National College of Art and Design

School of Fine Art

What is The History of Textile Production in the Liberties and what remains of it today?

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Textile Art and Artefacts (TAA) – Applied Materials

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I declare that this thesis is entirely my own work, in my own words and that all sources during the course of my research have been duly acknowledged.

Aisling Moore

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Introduction

The Liberties is one of the oldest and most historic neighbourhoods in Dublin city. Traditionally, it was associated with a hard-working, vibrant community who were employed in many of the local industries such as distilling, brewing, street-trading and textile production. The purpose of my research is to investigate the textile production industry that not only once existed, but thrived in the Liberties. As a student studying Textiles (Applied Materials) in Fine Art at NCAD, with the Liberties literally on my campus doorstep, this topic was of particular interest to me.

I wanted to find out more about its beginnings, its success over time, the main manufacturers and the reasons for its decline. In doing that, I hoped to find out more about the character of the Liberties and uncover any current textile activity that may be happening on the ground today.

To answer my research question, I dug deep into secondary research by reading books, reports, journals, studies and analysis to help find answers and draw conclusions. My primary research included telephone interviews, Zoom-based workshop interviews, face-to-face meetings, e-mails, walkabout research and site visits which included a tour of Botany Weaving Mills – the last remaining textile manufacturer in the Liberties.

Chapter 1 explores the Liberties area and the early beginnings of the textile industry, from the early 17TH century. I endeavoured to investigate how successful the industry was and the factors that contributed to its success. Chapter 2 explores how the introduction of new technology improved production but had a downside for the cottage industry. Chapter 3 details the top four established Irish poplin Dublin manufacturers at the time, almost all with strong connections to the Liberties. In Chapter 4, I outline the main contributing factors leading to the decline of the industry and discover the trail of evidence of this once integral part of the community. In Chapter 5, I explore the current situation regarding textile activity in the Liberties at industrial, community and educational level.

In the conclusion section, I point out the purpose of my research in trying to discover the backstory of textile production in the Liberties, my findings throughout and limitations in reaching my conclusion.

Chapter 1:

The Textile Industry in The Liberties:

The Beginnings

1.1 The Liberties area of Dublin

To discuss the story of the textile industry in the Liberties, it is necessary to explain a little about the neighbourhood itself and the environment in which the industry developed.

Figure 1: Historical map of Dublin showing city wall (Speed, 1610)

Figure 2: Part of old City Wall, Cornmarket (Aisling Moore, 2021)

The Liberties is one of the most historic neighbourhoods in Dublin, situated in the south west corner of the inner city. When the Normans invaded Ireland in 1170, Dublin became more defined in its development and layout of its streets and walls. The very fine Thomas Street where NCAD now stands, was built around 1177 and designed to point towards Strongbow's

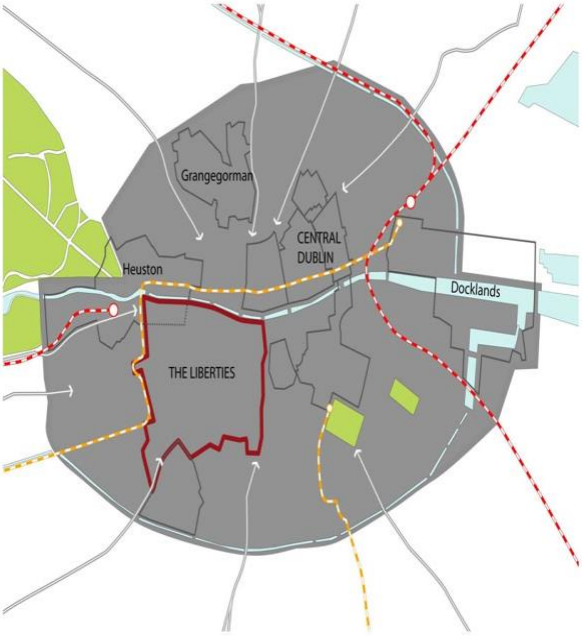

Figure: 3: Liberties outline on map (www.rudi.net)

religious house in Kilmainham. The existing wall that surrounded the city was strengthened and extended by the Normans around 1240 (Dickson, 2014). One striking piece of the city wall is still visible today in the Cornmarket area of Dublin 8.

During this period, Dublin was headquarters to the English Lordship who brought settlers from Wales and England. The defensive wall around the city resulted in an area known as the 'Pale'. English people remained inside the walls of the Pale with native Irish people living outside the walls by order. Small suburbs began to spring up beyond the Pale such as the Liberties. (Ordinance Survey Ireland, 2021)

The King of England at the time Henry II, gave permission to allow two tracts of land to be given to the Abbey of St. Thomas and Archbishop of Dublin which remained attached to the city but allowed exemption from city taxes. This enabled them to develop and establish their own rules and regulations regarding economic issues and laws, and hence the name '**Liberties**' (Ordinance Survey Ireland, 2021). This allowed the Liberties area of Dublin to thrive for centuries.

