only to expose a small fraction of the lining (Fig. 35). A very occasional feature of the shawl is a pleat inserted into it. The pleat is usually very fine and lined with a colourful lining. Pleats like this are occasionally used on the ends of the sleeves in place of cuffs or heavily embroidery or appliqué.





Figure 39:

Class costume of the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

Featuring kite shaped brat, attached by 'Tara' brooches at left shoulder and right hip (1996). Worn by Gail Flood (the Author).





Figure 40:

Kirsty Farrell, from the Christine Campbell School of Irish Dancing, Ashford, Co. Wicklow.

Featuring an unusual style of shawl, draping from shoulder to shoulder and unstiffened (1997).





Figure 41:

Class costume of the Ógra School of Irish Dancing, Booterstown, Co. Dublin (1998).
Kite-shaped shawl, single satin border.



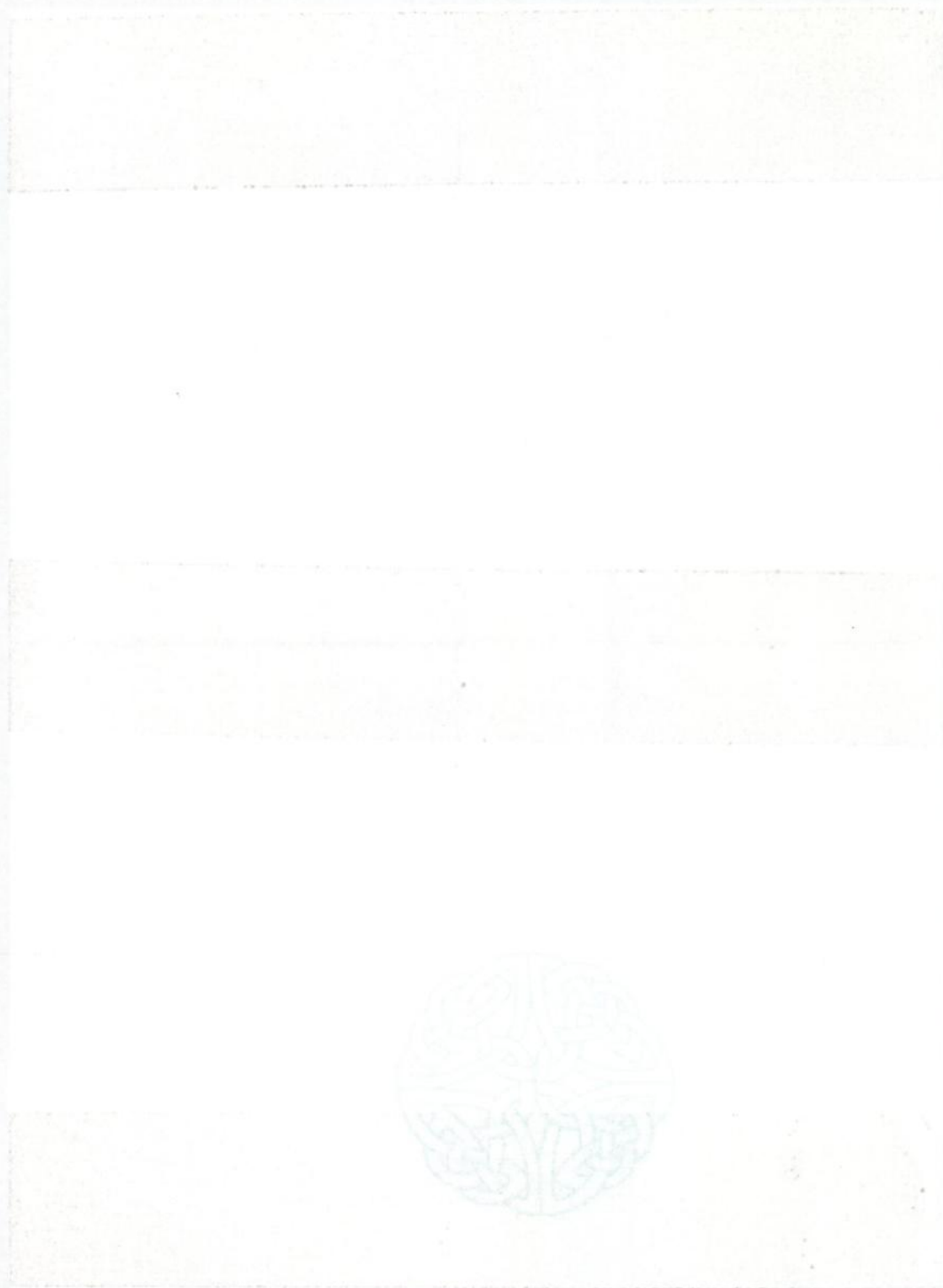




Figure 42:

Aoife Howe, pupil of the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, in solo costume (1998), featuring kite-shaped shawl with scalloped double border.







The designs on the costumes are said to be Celtic and based on Celtic ornamentation such as is seen in the Book of Kells or on ancient Celtic crosses. While this is true in the majority of cases, recently some designs have become very modern and it is obvious that they are not Celtic in style or origin.

Often the initials or name of the dancing teacher or the school's name are featured in the decoration of the dress. This is still a very common practice - Jacinta Lyons, tutor of the Naomh Fionnbarra School of Irish Dancing, Dublin uses the N.F. initials as the centre piece for her shawl design (Fig. 35), so too does the O'Shea School of Dancing, Greystones, Co. Wicklow (Fig. 57).

Original designs for embroidery can be drawn directly onto costumes, or heat transfers can be used. Seven Gates Designs of Drogheda (established in 1988) produces an annual catalogue of heat transfer designs (31), (Fig. 43). Individuals can choose which designs they want transferred on and can mix and match to create their own costume or, optionally, they can have their own design drawn up and applied onto the fabric. Seven Gates Designs offer a service where teachers can send up their designs and they are kept there so that one only needs to send up the fabric for transfer each time. Transfer designs are also available from Deighton's in England. Before this service was available, teachers often obtained their designs from books of iron-on transfers (Fig. 44). A form of stencilling was also used, but these methods proved very time consuming and less accurate.

The Book of Kells still continues to inspire a lot of the designs used. The images, however, are a lot freer and looser: harps, the Claddagh ring, the Tara brooch, knot work and snakes are still popular. A very recent development, over the past two or three years, is the practice of having a theme or story portrayed in a number of pieces of embroidery, especially pieces placed along a broad border at the hem of the dress. At the World Championships in 1996, Seven Gates Designs launched a new range of designs along the lines of this practice; these designs were based on the Salmon of Knowledge (Fig. 45), the death of Brian Ború, Setanta and the legend of Gráinne and



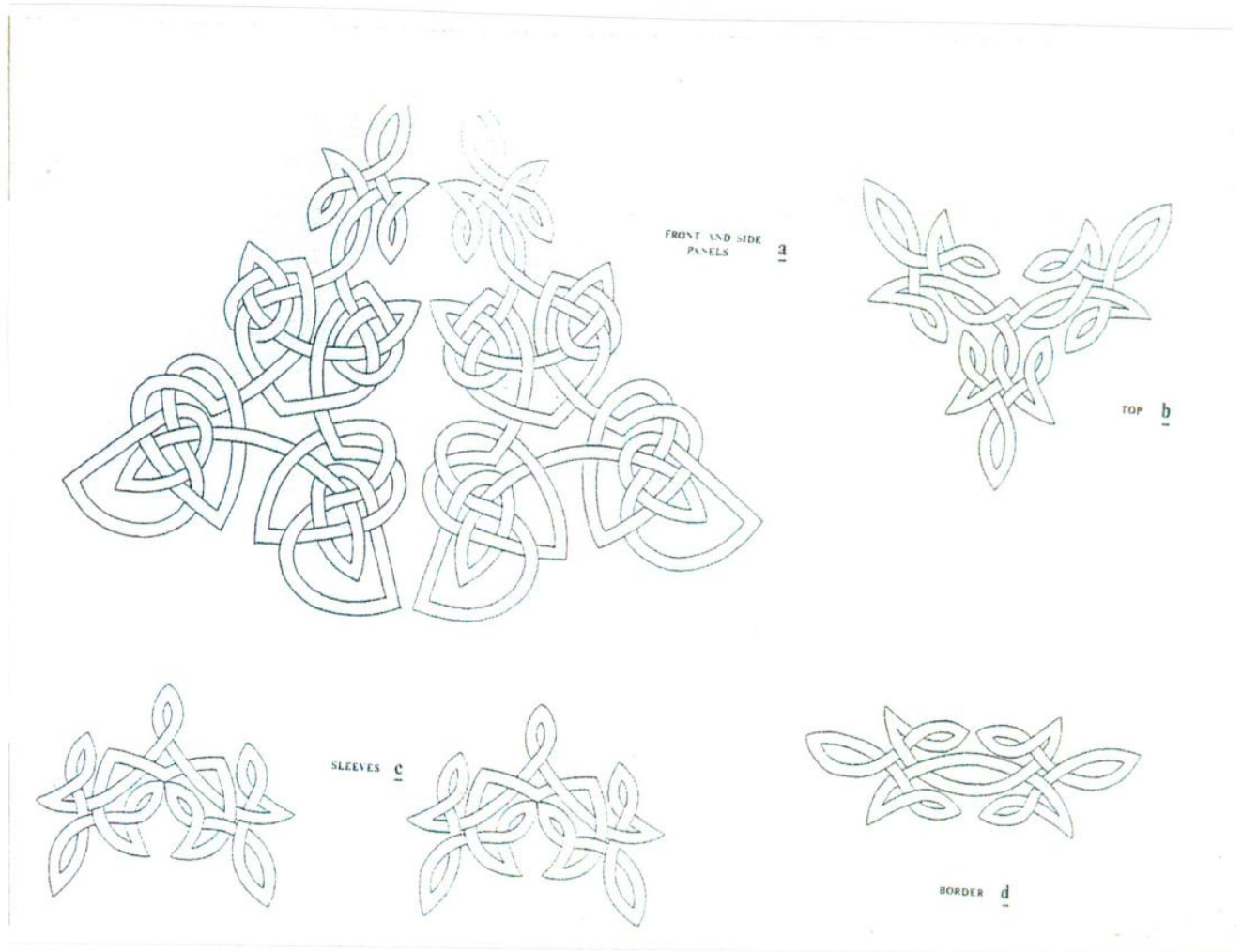


Figure 43:

Illustration of one full set of costume designs, from the Annual Catalogue of Seven Gates Designs (1992), Drogheda, Co. Louth.



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2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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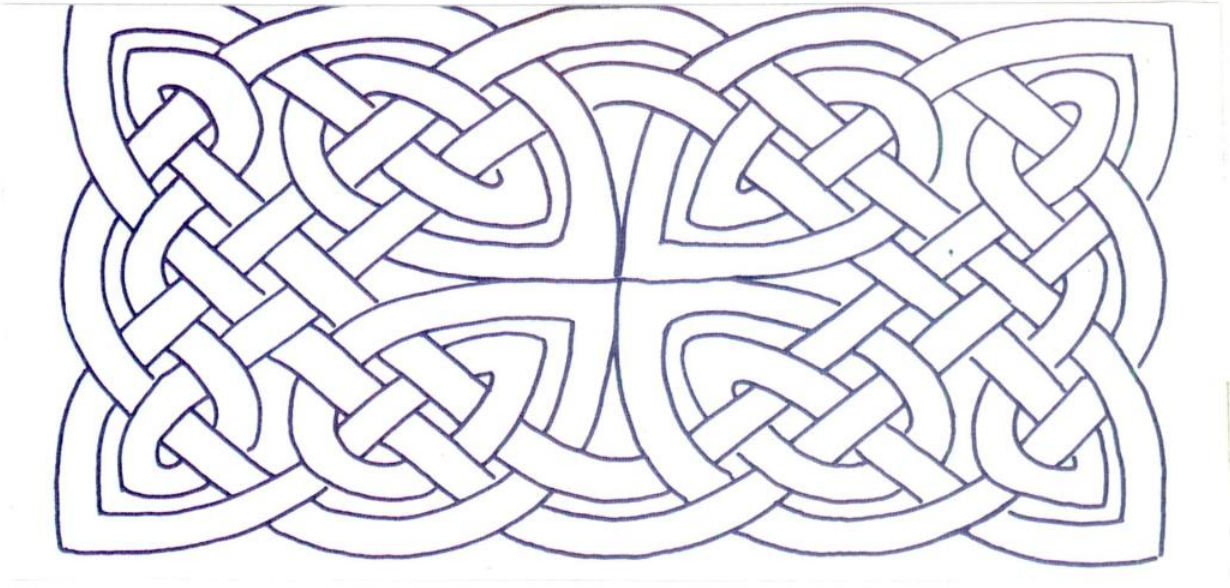


Figure 44:

An iron-on transfer, taken from a book of transfers.