Generations of craftspeople and tradesmen were attracted to the area which had a rich tradition in brewing, weaving, distilling, milling and tanning. The most important factor attracting industry was the extraordinary water rights - allowing access to water for trades. (Dublin City Council, 2009). Of note, is the Guinness brewing family who built St. James Gate in 1759 and employed generations of families for centuries in the area (The Liberties Dublin, 2021). Historian Donal Fallon states that Guinness's were famous for looking after their employees "from the womb to the tomb" even employing midwives for the wives of employees (The Journal, 2021).

Although the Liberties experienced great industrial wealth and activity during the 18th and 19th Century, it was an area of social depravation in terms of living conditions for the ordinary working people who mostly lived in slums. Enterprising employers with a social conscience like the Guinness and Power families, built homes for their workers in the locality like the Iveagh Trust Buildings in 1901, still home to people in the Liberties today. Lord Edward Cecil Guinness was responsible for the building of the Iveagh Market in Francis Street in 1906, housing a wet market selling food and dry market selling household goods and clothes. It closed in the early 1990s and after years of planning permission turmoil, the ownership of the building will be handed back to the Guinness family who hope to restore the building back to its intended use for the Liberties community (Liberties Dublin, 2020).

During the last number of decades, the Liberties has been going through changes. The Tivoli Theatre, Frawley's department store and Mother Redcaps market have disappeared. New student accommodation, hotels and many independent coffee shops have started to spring up in the area. Many new residents have come to live in the neighbourhood and the area has become more diverse and multicultural. The Liberties of today, although changing, still

retains its community spirit and distinctive character. One of the best places to experience the real spirit of the Liberties is in the Liberty Market on Meath Street. Opened since the 1970s, it is a great place to find a bargain and meet the stall holders who are a mixture of people from the Liberties and recent immigrants to the area.

1.2 How did the industry begin in the Liberties?

It is believed that highly-skilled Huguenots introduced new methods of weaving into Dublin, concentrated around the Liberties area. According to Campion (1963, p.3) they settled in the areas of Castle Street, Pimlico, Sweeney's Lane, Weavers Square and the Coombe because it was the centre of the wool trade and other types of manufacturing in Dublin at that time. These Huguenots were exiles fleeing wars and religious persecution from France during the 17th century and brought with them their only thing of value, their crafts, which they put into practice in the Liberties. According to O'Mullane (1946, p.113) an order from the Viceroy, the Duke of Ormonde in 1681 was made, allowing these persecuted Protestants have freedom of the city without fees, or taxes. It was noted by Hylton (1986, p.1) that Ormonde saw how the Huguenots would add value to the Irish economy as he had encountered their professionalism when in Normandy and Paris himself. Weaving looms were to become a fixture in many of the old gable houses situated on Weavers Square – which became known as 'Huguenot Houses'. These houses were constructed with large attics to accommodate the looms of the weavers (Webb, 2013). Many were highly skilled in silk weaving and joined the craft guilds which were evident in Dublin at that time making fine ribbons, velvet, taffeta, brocade, gold cloth and lace. They contributed highly and infused new life into the existing textile industry in the Liberties, which was one of the most highly populated parts of Dublin during in the 17th and 18th century (Campion, 1963). One major figure in the industry at the

time was French Huguenot David Digges La Touche, who played a major role in introducing poplin into Ireland.

1.3 David Digges La Touche (1671 -1745)

David Digges La Touche was a French Huguenot and founder of the silk poplin weaving industry in the Liberties. In 1700, he was sworn in as a brother in the Dublin Guild of Weavers – the controlling craft guild at that time.

Figure 4: David Digges La Touche (Geni.com).

He began the manufacture of Irish poplin in the Liberties. Poplin was the product of combining raw silk and fine wool and had become fashionable.

According to Dunleavy (2011, p. 59), the first reference to poplin as a product in Dublin was through a newspaper in 1704, which was around the time that La Touche began establishing himself. The product gained popularity and La Touche went on to become a thriving poplin

manufacturer by 1708. He was a very wealthy man and helped fund the rebuilding of **Weavers Hall** in the Coombe around 1745. The building was demolished in 1956.

Figure 5: Weavers Hall in the Coombe, with statue of George holding weavers instrument (English 18th Century Portraits, 2016).

1.4 The Weavers Guild

All cloth production was controlled by craft guilds at this time. According to Cotter Stubbs (1919, p.30.), the Weavers Guild was set up in November 1688 with the purpose of quality assurance and measurement of cloths for sale. It established regulations relating to weaving and the training of apprentices in weaving. The guild set standards with Masters and Wardens in their examination of the work of weavers. An apprenticeship would last for seven years before an apprentice would receive freedom of the Guild and would have to satisfy the Wardens and Master on the quality of their work.

1.5 What economic factors helped the industry succeed?

In trying to understand the success enjoyed in textile production that went on for centuries in the Liberties, it is necessary to understand the economic factors that helped.

Demand

Demand for woven woollen cloth was at its height in the 17th century and the Newmarket area of the Liberties was at the centre of meeting that demand (Campion, 1963). By the early 18th century, silk was imported and becoming popular because of the demand for a new

product called poplin, which combined both silk and wool. These newer products were not for the mass market, however, as ordinary people of Dublin could not afford them.

It was the fashionable upper-class who demanded these luxurious items. They bought into the full product range of silks, velvets, ribbons, poplins, carpets and furnishings for their homes and carriages. The textiles that met this demand came straight from looms in the Liberties (Breatnach, 1990).

An emerging middle class also desired these high end products. According to Dunleavy (2011, p.31- 47) for them, silk was a status symbol which allowed them to dress in a way that would distinguish them from the working class. Such was the demand that two major centres for the manufacture of luxury silk wear were set up in Dublin at that time, one on Whitefriar Street called the *French Factory* and the other on Dame Street called the *Great Silk Ware Room.* These centres produced award winning luxury velvets, damask, paduasoy and flowered silks.

While the upper class had a penchant for all things silk, oddly enough, funeral attire such black ribbons and luxurious black velvet was in demand by way of expressing your status in grief. Dunleavy went on to say that producing fabric in the colour black was financially rewarding as there were so many periods of official mourning.

Available Raw Materials:

The materials required to manufacture the goods to fulfil the demand were available. Fine quality Irish wool fleece was a ready resource due to our sheep grazing on rich agricultural pastures. This advantage created a great woollen trade in the Liberties,

particularly in Newmarket. According to Webb (1913) Newmarket received its own wool production patent in the 17th century.

New tastes required new materials and according to Dunleavy (2011, p.45) when silk became popular in 18th and 19th century, enormous amounts of raw silk were imported and most of the manufacturing took place in the Liberties, where finishing of the material was completed including throwing, weaving, dyeing and other processes. The *raw silk* was imported from countries all over the world including Italy, Spain, the East Indies, Persia and particularly China which produced excellent quality silk.

For the manufacture of Irish poplin, a mix of finest raw silk from China was imported together with high quality merino wool from Australia. This seemed to be the winning combination for the Irish poplin product. Ireland gained international fame for its poplin because of its high standard of manufacture and content (Campion, 1963).

Available Workforce

The availability of raw materials and demand brought about opportunity for workers in England and the West of Ireland to come and settle in the Liberties and join the workforce already in place. Evidence suggests that skilled artisans were already living and weaving at home in the Liberties since before 1700. Up to the point where we began importing raw silk, the main industrial wealth in Dublin came from wool production. According to Breathnach (1990, p.134) the import of silk represented a *turning* point in the 17th century. There was a high demand for products created from silk which in turn required good talented workers and this talent was available in the Liberties. A number of skilled French masters and journeymen came over from Spitalfield, UK to join the workforce (Campion, 1963).

It is pointed out by Dunleavy (2011, p. 47), that the highest concentration of weavers were in the area around Francis Street, Swift's Alley, Catherine Street and Garden Lane. From a report at the time, 800 looms were in use around 1730, with control in the hands of a small number of master weavers (Webb, 2013). He goes on to say that cotton, wool, silk and poplin were being hand woven. It was noted by Bayley Butler (1988 p.2) that each house had its own loom and employed about four to eight people. She points out that by the early 19th century about 22,000 people depended on the industry which also included tanners and dyers. By 1800, the Liberties area was at the height of its prosperity (Webb, 2013).

One main process involved preparing the cloth. This is set out by Bayley Butler (1988, p.2) who notes that it started by sizing it and allowing it to dry before being woven on the loom. Next, it was stretched on hooks called 'tenter-hooks' which happened in dry weather. This process was not suitable during the Irish winters and the weavers suffered great hardships as a result. A quote from the Dublin Society in 1809 stated 'In the winter season, when rain, snow and frost sets in – they are all thrown idle'. Eventually, a Stove Tenter House was built in 1815, with indoor heating, for the use of hand weavers in the Liberties. This is the reason that the 'Tenters' area of the Liberties is so called.

Chapter: 2

New technology

The Industrial revolution of the 18th century brought changes to industry in England and Ireland. Cottage industries were being replaced by factory setting with an employer as an overseer (Webb, 2013).