(Courtney Davis, Celtic Iron-on Transfer Patterns, 1989).



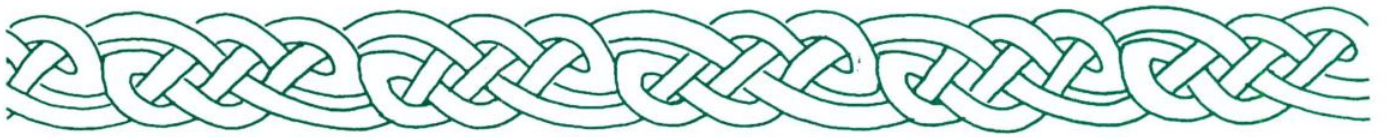


Figure 45:

Gemma Donovan, at the Munster Championships 1997, wearing heavily embroidered costume with the Salmon of Knowledge as motif.





Diarmuid, taken from bible scenes or old Irish tales (Fig. 46). Birds have been, and still are, a very popular source of decoration, providing scope for colour (Figs. 47 and 48).

Embroidery and Appliqué:

“One can possibly justify the enormous amount of embroidery and variety of colours on the dancing costumes by referring to the early Celts’ love of the same” (32). In the case of the embroidery itself, Cullinane writes that there are references in early Irish literature of pre-Norman times to the use of embroidery to decorate the tunics and braths of the chieftains and other leaders, (33). The hem of the tunic was the part that was most frequently embroidered. Cullinane also tells us that there is reference made to the daughters of the High King Cormac Mac Airt of Tara wearing fringes of silver and gold threads into the clothing of every colour. And so, from such early references, we can claim a right from our early Celtic heritage to use embroidery and even silver and gold threads, brooches and collars to adorn our costumes.

At the beginning of the century, hand-embroidered chain-stitch or, less frequently, satin-stitch was used to decorate costumes and embroidery. It was usually carried out in the dancer’s home. Nowadays, embroidery is more often than not carried out by dancewear companies or by individuals who specialise in it. Over the last 15 years, dressmakers and dancewear companies are using an increasing amount of machine embroidery and appliqué. Decoration now covers a much greater area of the costume (Fig. 49).

Synthetic threads used in machine satin-stitch embroidery, include rayon, neon, polyester and lamé. There is an elaborate range of colours. Before, class costumes would carry about three colours; now it is standard to have five to six. A lot of people still prefer to use hand embroidery, Marianne Quinn, tutor of the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, still has all of her class costumes hand embroidered. This adds to the cost of the costume, much more so on solo costumes





Figure 46:

Leanne O'Sullivan, from the Ní Anglais School of Irish Dancing, Clonsilla, Dublin (1998), wearing solo costume featuring a man playing a harp. Two-tone costume, heavily appliquéd with low rim collar.





Figure 47:

Katrina Lacy from the Kay Keeley School of Irish Dancing, Wexford.

Pictured in solo costume, wine velvet with green satin lining. Heavily embroidered bird motif with scalloped collar and shawl, (1995).





Figure 48:

Aoife Priest, in solo costume, from the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

Navy velvet with orange satin lining, swan bird motif, four panel design. Heavily hand embroidered with diamonté, (1998).

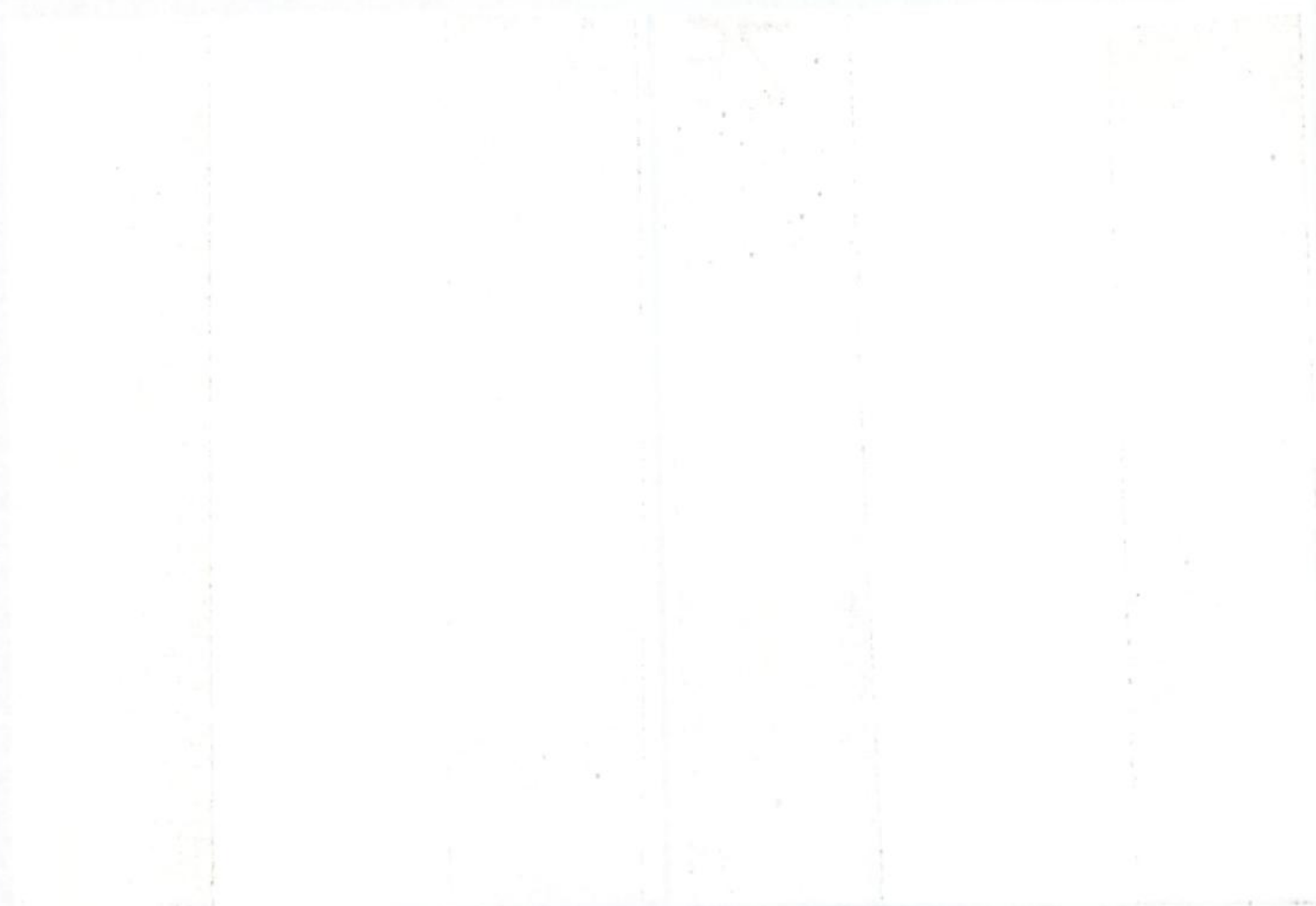




Figure 49:

Lisa Byrne, Ní Anglais School of Irish Dancing, Clonsilla, Dublin, in solo costume (1998). Heavily appliqué and machine embroidered two tone costume. Silver sequins sleeves and neck section. Compact design.





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where it can add an extra £150 to the end price. The colour palette for solo costumes is much greater and can range from seven colours upwards.

Appliqué is carried out using satins, acetates, velvets or metallic lamés (Fig. 50). Diamonté, Rhinestones and other forms of embellishments are popular options. They often cover the costume and the headgear as well (Figs. 49 and 50). The average price of a class costume today is around £350. Solo dresses however, if heavily embroidered and depending on the type of embroidery, choice of fabrics, and any unique features, can cost anything from £700 upwards.

Collars and Cuffs:

Lily Comerford introduced plain white collars and cuffs in the early 1920's for her own class costume (Fig. 18). Plain white collars and cuffs were more or less standard on many dancing costumes up to the 1960's. From the 1960's onwards the plain white material collars and cuffs were gradually replaced by more colourful and more elaborate ones which were usually of lace or crochet. White lace is still very popular, but often with coloured parts added onto the lace or coloured sequins attached (Fig. 51). The collars have also tended to diminish in size, or to be replaced by a 'military' style collar (Fig. 50). Marianne Quinn, of the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, states how the shape of the collar is often dictated by the shape of the design on the chest piece of the costume (34). The cuffs have become very elaborate and are usually covered with embroidery or appliqué (Fig. 45).

Belts and Socks:

The belt has formed an important part of many costumes worn throughout this century, as it was here that the dancers would often display their medals (Figs 6 and 12). There is sometimes a form of belt worn around certain costumes (Fig 51). An embroidered belt tends to be popular for boys costume with long trousers (Fig. 55).





Figure 50:

Meghan Reilly, from the Peter J. Smith School of Irish Dancing, New Jersey, USA.

Wearing a solo costume heavily embroidered with the majority of design in appliqué. Irish dancing pumps used as motifs suggest that themes are developing beyond more traditional Celtic themes (1998).



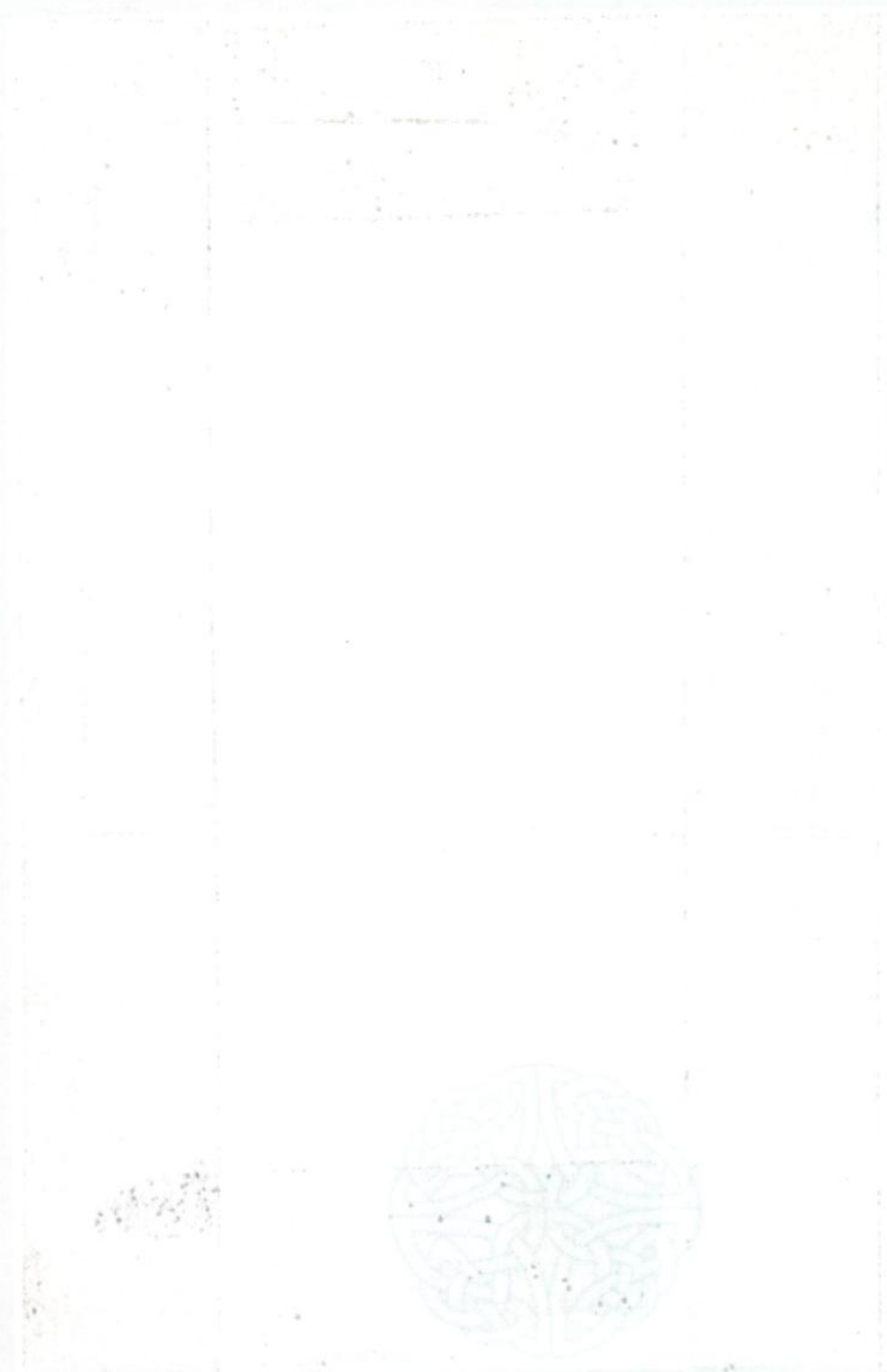




Figure 51:

Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray , Co. Wicklow.

Class costume featuring satin belt and diamonté studded lace collar, (1998).





From the 1890's onwards, it seems that long black stockings were worn by the older female dancers (Fig. 10) and short white ankle socks by the younger dancers (Fig. 11). Since the 1980's, there has been an almost universal changeover by dancers of all ages to wearing white socks of almost knee length, the type that are known as "poodle socks". These are longer than ankle socks, but do not reach the knee and they are of a rather thick nature, usually of a somewhat bubbled or undulated texture (Fig. 49). Jacinta Lyons of the Naomh Fionnbarra School of Irish Dancing, Sandry, Dublin, informed me that the organisation, Cumann Rince Naisiúnta, has a rule that states; on her 18th birthday a female Irish dancer is requested to wear black tights in competition, (34). This, however, is not a rule of all dancing organisations and it is mostly only popular in other organisations where the dancers wear them in figure dancing more than in solo dancing.

Shoes:

Traditionally, everyday shoes were worn by both male and female dancers. In recent years, pumps have changed to the crossed laced type, with a low cut both at the back around the heel and sides and also in the front, (Fig. 52). The crossed laced design and low cut of the pumps contrast with the white poodle socks, highlighting the feet and allowing the adjudicator to concentrate on the footwork. Pumps worn by Irish dancers are made from leather and are always black; no other colour has ever been worn.

For some years, even up to the 1970's, light pumps or ballet shoes were worn by the men also. Now the male dancers wear a lightweight shoe similar to that used for heavy dancers, but without the toe pieces. It was mainly men who performed heavy jigs and hornpipes, they wore their everyday shoes. However, around 1930, female dancers took to wearing heavy shoes to perform these dances; these have toe pieces or nails or, alternatively, fibreglass. Fibreglass heels, however, do make a very





Figure 52:

Georgina, Siobhán and Jenna, pupils of the Yvonne Saul School of Irish Dancing, Dublin (1998).

Green gaberdine class costume with bright yellow satin lining and blouse. Note the lining in the pleats.





artificial sound, while allowing dancers to sound 'clicks' with much greater ease. Due to this, legislation had to be introduced to control the number of clicks in a step. To assist the dancers to best bring out the 'clicks', the "bubble heel" was introduced in the 1980's. This is a protrusion of the fibreglass heel to make contact easier when sounding a click. Legislation was also introduced to outlaw those heels and to control the height and width of the heels. Heavy Irish dancing shoes, like pumps, are also black and of leather (Fig. 42). Buckles, often tied onto the front for decoration, have been used for many years (Fig. 48). These buckles are usually square, but there are also shamrock shaped types available.

Headgear:

In the early part of this century, some female dancers wore cloth headbands decorated with Celtic embroidery (Fig. 16). In the last five years or more, there has been an enormous increase in the amount of headgear worn by dancers. This is multicoloured and adorned with glittery stones, sequins and ribbons, and will frequently consist of up to three pieces: a multicoloured headband at the front, behind this a 'scrunchie' holding up the hair on top of the head, and at the back ribbons clipped on. Tiara-shaped headbands are popular, but the metal beauty queen type tiara has been prohibited. There are also rules that if any item of the headgear falls off during performance, the dancer is disqualified.

The enormous explosion in the popularity of Irish dancing, geographically and numerically, along with changes in the style of dancing, has resulted in a huge demand for Irish dancing costumes. And because dancing costumes have become extremely elaborate and expensive, an Irish dancing costume industry has developed here in Ireland to cope with the recent demand. Dancing costumes are designed, made and embroidered to individual tastes and supplied to dancers world-wide. The industry is not confined to the actual dress or costume, but includes all the various accessories: both light and heavy shoes, stockings, headbands, brooches, etc. This Irish dancing industry and changes in costume continue to grow and expand.





The Making of an Irish Dancing Costume

A class costume is worn by members of a dancing school group and the colour, pattern, design and style is chosen by the teacher of the school. A solo costume is picked by the individual and will be unique. It is very rare for any two solo costumes to be the exact same. To have an Irish dancing costume made requires the skill of a number of people. Irish dancing costumes today have developed into a mass of colour and stitch. The fabric is the first thing to be chosen. Two types of fabric are required. Gaberdine is the most popular fabric used for class costume, although velvet is becoming popular again. A lining or satin fabric is required for the secondary colour. Although the colours have gone from primary reds and blues to luminous shades of pinks and purples and the designs have nearly turned into story books, the shape and construction is basically standard throughout.

The fabric is cut by the dressmaker. Some dressmakers have their own patterns for costumes but patterns can also be drawn up by the dressmaker specifically for a certain person, (35). There are six pieces to the costume: 2 sleeves, 2 back panels, 1 front piece and 1 full skirt. Irish dancing costumes at present usually have an "A" line bodice and "A" line skirt. The latter has a number of very large inverted pleats. A single pleat in the centre of the dress with two others at the sides gives a two panel effect to the front of the dress (Fig. 52), whereas two side pleats give a single panel to the front of the dress (Fig. 53). Whatever the design, all the panels of the skirt are supported by the addition of pelmet stiffening which has been used in costumes for the past ten years, to the underneath part of the skirt. Depending on the amount of panels in the skirt, the amount of lining for the skirt will vary. All of this adds to the considerable weight and cost of a single costume. Class costumes tend to be lighter and cheaper and they use lighter fabric weights, less stitching and sequins. Solo costumes use a lot of velvet with satins, have a lot of embroidery and embellishment, and also are fully lined. This causes them to be much more expensive. The insides of the pleats are fully lined, with bright usually satin material (Fig 52), and are





sometimes embroidered or else finely pleated (Fig. 53). This adds to the effect of the dancing, as on lifting or kicking up, the dancer exposes the various colours of the lining and inner parts of the pleats.

The pieces of fabric are sent off to have the designs heat-transferred on, and are then ready for hand embroidery using chain stitch or machine appliqué or embroidery. The dress is assembled by the dressmaker and fitted on the dancer before all the trimmings are added.

A feature of Irish dancing costumes that has become popular over the last four to five years is what is known as a 'two tone' costume. This is where the "A" line top section of the dress and the front "A" line panel of the skirt area is a different, (secondary) colour to the main body of the dress. This secondary colour is also frequently used as a wide (approximately 6 inches deep) border around the entire hem of the skirt (Figs. 46 and 54). This border is often used to display a number of pieces of embroidery/appliqué which combine to make up a theme (Figs. 46 and 54), or it may be just heavily covered with embroidery. The top of the border, edges of the panels and pleats are frequently trimmed with a tertiary colour.

A secondary colour is frequently used to form a deep cuff at the end of the sleeve. These cuffs may be up to twelve inches deep, frequently with a peaked top and often rimmed with a tertiary colour (Fig. 54), they also display a lot of embroidery/appliqué. Where these cuffs are not present, the end of the sleeve is usually covered with embroidery/appliqué (Fig. 54). Over the last four to five years these cuffs have replaced the lace or crochet cuffs that were popular in the 1970's - 1980's, (Fig. 33). Also, the crochet or lace collars (Figs. 34 and 41), have largely been replaced by small upright collars of a "military" or "Chinese" style which are often referred to as mandarin collars, so that the collar is an upright extension of the top of the dress (Figs 53 and 54).





Figure 53:

Jacquí O'Shea (right), tutor of the O'Shea School of Irish Dancing, Greystones, Co. Wicklow in solo costume, featuring embroidered satin lining between pleats.





Figure 54:

Mary Ann Baterip, Fry-Days School Kent.

Wearing two-tone solo costume, navy velvet, pink satin secondary colour and yellow piping. 'Military' collar. Appliqué used to highlight Claddagh ring motif.







This, at first, was only introduced in solo costumes due to individual tastes, but now with class costumes becoming more and more decorative and elaborate, teachers, e.g. Jacqui O'Shea, tutor of the O'Shea School of Irish Dancing, Greystones, Co. Wicklow, are "trying to cut the cost of costumes by having a solo type, more elaborate class costume". Ms. O'Shea, who originally had lace collars on gaberdine costumes (Fig 56), changed to having mandarin collars on velvet costumes (Fig. 57).

This results in dancers not feeling the need to have two costumes. The 'Chinese' or 'Mandarin' collar has been a popular feature in everyday fashion over the past number of years. This may have influenced individuals who wanted to change the style of Irish dancing costumes, to modernise or make them 'fashionable' by bringing in fashion features of everyday dress.

Nowadays, an expert can identify which school a dancer attends from simply examining the dress's colour and design. When a dancer wears the costume of their school they are not only representing themselves, but also their teacher and fellow pupils. Therefore, Irish dancing costumes portray a lot more than meets the eye. At present, there is a move for dancers to wear a simpler form of dress and return to the plain style of dress worn by peasants two hundred years ago. This may be the result of many things, one being that costumes have been pushed to the extreme and need to totally revert. The other being the influence of the show 'Riverdance', which has brought new meaning to style in Irish dancing costumes.





Figure 55:

Male dancer, wearing long trousers with an embroidered belt.





Figure 56:

Class costume of the O'Shea School of Irish Dancing, Greystones, Co. Wicklow (1996).

Featuring Navy gaberdine costumes with lace collars.





Figure 57:

Class costume of the O'Shea School of Irish Dancing, Greystones, Co. Wicklow (1998).

Featuring navy velvet costumes with 'military' style collars.