2.1 The Jacquard Loom

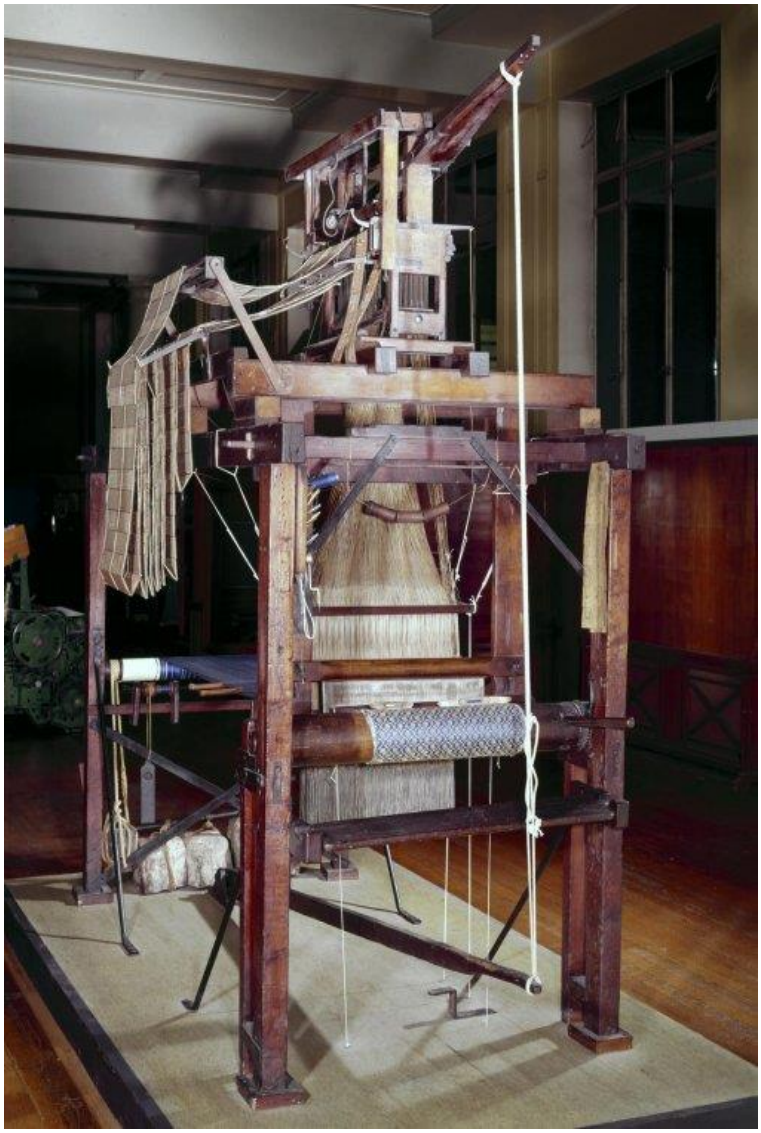

Figure 6 : The Jacquard Loom (Science and Industry Museum, 2019)

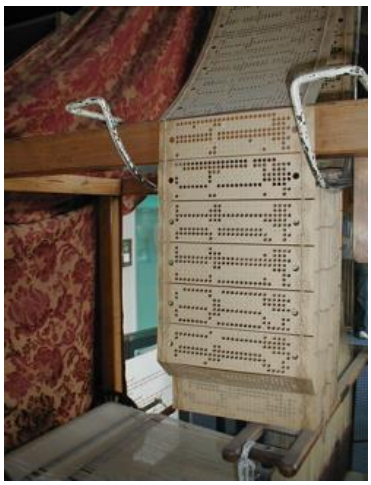

Figure 7: Punched hole system for the loom (Science and Industry Museum, 2019)

It appears that the introduction of the Jacquard loom had great impact on textile production around the world. Before the 1800's weaving involved manual production of high-quality textiles for the upper and middle classes. Joseph-Marie Jacquard introduced the Jacquard Loom in 1804. This was considered a huge technological advancement because it was now possible for detailed and complex patterns to be

manufactured by the unskilled in a fraction of the normal time it would take a master weaver and his assistant ‘draw boy’, who used to stand on top of the loom, to do manually.

The new technology appears to have been a game-changer in textile production. It is said its design inspired early computer technology. The technology used interchanged punched-hole cards where it could weave all manner of designs including detailed flowers and leaves. Each card was a line of a pattern, and threads passed through each card allowing change of colour creation of a design. The punch card took over the job of the ‘draw boy’ (Science and Industry Museum, 2019). Examples of brocade and damask woven on a Jacquard loom: (damask is reversible but not for brocade).

Figure 8: Woven brocade on a Jacquard (Dreamstress, 2014)

Figure 9: Damask woven on Jacquard (Dreamstress, 2014)

There was a downside however, the skilled hand-looming craftsmen who read diagrams on patterns and their ‘draw boys’ were no longer in demand because unskilled labourers could be trained to use the Jacquard. According to Bayley Butler (1988, p.3-4), when these new looms started to arrive into Dublin, it was the beginning of the end of hand weaving in the Liberties. Slowly, these hand weavers looked for alternative employment. These work opportunities lay across the Irish Sea, as William’s notes (1986, p.100) there was a swarm of handloom weavers from the Liberties that emigrated to Britain in the early 19th century because of the decline in the demand for their skills. He points out that a considerable proportion of silk weavers moved to Macclesfield and Congleton.

Many of the big companies in Dublin began importing the Jacquard loom from England such as Elliott's, Atkinson's, Fry's and Pim's. According to Dunleavy (2011, p.138), Fry imported ten of these looms in 1841 and Atkinson displayed work on Jacquard looms in the 1841 exhibition. She goes on to say that by 1935, the Jacquard loom was the most commonly used loom in Dublin.

In Botany Weaving Mills, operating since 1934 off Cork Street, you can still see rows of Jacquard looms operating and turning out beautiful fabric – the difference nowadays is that the programs used for designs are computerised, unlike the old punch card of earlier times and can be tweaked to suit the requirements of the company.

Chapter 3:

Four Dublin producers of

Irish Poplin

There were four old established manufacturers of Irish poplin that controlled production in Dublin. This section is confined to actual textile producers and does not include the fashion houses of the Liberties.

3.1 Messrs Atkinson & Co.

Atkinson's were founded in 1820 by Richard Atkinson, who became Lord Mayor twice in Dublin. He owned the last intact Georgian House, known as 'Atkinson House' on New Street which still stands today (Irish Georgian Society, 2016). It is reported that he bought the looms from the weavers he had working for him in their homes in the Liberties and converted the then cottage industry into a large factory base at 31, College Green and Merchants Arch in the early 20th century (Atkinsons Royal Irish Poplin, 2021). The poplin manufactured by Atkinsons was of very high quality, including hats, dresses, handbags and tobacco pouches. They were top-class manufacturers and made dresses, capes etc., for the Duchess of Kent, Queen Victoria and for other Royal houses in Europe including the Czar's Russian Court and the Empress of Austria.

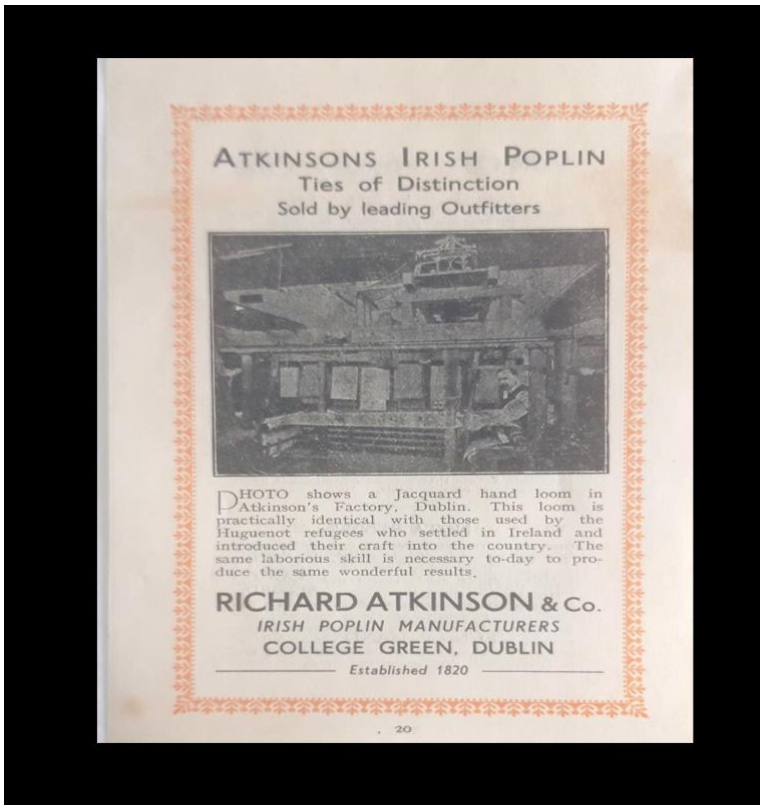

Figure 10: Advertisement for Atkinson Poplin (National Archives)

The Eucharistic Congress of 1932 flew two blue banners woven by Atkinson's. According to Dunleavy (2011, p.129) efforts were made by Richard Atkinson and William Reynolds to try and secure a commission for the robes for Queen Victoria's Coronation in June, 1838. They were unsuccessful, but not entirely, as Queen Victoria did buy rolls of fabric from them. Both suppliers were granted a royal warrant from the Queen in 1837. Atkinson's supplied Irish poplin for Queen Victoria's trousseau (Irish Georgian Society, 2016). The poplin for the trousseau was a brocade with gold and silver on white background with rose bouquets, shamrocks and thistles.

The 'Atkinson Tie'

Figure 11: Atkinson's famous tie (Atkinsonties.com)

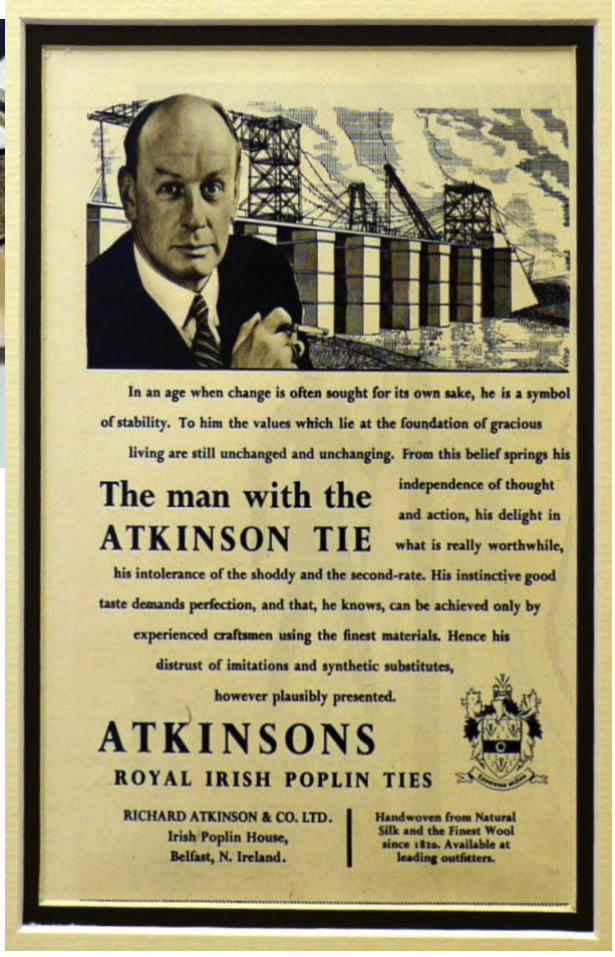

Figure 12: Atkinson lifestyle advertisement (National Archives)