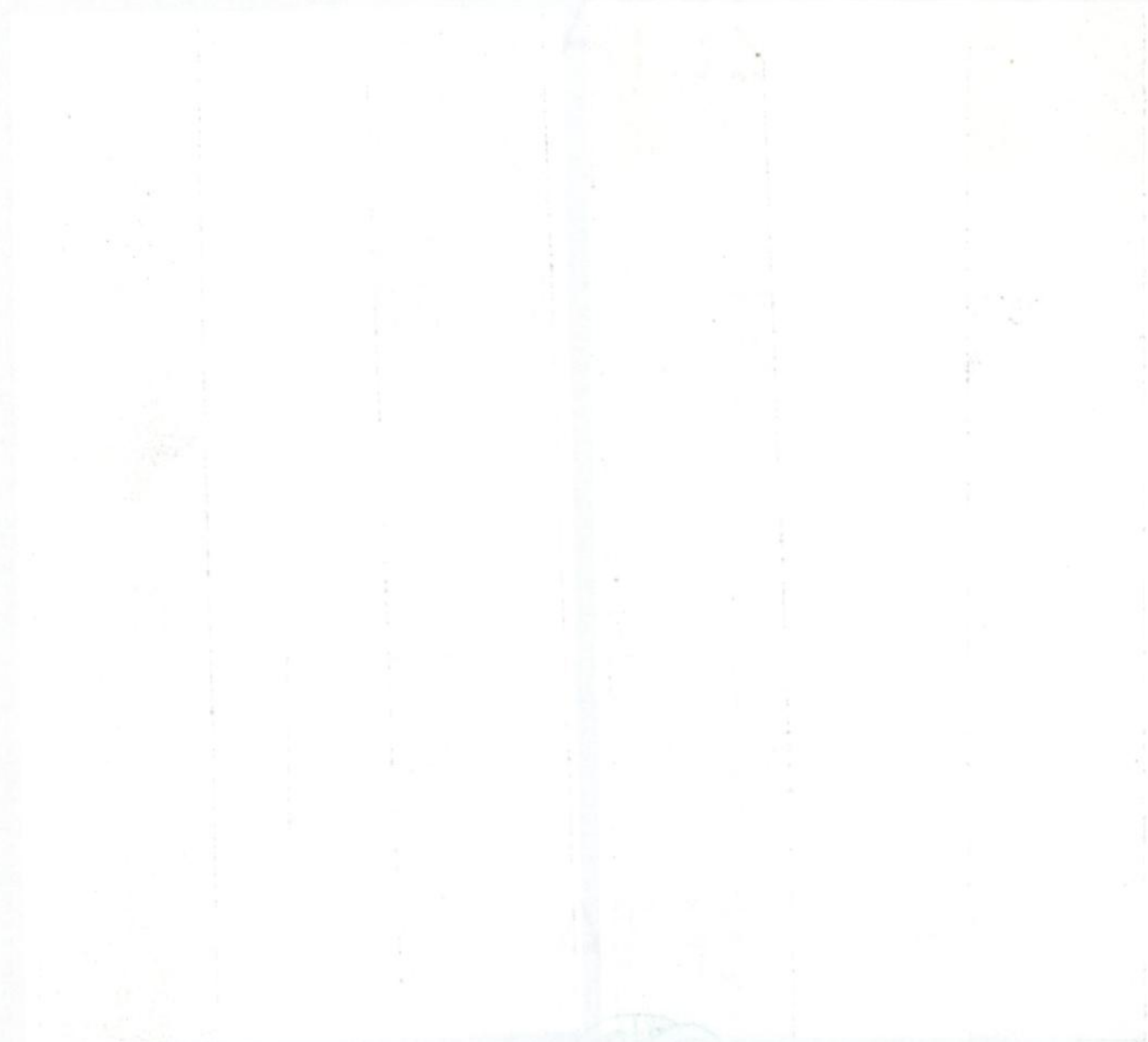




Figure 58:

Yvonne Saul, tutor of the Saul School of Irish Dancing, Dublin, in solo costume (1992), with male dancer in kilt.





Figure 59:

Yvonne Saul, tutor of the Saul School of Irish Dancing, Dublin, pictured in solo costume (1992).





Figure 60:

Group of Irish dancers in solo costumes, Dublin, October 1992. St. Enda's School of Irish Dancing, Dublin.

Notice the variety of costumes.







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Chapter Two

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CHAPTER THREE

Irish dancing has never been as popular as it is at present. The number of dancers, teachers and adjudicators has increased continually over the past decade. This has understandably resulted in the development of a much more extreme and elaborate form of dress.

Riverdance

One of the most successful stage shows ever to emerge from Ireland is 'Riverdance'. The concept for 'Riverdance' began as a seven minute interval act during the Eurovision Song Contest in Dublin in April 1994, when it was transmitted to an estimated 300 million viewers world-wide.

Although much has been written about the unique style of Irish dance, which insists on keeping the top of the body immobile, the acknowledged authority on the traditional music and dancing of Ireland, the late Brendan Breathnach, believed that it had more to do with style than with the suppression of sensuality. In his book 'Folk Music and Dances of Ireland', he wrote; "The good dancers kept the body rigid, moving only from the hips down and with the arms extended straight at the side, the good dancer could dance on eggs without breaking them and hold a pan of water on his head without spilling a drop".

Séamus O'Sé who runs the O'Shea School of Irish Dancing, Dublin, recalls that the World Irish Dancing Championships were established in 1969 and continue to expand and that the first American to be declared a World Champion was a young man from Chicago, Michael Flatley (Fig. 61) (36). Vice President of An Coimisiún le Rincí



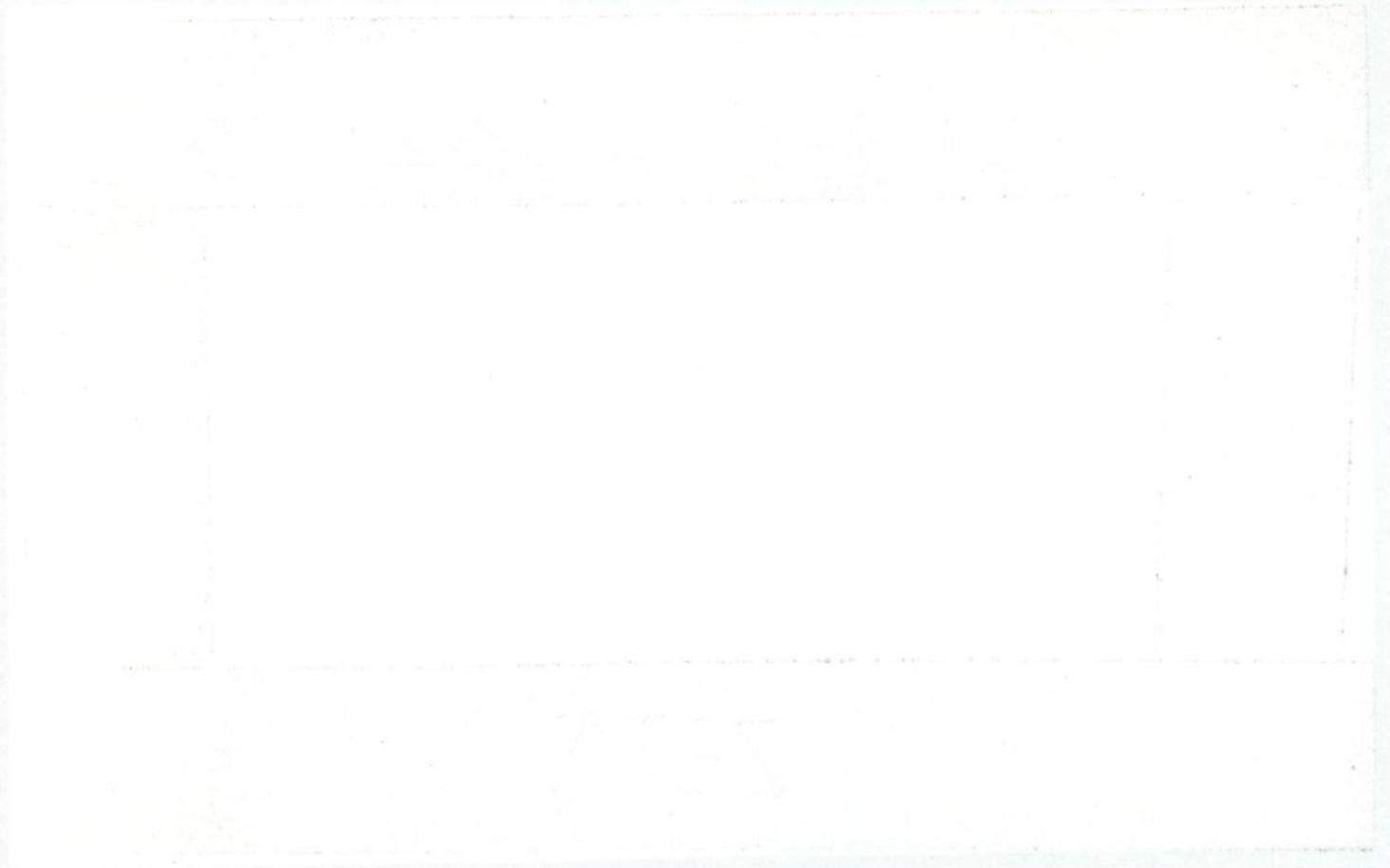


Figure 61:

Michael Flatley, with his Lord of the Dance troupe (1996), wearing leather trousers and sequins shirt.



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Gaelacha, Séamus O'Sé says "It took 'Riverdance', presented and packaged in a new and exciting format, to awaken the people of Ireland to the rich heritage of our traditional dance." Perhaps, too, it has shown that innovation and imagination need not damage a living tradition, but can actually enhance it.

'Riverdance' rescued Irish dancing from the cultural commissars, reclaiming its sensuality with its simple costumes and flowing hair while celebrating its traditions and skills passed through generations. The resurrection of traditional Irish dancing on an international stage came after Irish music had taken its place as an important strand of contemporary popular culture. The Irish groups U2 and the Cranberries were already major influences in popular music all over the world when 'Riverdance' made its debut in the Eurovision Song Contest and went on and became a theatrical phenomenon and a metaphor for a new Ireland dancing into the twenty-first century.

The show has travelled world-wide and, over the past two years, this heady mix of Celtic chutzpah and cultural glitz had become one of the most successful and innovative theatrical ventures on the stage of three continents. Its international recognition gave Ireland something of a cultural grand slam, coming in the same year that Irish poet Séamus Heaney won the Nobel prize for literature. 'Riverdance', the show, is now part of an Irish cultural commonwealth, blunting the hard edges, dividing high art and vulgar entertainment where the nation's artists are now sharing their inheritance with the rest of the world.

The original music was released as a single and held the Number 1 position in the Irish charts for 18 weeks in 1994 and to date, four million 'Riverdance' videos have been sold. The majority of the dancers selected for the shows are those who have reached the All-Ireland and World Championship level. These successful shows have for the first time made it possible for champion Irish dancers to pursue a successful career in Irish dancing. Other shows, including 'Lord of the Dance' (1996) continued the trend.





A very different, modern style of dress was adopted for those shows. Though most female dancers still wear the most elaborate style of costume, the 'Riverdance' outfits have had a considerable impact, making new concepts of costume design possible for dancers (Figs. 62, 63 and 64). Dresses in the new idiom are lighter than traditional costumes, with no pelmet stiffening, much shorter length of skirt, both facilitating ease of movement. Popular fabrics include velvet and chiffon. Velvet for the bodice of the dresses and chiffon for the skirts (Fig. 65). Braiding or ribbon is used to decorate small areas (Fig. 64), glittering beads and sequins to add sparkle; if embroidery is used, less complicated motifs decorate much smaller areas of the dress (Fig. 65). The introduction of lace-like fabrics for the sleeves and neck areas make the dresses look more elegant, mature and have a sexy appeal (Fig. 66). Being simpler in design and construction, these costumes are less expensive to buy.

The wearing of leatherette trousers by the men in these shows, 'Riverdance' and 'Lord of the Dance' (Fig. 61) has helped to fashion long trousers for male dancers instead of kilts, with stylish, brightly coloured shirts worn without a tie and sometimes with a cummerbund (Fig. 66) and/or a jacket or waistcoat, emphasising the waist and legs. We can see the influence in competition dress for boys when we look at the satin colourful shirts and long trousers worn by all the boys in the 1998 Australian Championships (Fig. 67).

The costume designer for 'Riverdance', Jen Kelly, worked with Moya Doherty, John McColgan and Robert Ballagh to "capture the look, spirit and essence of the show" (37). Kelly said the emphasis was on dance, and the fabrics and colours were chosen to compliment what he describes as "the Riverdance Palette" (37). He designed every costume in the show which he says has changed significantly from the early days; the original clothing budget was £16,000, whereas the current costumes cost some £80,000. Jen Kelly hopes the girls' costumes look gentle in their Irishness (Fig. 68) and the boys' costumes, rugged, (Fig. 68). Ironically, the Ulster Museum in Belfast picked out one of his 'Riverdance' costumes as 'a contemporary look for the '90's'. Some very specialist requirements were needed for 'Riverdance':



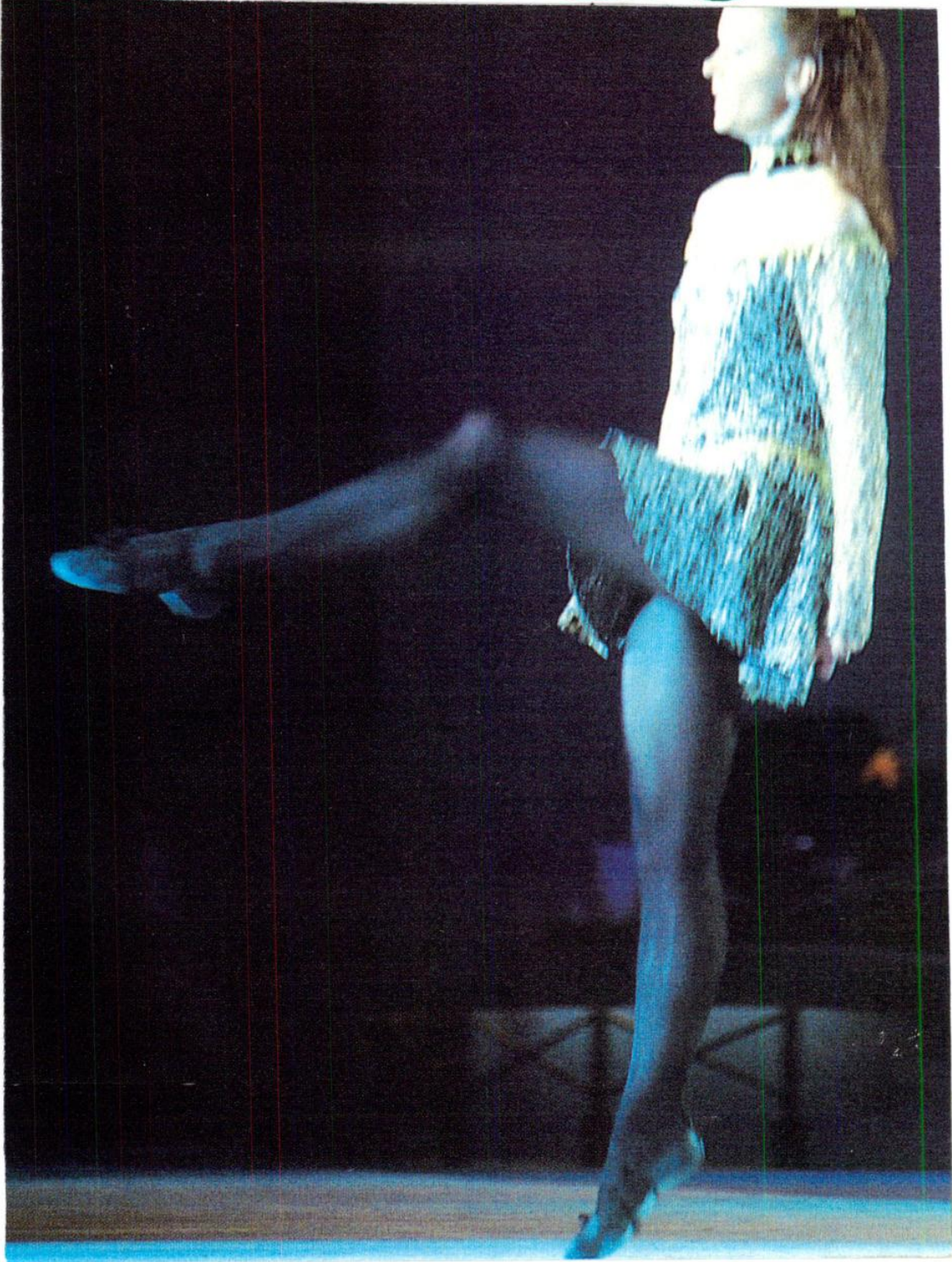
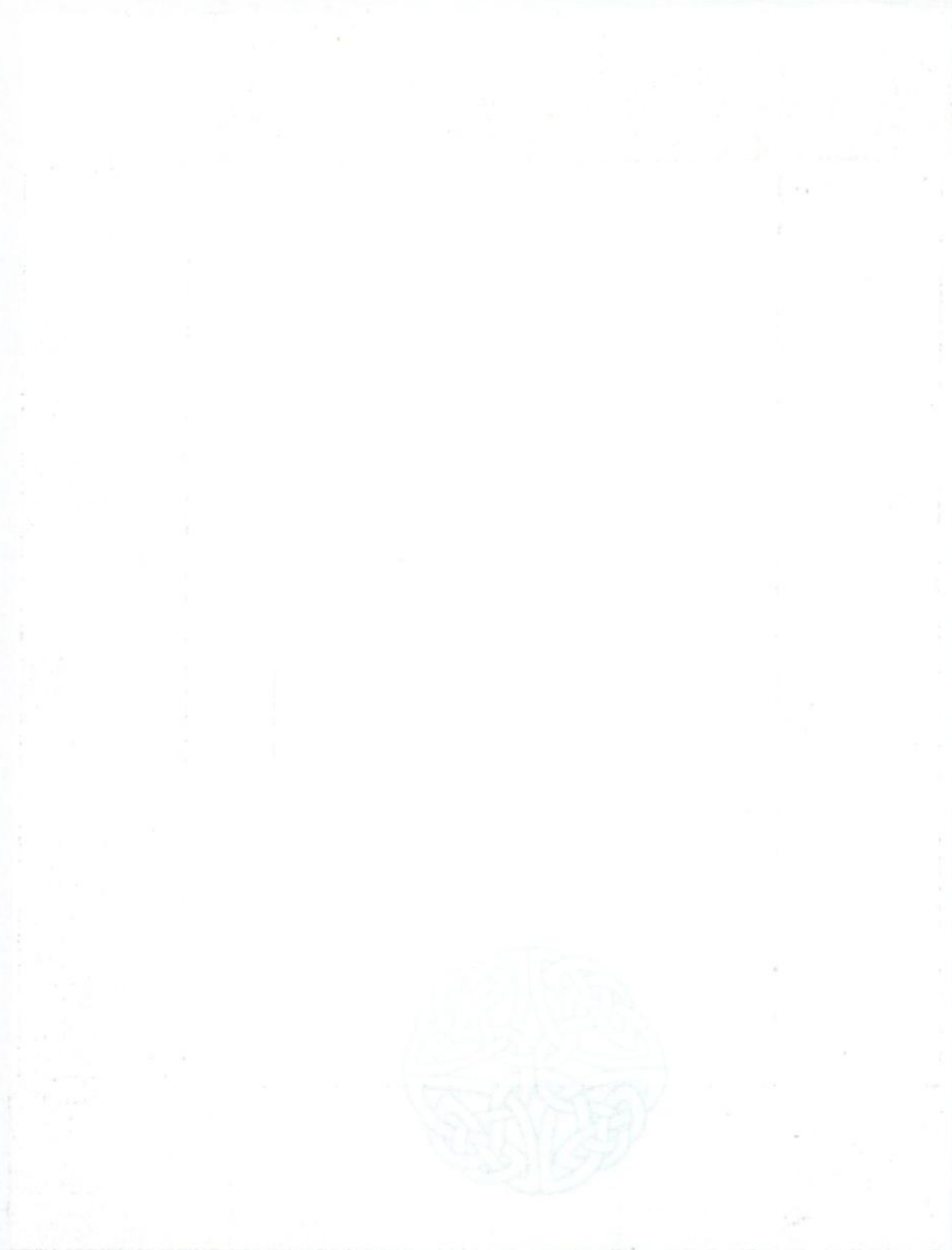


Figure 62:

Jean Butler, 'Riverdance' (1996).

White lace dress worn with black tights.





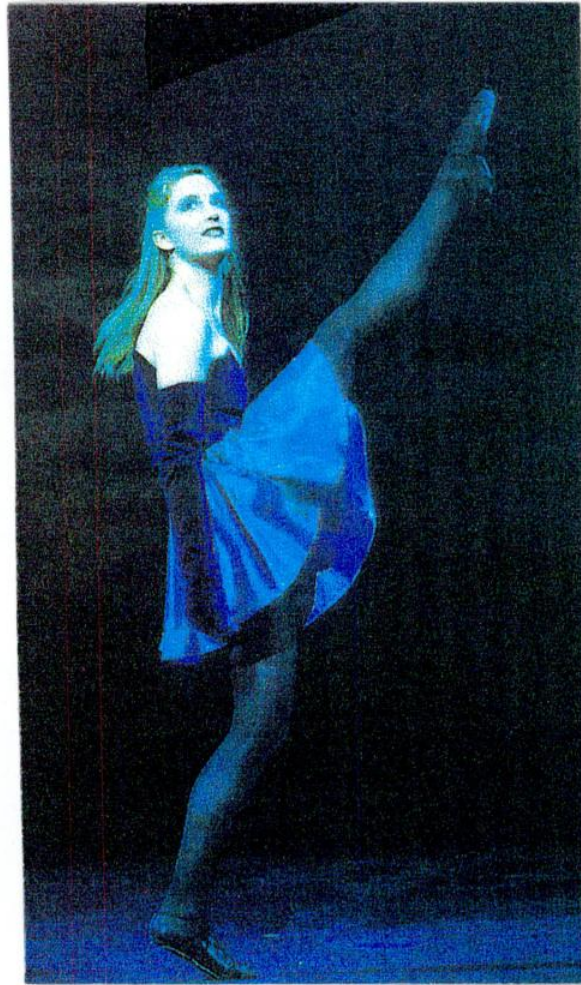


Figure 63:

Joanne Doyle, 'Riverdance' (1994)

Simple, non-embroidered skirt with top.



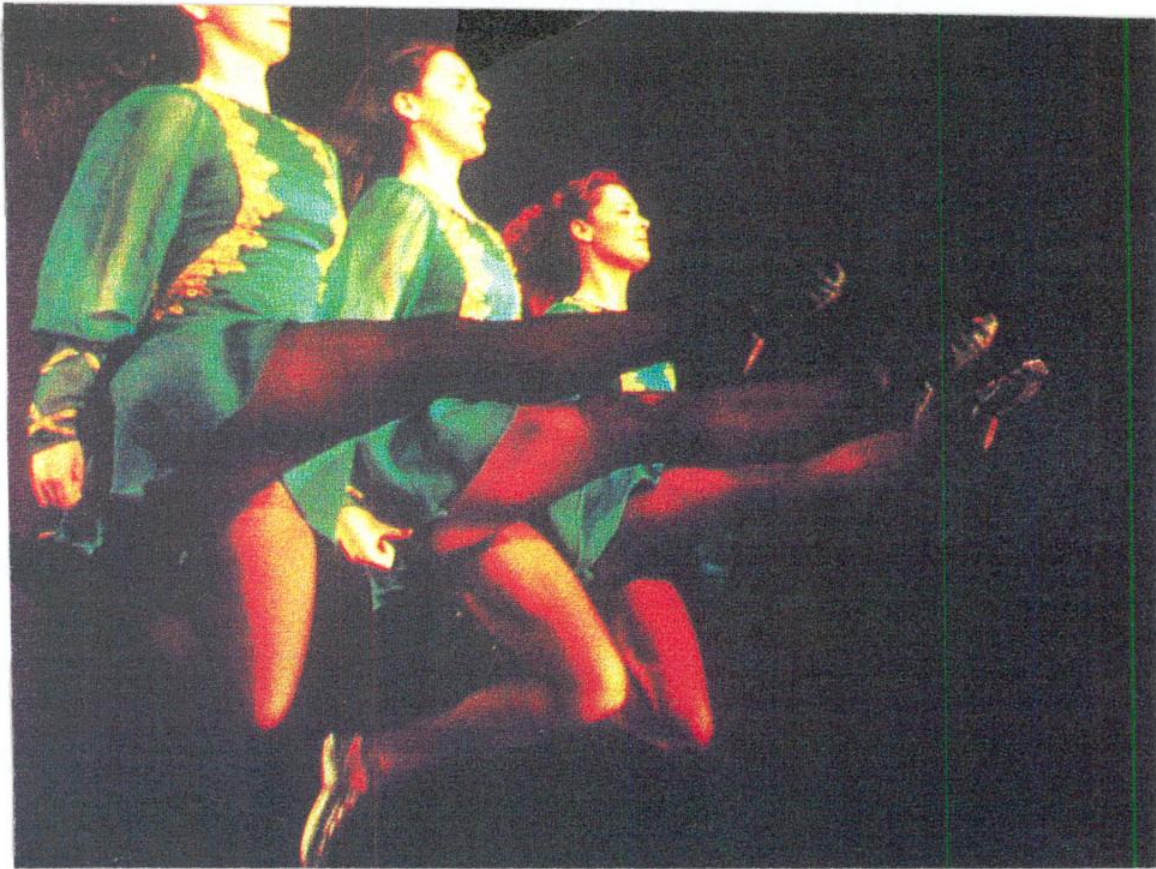


Figure 64:

'Riverdance' (1994)

Simple green and gold dresses worn with black tights.