One very interesting niche that Atkinsons targeted was the tie market. They branded their poplin 'Royal Irish Poplin' and sent the material to their premises in Belfast to be made into ties. Eventually Atkinsons moved all their operations to Belfast (Fleming, 1985). The tie became famous and known as the **'Atkinson Tie'**, which still is in great demand today. Atkinsons continue to produce high-end products from their company in England which ensures the Atkinson brand lives on.

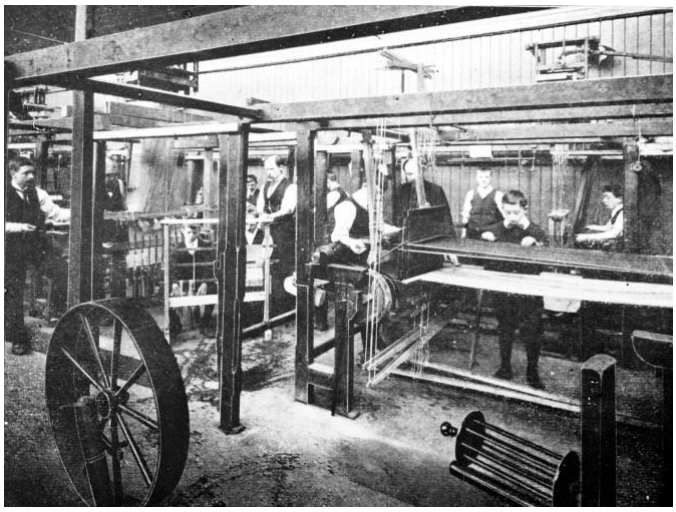

Figure 13: Tie-making at Atkinson's Poplin factory at Merchants Arch (Working Lives Exhibition 1893-1913)

3.2 Elliott & Co.

The company started in 1876 by Thomas Elliott in South Brown Street, Weavers Square, in the Liberties.

Figure 14: Irish National Foresters Sash produced by Elliott & Co (Worthpoint, 2021)

According to Dunleavy (2011, p.153) they expanded the business in 1887 and built a factory in Tenter Lane in the Coombe. Elliott's produced clerical attire, academic hoods and robes, ties, dress fabrics and speciality white poplin for wedding dresses.

Elliott's demand came from high society circles. One of their claims to fame is specially designed curtains for Áras an Uachtaráin. (Fleming, 1985). When President Eamon De Valera became a university Chancellor in 1921, Elliott's made a beautiful gown of Irish black poplin incorporating Celtic motifs. The Elliott business was family run and continued right up until 1966 when the company went through significant turmoil. The business was destroyed by fire in November of that year and they found it difficult to set up again. The South Brown street premises closed down in 1972.

3.3. Fry & Co.

Fry & Co. established in 1740. The family operated from Nicholas Street in the Liberties up to 1804 when they moved to Dame Street. Eleven years later they moved to Westmoreland Street, then to Kevin Street and after that, to Cork Street (Campion, 2013, p.8). They were considered the first to use Irish poplin on upholstery, carriages, motors, curtains, tapestry and silk fringes. According to Dunleavy (2011, p. 155) Fry boasted that they were the largest manufacturer of their kind in Dublin at that time.

Dunleavy noted (2011, p.156) Fry's poplin and trimmings were so successful they were appointed 'Irish Poplin Manufacturers to Her Majesty' in 1871. They helped furnish two apartments in gold silk at Windsor Castle and made silk poplin curtains for the drawing

rooms of Dublin Castle. They were also involved in exporting products to India – their customers being Indian royalty and nobility.

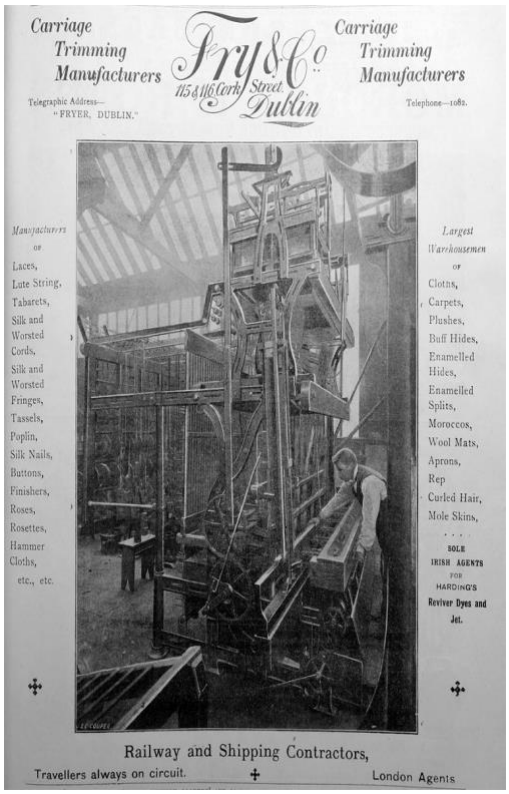

Figure 15: Advertisement for Fry & Co
(Graces Guide to British Industrial History, 2021)