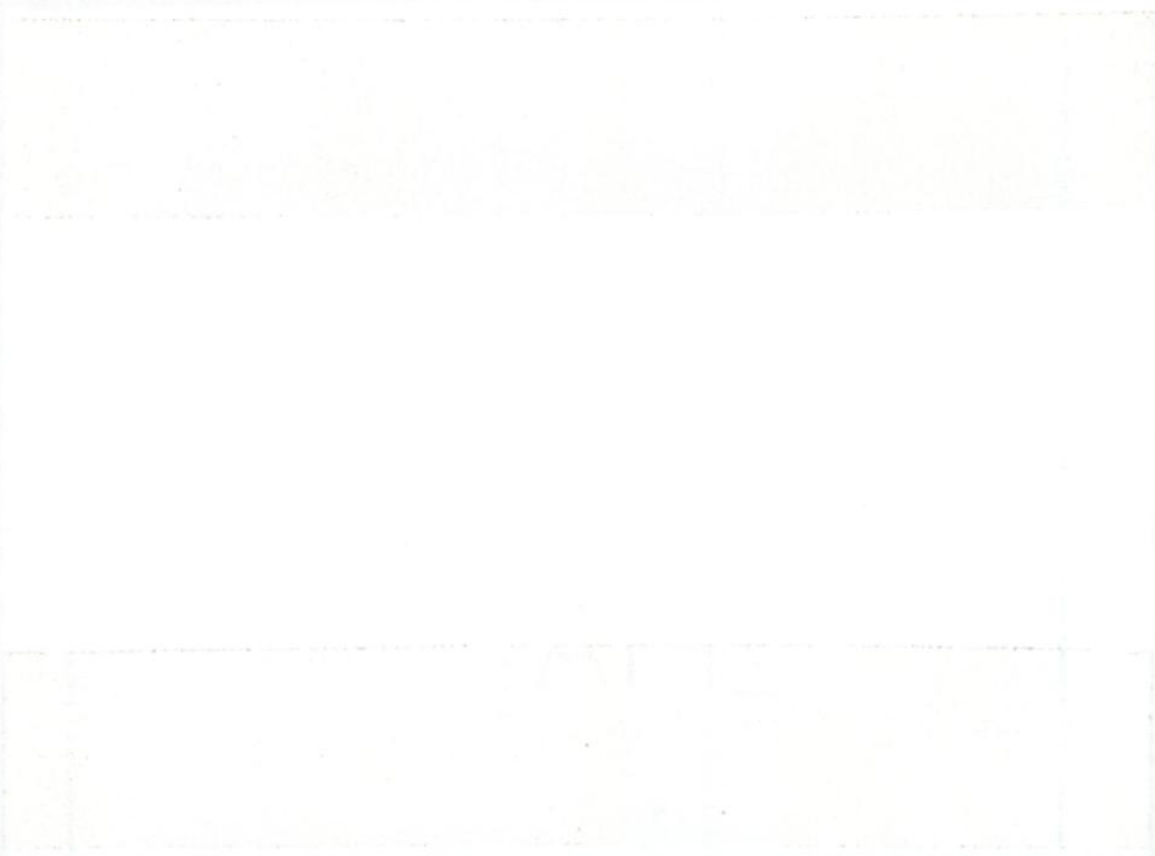




Figure 65:

'Riverdance'-style costume, Photograph featured on the front of the Irish Dancing Magazine, first publication (1998).



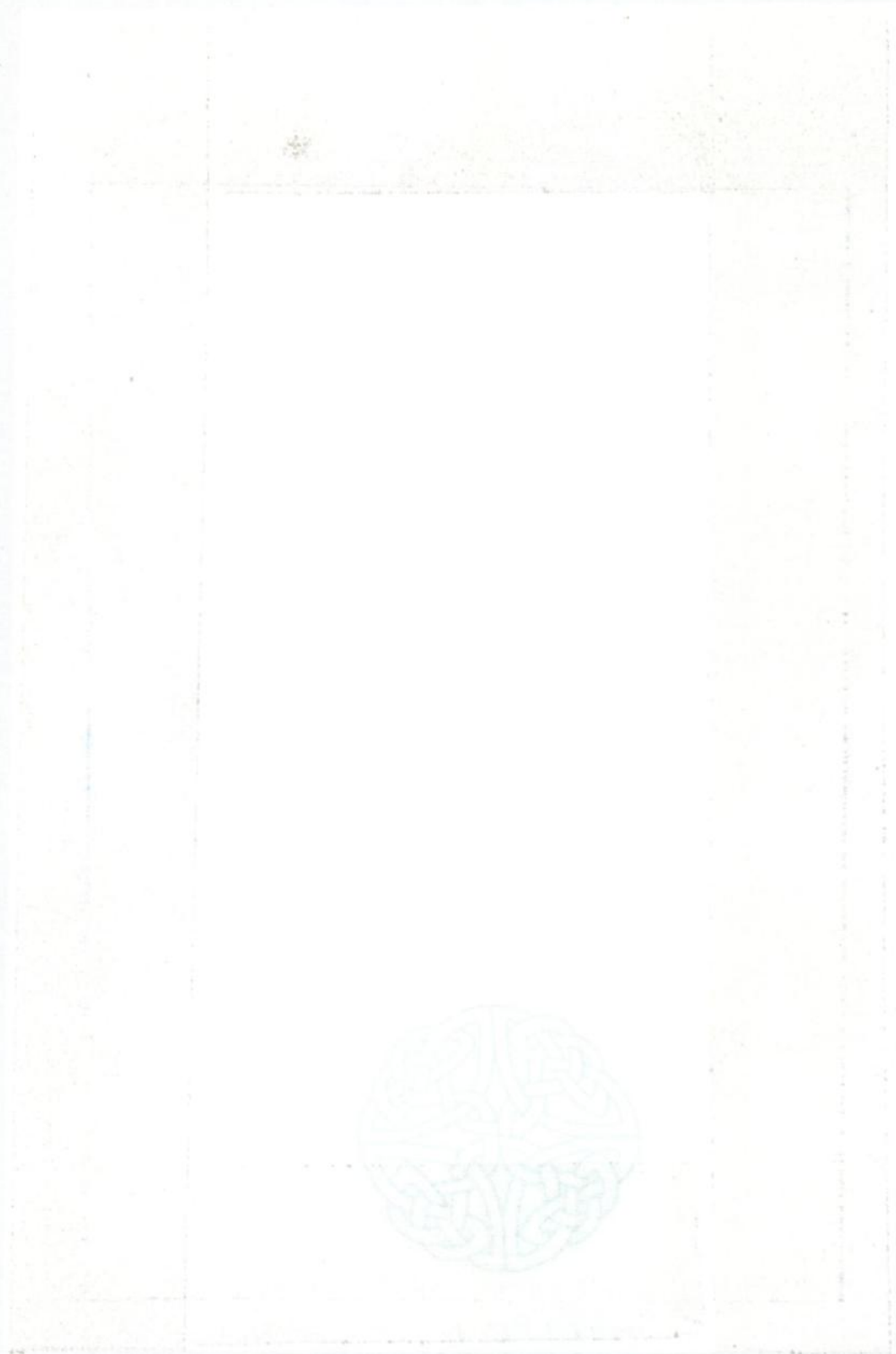




Figure 66:

Jean Butler and Michael Flatley, 'Riverdance', 1995.



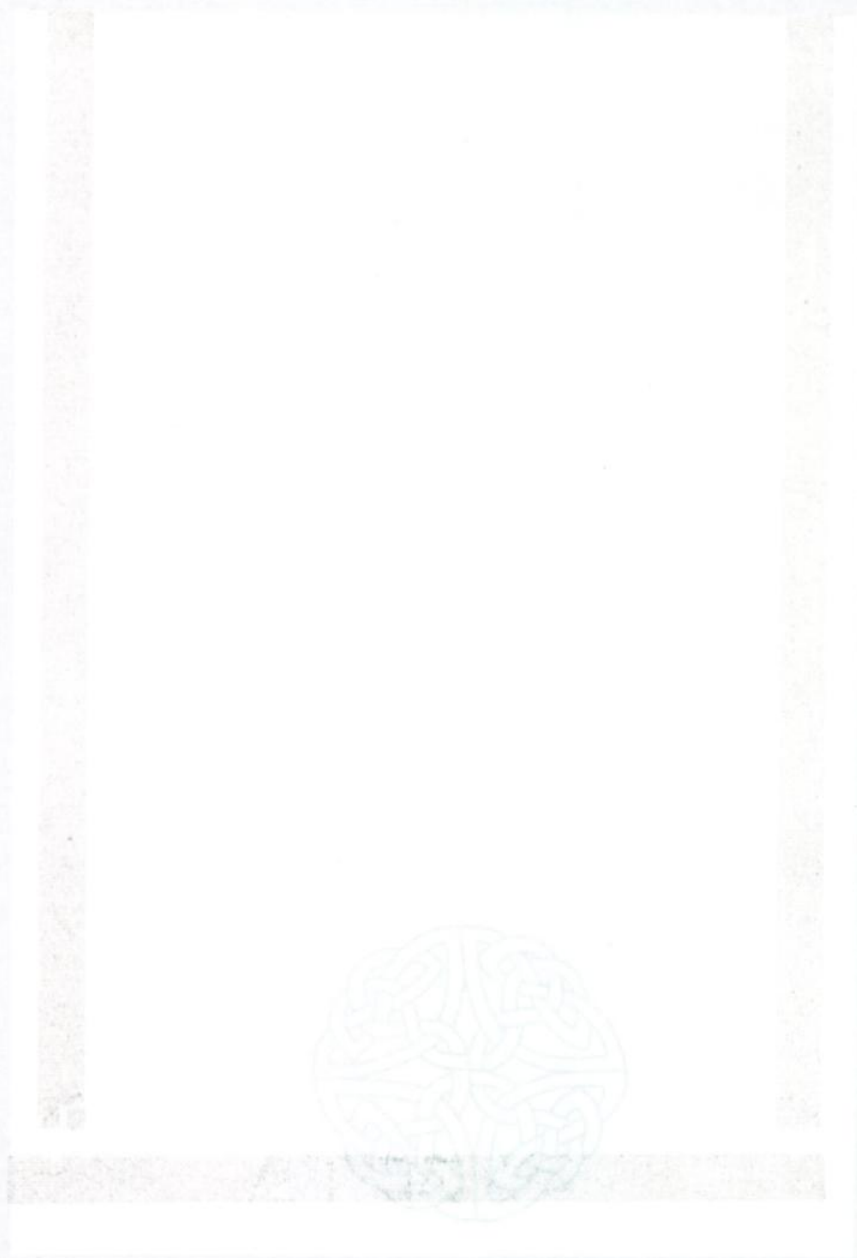




Figure 67:

All-Australian Irish Dancing Championships, 1998.
Featuring satin shirts, popular for male dancers.

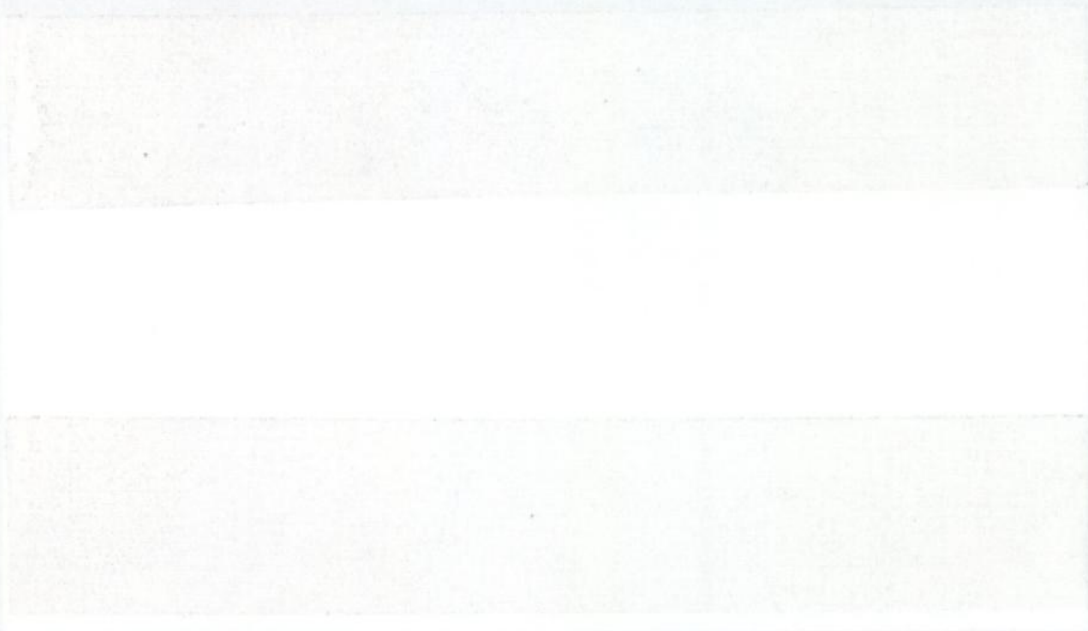




Figure 68:

The 'Riverdance' troupe, featuring girls' and boys' costumes.







microphones were inserted in the insteps of the principal dancers' shoes. The microphones are glued on to a tie clip and a cable is run up the dancer's leg and connected to a radio transmitter fitted around the waist.

The female Irish dancing costumes for competition dancing have tended to remain stiff and elaborate even after the 'Riverdance' show, with its introduction of a much simpler style of dress. This may be a result of the lack of encouragement that many of the Irish dancing organisations give to the wearing of what may be regarded as a style of dress that is too short and too revealing. Pat Cadwell of An Comhdháil (38) states that the organisation introduced a rule shortly after 'Riverdance', not allowing 'Riverdance'-style costumes in competitions; this was to keep the traditionally embroidered costumes. They have, however, invented a new competition which is known as the 'Freestyle Competition'. This is a section which allows Irish dancers to wear 'Riverdance'-style costumes and to dance more modern steps, also using the upper body, holding the arms out and dancing more expressively. The wearing of such costumes has also introduced a trend for wearing long, curly wigs which were worn by all the 'Riverdance' and 'Lord of the Dance' crew. However, the encouragement by organisations such as Comhdháil of the traditional Irish dancing costumes helps to keep alive the traditional crafts of embroidery, crochet and lace making.

The style of 'Riverdance' costumes, their simple shapes and plain colours like black, silver and minimal designs, is popular for cabaret dancing. Such dresses would be regarded as very elegant and evening-like and are very appropriate for display work and evening shows. A popular feature of night life in Ireland for visitors and locals alike is the number of pubs providing traditional music and set dancing. Many foreign tourists leave the comfort of hotels to seek out pubs with music and dance where they are invited to partake in sets. Jury's Cabaret in Jury's hotel, Dublin has been an established show of Irish music and dance since the mid-1980's. It is one of the best known cabaret shows in Ireland, where tourists can pay £26.95 for a full four course dinner and an evening of Irish entertainment.





From long before the mid-19th century Irish famine, Irish people have left Ireland and set up home in countries far afield. In doing this, they took their Irish culture with them. Art and industrial exhibitions at the turn of the century in Chicago, New York and Boston, (39) increased American interest in Irish national costume and dance. Feiseanna, which were also organised by the Gaelic League, were held for the first time in New York, Boston and Chicago in 1912.

It does not appear as if any of the Irish dancing bodies in Ireland actually legislated for the type of costumes to be worn by Irish dancers. The costumes and style of costumes were and still are the responsibility of each dancing teacher and in more recent times have become the responsibility of the individual dancer. The dancer does not have to consult with the teacher. The input from the teacher is diminishing, especially with the massive changeover to the solo costume. So, therefore it is almost exclusively the individual dancer that decides what is or what is not acceptable or fashionable in Irish dancing costume.

Costumes were, however, legislated for in Melbourne, Australia as early as 1932, (40). The rules of the Irish National Dancing and National Dance Promoters' Association of Victoria were recorded in a 14-page booklet. The object of the organisation was to create, foster, control and maintain the Irish national dancing, Irish dress and music in Australia (Fig. 69)

'Riverdance' and 'Lord of the Dance' have had an enormous impact on Irish dancing schools. Dancing teachers are agreeable to change and updating the steps to keep abreast of the new trends. With the high profile of the dance shows, an increasing number of pupils are joining schools, eager to learn these new dances. In the past, boys were reluctant to dance in public outside competitions, but they are now more prepared to display their skills.





Figure 69:

Circa early 1950's: Seven members of the Dunell family, Melbourne, Australia, all pupils of Duncan Conroy. These costumes were strictly legislated for in Melbourne up to the 1950's.

(John Cullinane Archive Collection). 'Australian Experience' article, Irish Dancing Magazine, Vol. 1 Issue 9.





With three 'Riverdance' productions and two 'Lord of the Dance' shows on world tour, Irish dancing now has world-wide appeal, with audiences clamouring for more shows and extended tours. However, Irish dancing still remains very much part of the heritage of the Irish and the Irish diaspora abroad. Tourists enjoy the opportunity to sample a few steps at a céilí when on holiday, but not many have the inclination or determination to master the intricate steps. Instead they are prepared to sit back and watch talented dancers demonstrate their skills.

There are nowadays many opportunities to witness the art and grace of Irish dancing. It still forms a regular part of social functions in such places as Achill Island, the Aran Islands, Connemara and many other Gaeltacht areas. Annually, thousands of dedicated competitors attend céilís, feiseanna and major events in Ireland. Abroad, there are many dancing schools. In Canada, there are schools in Vancouver, Quebec, Ontario and Toronto. In Australia, there are schools in Sydney, Melbourne and Adelaide. Several cities are centres of Irish dancing with schools in Manchester, Liverpool, London and Edinburgh. America is also home to many dancing schools. Irish dancers, like the Cara Irish Dancers from Bray, Co. Wicklow, often perform at festivals throughout the world, including the Ohio State Fair, America and the Oktoberfest, Germany. I myself have travelled with my fellow Irish dancers in the Cara School of Irish Dancing to the London Irish Festival in Kilburn, London in June 1994, to Chicago, America for the St Patrick's Day celebrations in March 1995, to Toronto, Canada in August 1996 and more recently to the Ho Chi Minh city in Vietnam in December 1998 to dance in large cabaret shows and partake in Irish nights for other cultures to experience, (Figs. 70, 71, 72 and 73).

The dance erupts today in a spontaneous form at the Fleadh Cheoil, (Music Festival). Although dancing does not feature prominently in the Fleadh, the music of a lone musician can frequently snowball into a full scale céilí or set dance. During the summer months, céilís are held frequently throughout the country. Visitors are always welcome and will quickly master the basic steps. The most popular céilí dances are 'The Walls of Limerick', 'The Bridge of Athlone' and 'The Siege of

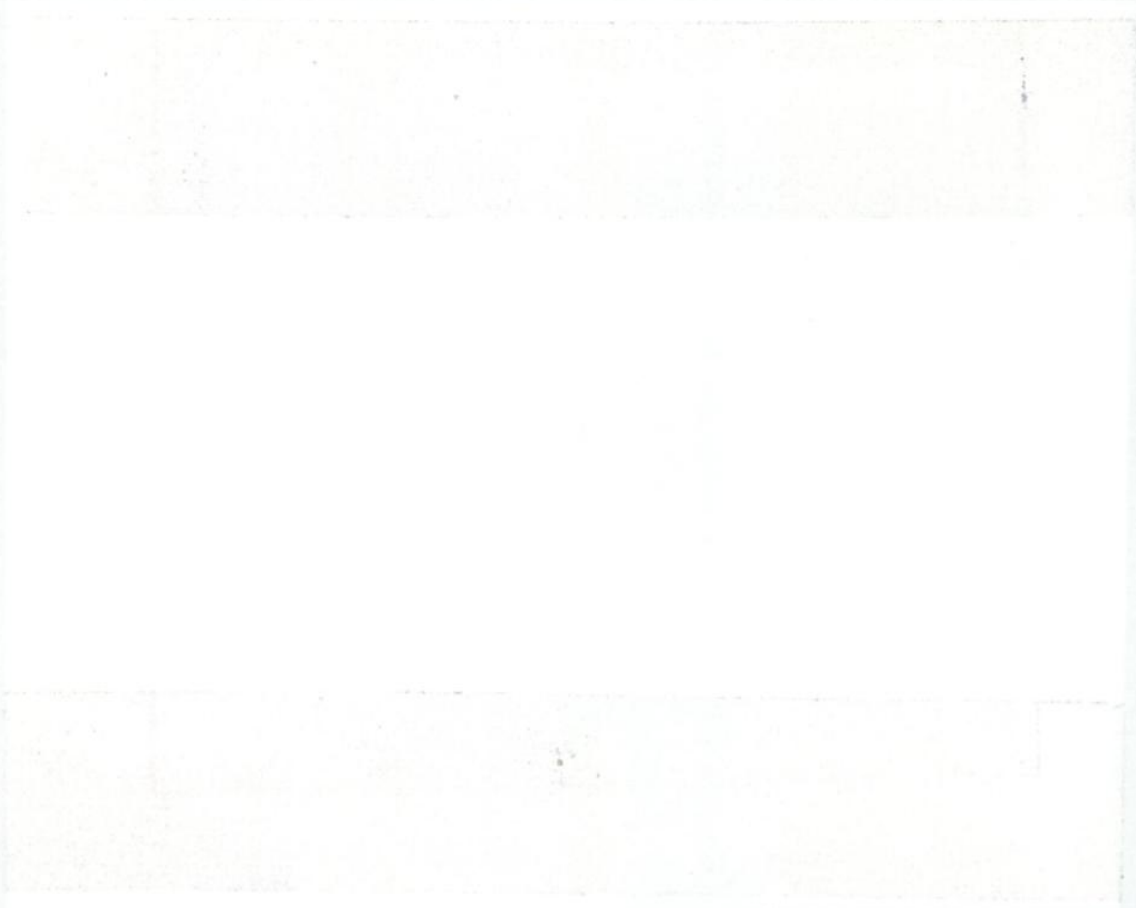




Figure 70:

The Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow, with the Claddagh School of Irish Dancing, Iona, Chicago, performing for St. Patrick's Day, March 1998.