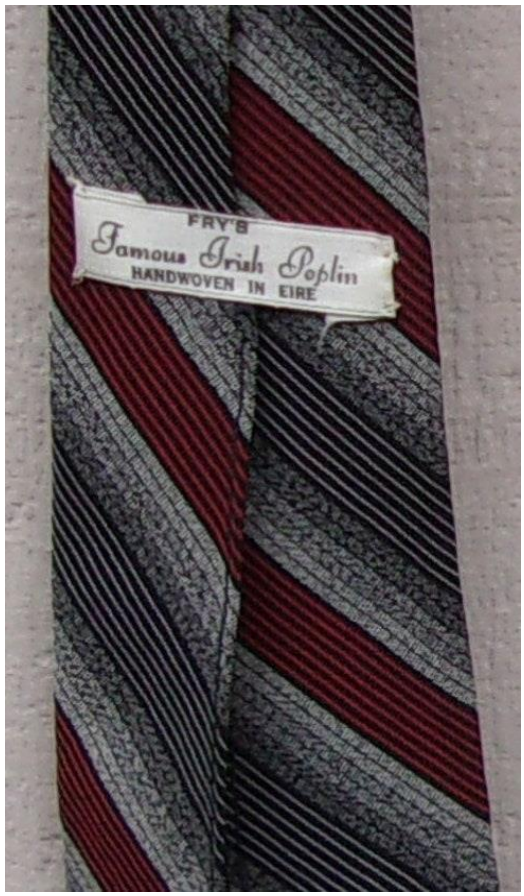

Figure 16: Fry Irish Poplin tie (Easy Resource)

When they exhibited at the 1865 Dublin Exhibition, they got the attention of two new customers, the Prince and Princess of Wales who ordered rolls of material (Campion, 1963). The poplin pattern that seemed to attract most was described as blue background with gold. They also ordered black poplin with Lily of the Valley to be sent to the vice-regal Lodge.

William Fry & Co. made an Irish Poplin dress for **Princess Alexandra of Denmark** when she paid her first visit to London on 7th March, 1863. The fabric was a pale violet colour made of handwoven silk and wool.

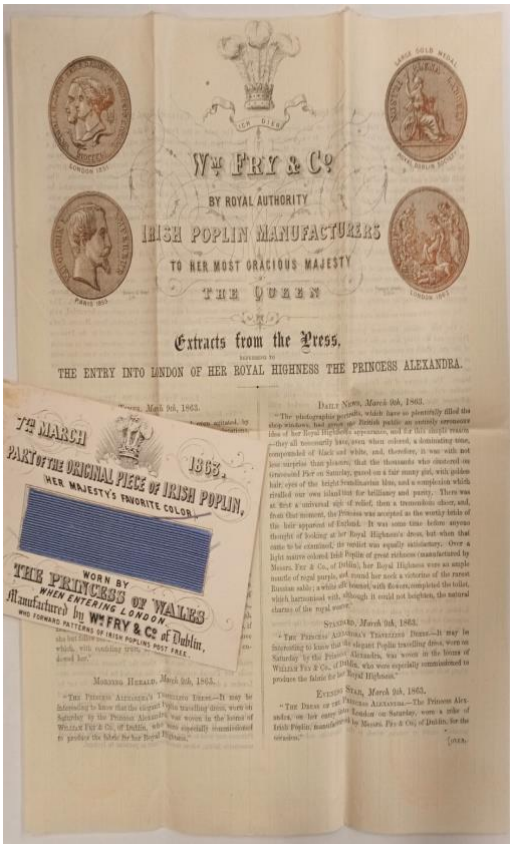

Figure 17: Fry's brochure & swab of material used for Princess Alexandra's Dress (Dublin Archives and Manuscripts at the Bodleian Library)

Figure 18: The arrival of HRH Princess Alexandra of Denmark at Gravesend in 1863 wearing the Irish Silk Poplin dress. Painting by Henry Nelson O'Neil 1817-1880. (National Portrait Gallery, London)

This was a marketing triumph for Fry's. They used press extracts from the day to put together a brochure with a swab of the original material used for making the dress attached as part of their marketing plans.

3.4 Pim Brothers & Co.

The company was founded by the Jonathan Pim (1806-1885) who were Quakers. Production started in 1877 and they were weavers of poplin, linen, cotton and flour millers.