ZETA

THE ZETA CHAPTER OF THE SIOUX TRIBE OF INDIANS
HAS BEEN ORGANIZED AT SIOUX FALLS, S.D.



Figure 71:

The Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow.
Performing in Chicago for St. Patrick's Day, March 1995.





Figure 72:

The Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow.

Performing in Toronto, Canada, August 1996.



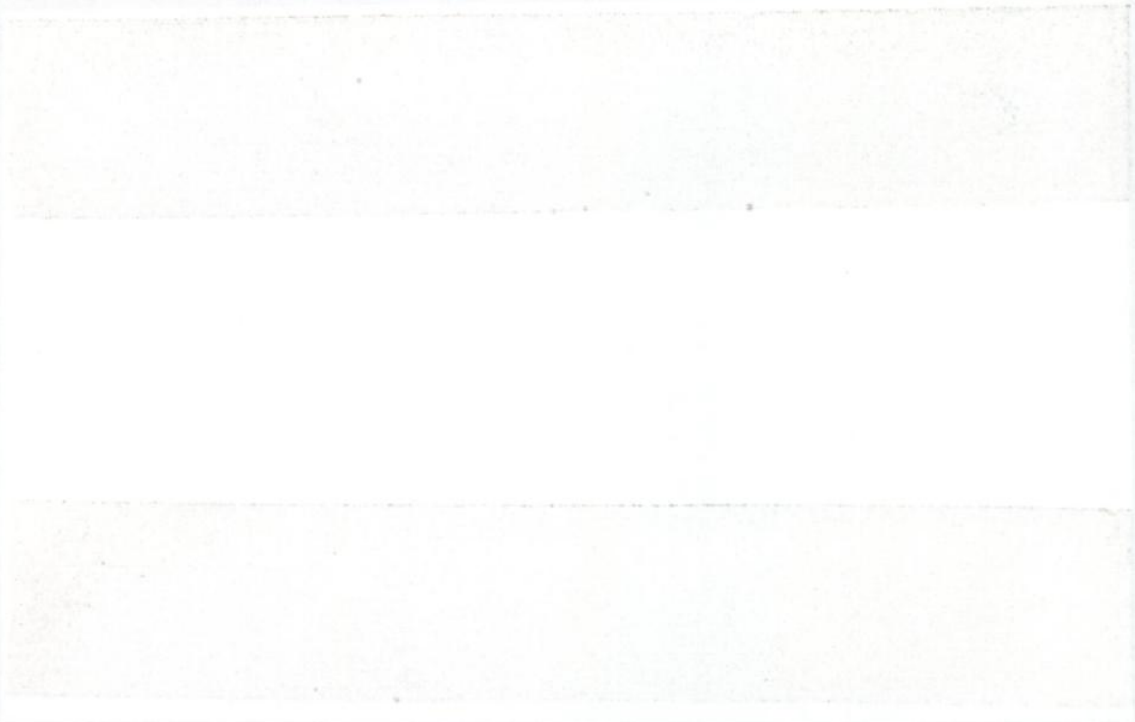




Figure 73:

Members of the Cara School of Irish Dancing, Bray, Co. Wicklow.
Performing in Ho Chih Minh City, Vietnam, December 1998 in aid of the Christina
Noble Children Foundation.





Ennis'. Large crowds, including foreign students, attend the Friday night céilís in Comhaltas Ceoltóirí Éireann in Monkstown, Co. Dublin.

As the twenty-first century approaches, 'Riverdance' costumes seem set to continue to influence current trends in costume style. Whatever future direction fashion in male and female Irish Dancing costumes takes, it will reflect a self-confident modern Ireland, rich in traditions of music and dance, an Ireland which continues to re-invent its own heritage and to express its own national pride and identity.





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Chapter Three

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39. Flynn, op. cit., 1998, page 25.
40. Cullinane, op. cit., 1995, page 69.





CONCLUSION

Irish dancing costumes and accessories must have reached their limits. It is difficult to see how much more elaborate they can become, although no doubt dancers and dancing teachers will find a way. It is interesting to see that the Irish dancing organisations do not require or tend to promote or even condone these elaborate, expensive costumes. But it is maybe the individual dancers and dancers' parents who are responsible for the elaborate and costly costumes in their efforts to outdo each other in having the 'better' costume.

The Irish dancing organisations do not discriminate against those dancers wearing simpler but effective costumes and this can be proven by the fact that top men's competitions have been won by dancers wearing simple long trousers and plain shirts. It is interesting to look closely at the simple, effective costumes introduced by the impact of 'Riverdance'. This style of costume is evident and is a fashion followed by many.

As we near the millennium it is a most interesting time for Irish dancing costumes. The male dancers by the start of 1996 had discarded their kilts, even in competitions, so that the majority are by now wearing trousers. The female costumes are even more interesting. Some costumes appear to have reached the limits of adornment of all kinds, and this appears to have led to a number of dancers adopting a new style of costume, one that had been greatly influenced by 'Riverdance'. Plain, simple and lightweight costumes appear to be popular with many dancers.

The Irish Dancing Magazine published in Bristol in England, produced its first issue in March 1998. This is a magazine which features articles exclusively on Irish dancing-related subjects, articles and advertisements on all accessories and availabilities related to Irish dancing costume and dress and articles on competitions and classes throughout the world. It helps to encourage Irish dancing and to make





people more aware of what is available throughout the world in relation to Irish dancing. The motifs used on Irish dancing costumes since around 1995 have moved considerable away from the Celtic imagery which was always used.

This may be a result of the influence of other cultures. The Irish Dancing Magazine is a medium which Irish dancers from as far as Australia to as near as Ireland can use to experience Irish dancing in other countries. There is a picture section purely for photographs of dancers in costumes. This may also be seen as a fashion section, where dancers can see what costumes and designs are being worn or are fashionable.

Dancers are looking for a fresh approach. Some have started to opt for the simpler 'Riverdance' style; plain simple and lightweight costumes which focus on the visual aspect of the actual dance. Other dancers opt for the total opposite; extravagant, heavily embroidered, colourful art pieces which may often be considered 'gaudy'.

Female dancers continue to experiment with costumes, seeking new fashions. They have started to turn away from the extremely elaborate costumes of the 1980's and early 1990's. Irish dancing costumes, like any style of dress, are fashioned by trends and ideas that are projected world-wide and adopted by individuals as representations of their interest.

The dancers and costumes of Irish dancing do not belong to any one class, generation or region. Grace and beauty of movement on a high level are the main ingredients of Irish dance, and Irish people, being proud and fortunate possessors of a unique heritage of native dance and costume craft, have combined both and translated this to other cultures throughout the world.

During this century, it is clear that the style and significance of Irish dancing costume has altered. This has been due largely to the increase in competitive dancing and the effect of modern technology. Nowadays, dancers are concerned primarily with how 'fashionable' their dresses will be rated and how effective they will appear during





performance on stage. How 'Irish' a costume seems to be is of less relevance. The concept of wearing costumes made from indigenous materials of Irish manufacture and of traditional colouring seems to have long gone. Today, the majority of both solo and class costumes are made from synthetic fabrics and in a diverse range of colours. Embroidery can cover a greater area of the dress and the motifs are often far from Irish. Costumes have been adapted to suit competitive dancing and are far from the style of the brat and léine worn in the historic past.

An increase in the number of dancewear companies shows that production of dance costume is already commercial.

The direction which Irish dancing costumes will take next will be interesting to see.





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Appendix I

Questionnaire for Irish Dancing Teachers

1. How long have you been teaching Irish dancing?
2. Did you dance before you began teaching, and with whom did you dance with?
3. Did you design your own costume, did you have it designed (and if so, by whom), or did you obtain patterns from elsewhere?
4. Is there a variation in the style and shape of costumes you have made/had made?
5. What fabric is used for the dress?
6. What colour are the costumes?
7. Is there any significance attached to the colour of the costume?
8. How is the design applied to the costume before it is embroidered?
9. How did you have the embroidery applied to the costumes? Is it hand, machine or appliquéd?
10. What sort of stitch is used?
11. What motifs are applied to the costume?
12. Where do you obtain your motifs from?





13. Do the motifs have any significance?
14. What kind of thread is used in the embroidery?
15. What colour threads are used in the embroidery?
16. Is there a variation of costumes within one dancing group?
17. Are there any rules laid down as regards the colours and the decoration of the costumes?
18. What is the relationship between the style and the decoration of the costume and its price?
19. How do class and solo costumes differ in fabric, colour, design and price?
20. Do you feel that the scale of the designs on the costumes have changed over the years?
21. Have the growing number of competitions affected the design and decoration of the costumes?
22. Does each dancer own their own dress or do they get passed on?
23. Is a shawl worn with the dress and how is it attached?
24. Is there a particular shape to the shawl, is there decoration on it?
25. Do you know anything about the Celtic brooches that are worn?
26. Do all the costumes have lace collars?



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27. Where do you get the lace collars from?
28. Are they specially designed for every dress?
29. Are tights or socks worn with the costumes?
30. Do you know anything about the history of Irish dancing costumes?
31. When were they first worn?
32. What dictated the style?
33. Was embroidery always used?
34. In what way has the style and decoration of the costumes in relation to the fabric, stitch, etc. changed over the past years?
35. Has 'Riverdance' and Michael Flatley in your opinion had an effect on Irish dancing and in what way?
36. How has it influenced or altered the style of Irish dancing costumes?
37. Has it altered people's perception of Irish dancing?

If possible, could you include your full address and details for reference. Also, if possible, could you include a photograph of your class costume or your class including the name of the individuals in the photograph. I will return your photograph as soon as I have taken a colour photocopy. I would also like to include your name in relation to the information you have given me. If there are any dancers in your class who have particularly interesting solo costumes and would like to be included, I would be most grateful if you could include their photograph.





Appendix II

Questionnaire for Dancewear Companies

1. How long has your company been established?
2. How large is your company?
3. In what way are you involved with the production and supply of Irish dancing costumes?
4. Do you design costumes or do you obtain designs and patterns from elsewhere?
5. Is there a variation in the shape and style of costume which you make?
6. What type of fabrics are used for the dresses?
7. Does the type of fabric vary from dress to dress?
8. What colours are the costumes?
9. Is there a particular significance attached to the colour of the costumes?
10. How are the designs applied to the fabric?
11. How do you apply the embroidery to the costumes, is it hand, machine or appliquéd?
12. What sort of stitch is used?
13. What kind of thread is used?





14. What colours of thread are used?
15. What are the motifs which are applied to the costumes?
16. Where do you obtain the motifs from?
17. Is there any significance attached to the motifs?
18. Are there any rules laid down as regards the colours and decoration of the costumes?
19. How do class and solo costumes differ in fabric, colour, design and price?
20. Does each dance group have a specific design of dress?
21. Do you feel that the scale of design of the costumes has changed over the years?
22. What is the relationship between the style and the decoration of the costume and its price?
23. Does the price vary according to whether a costume is decorated using hand, machine or appliquéd stitching?
24. What is the range in price of costumes which you make and design?
25. Has the scale of embroidery changed over the years?
26. Have the growing number of competitions affected the design and decoration of the costumes?





27. Does each dancer own their own dress or do they get passed on?
28. Is a shawl worn with the dress and how is it attached?
29. Is there a particular shape to the shawl, is there decoration on it?
30. Do you know anything about the Celtic brooches that are worn?
31. Do all the costumes have lace collars?
32. Where do you get the lace collars from?
33. Are they specially designed for every dress?
34. Are tights or socks worn with the costumes?
35. Do you know anything about the history of Irish dancing costumes?
36. When were they first worn?
37. What dictated the style?
38. Was embroidery always used?
39. In what way has the style and decoration of the costumes in relation to the fabric, stitch, etc. changed over the past years?
40. Has 'Riverdance' and Michael Flatley, in your opinion, had an effect on Irish dancing and in what way?





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