As one of the biggest poplin makers in Dublin and their close proximity to the Liberties, Pim & Co warrant inclusion. The original head office of Pim Brothers was in Grafton Street but changed to South Great Georges Street where they had a magnificent department store on the site where the George Pub now stands (Campion, 1963). They also owned the buildings now known as George's Arcade. Mr. Pim himself, lived just around the corner in South William street, opposite where the Civic Museum stands. The company had 600 power looms in operation from their premises at South William Street and factory at Harold's Cross where they specialised in Irish linen and poplin production - mainly for the export market and in particular, America. According to Dunleavy (2011, p.140) Pim were a true international company with offices in London and New York and agencies in Hamburg and Paris.

Figure 19: Advertisement Pim Brothers (Lillian O'Brien wordpress.com)

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Chapter 4:

The industry in decline

4.1 Factors contributing to the decline

Research suggests that a number of factors account for the slow decline in the industry. Starting in year 1779, embargos were put on exports. Weavers were then put on a fixed wage known as the Spitalfields Act and looms became idle as weavers, upset with their new pay scheme, began to join unions. By 1793, the trade picked up a little but the Act of Union was approaching. England had declared war on France in 1756 and raw material became scarce, greatly affecting silk weavers. Another blow was the 1798 rebellion which ruined weaving in the Liberties. (The Irish Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers).

When the Act of Union came into effect in 1801, Dublin city changed socially and demand declined. According to Dunleavy, (2011, p. 118) removal of the protection tax of ten percent was also a contributor. In the Liberties alone, 900 looms were affected. Although the impact of the Act was not felt immediately, the high society that had been once part of Dublin life had almost vanished. These were the people who loved entertainment and dressed up for dinners, concerts, suppers – each trying to outshine the other in terms of the magnificence of their gowns, houses, carriages, carpets, etc. (Campion, 1963). New wealthy upper class came to replace the old and all hopes for the silk industry lay in them buying like their predecessors.

By the year 1826, Dublin's ports opened their doors to imports of popular Italian and French silk leading to a reduction in the demand for Irish silk. This brought about the end of Irish silk trade and left many wealthy manufacturers ruined. The weaver population dropped to 342 by 1838, 280 of which were poplin weavers (Campion, 1963). However, the number of poplin weavers in the Liberties continued to reduce so much that by 1840, the Corporation of Weavers was gone. The introduction of the power loom was another blow to the hand weaver in Dublin where trade languished until its demise in the 19th century (Webb, 1913). Demand

for poplin began to decline because as its heavy construct which did not match the new fashions of the time. Another blow was the cholera epidemic in 1832 which must have seemed like the end. Aided emigration started and some have compared the consequences for Dublin to that of the great famine (Breathnach,1990).

Moving towards the 20th century saw a steeper decline and yet somehow, a fashionable demand grew for the *handwoven poplin tie* which had a positive impact on the industry (Fleming, 1985). It was said that a man who wore a handwoven tie made of Irish poplin was a 'man of discernment and distinction' (Campion, 1963). Atkinson's in particular, ran advertisements showing well-dressed men sporting the Irish poplin tie.

Of the main manufacturers in Dublin that produced Irish poplin ties at that time – what happened to them? Pim Bros ceased business and Mitchells premises burned down in a fire. Atkinson's eventually moved its production to Belfast and the UK still manufactures the Atkinson Tie. Elliott's went through turmoil in the 1960's due to family disputes and competition and eventually was bought over in 1972.

4.2 The evidence trail left in the Liberties

While the textile industry has almost gone, the Liberties still reveals evidence and clues of its textile past that once flourished in the form of places names relating to the industry over centuries. Names such as Weavers Square, Crosstick Alley, Back Lane, The Tenter's, Tailors Hall and Atkinson House bear direct witness to its rich textile past.

Chapter 5:

The industry today

In the Liberties today, there remains one textile manufacturing company, Botany Weaving Mills, operating since 1934. Other activities include enterprising programmes, educational workshops and courses – run by local colleges, vested interest groups and individuals.

5.1. Botany Weaving Mills

Botany Weaving Mills is situated just off Cork Street on Emerald Square in the Liberties where it has manufactured textiles since 1934.

Figure 20: Vintage Photo Delivery Van to Aer Lingus (Botany Weaving Mills). Photograph: Botany Weavers 10/1/22)

How is it that Botany Weaving Mill is still manufacturing in the Liberties – when so many have folded and gone before them? The answer lies in their clear understanding of the most basic concept in marketing – listening to their customer!

This dynamic company has developed and tweaked its product to meet the demands of its customers since it began operations in 1934. Consumer tastes change and Botany are always ready to meet the change. David Lawson, Marketing Manager explained to me when visiting, that when fashion tastes changed in the 1960s from thicker garments to thinner fabric for women, they moved with that change. During the 1960s Botany's fabrics were to be seen in the windows of Switzer's of Grafton Street, where Brown Thomas now stands.

Figure 21: Page from brochure during 1960's
(Botany Weaving Mill) Photographer: Aisling Moore 10/1/2022

Figure 22: Material samples 1960's (Botany Weaving Mill) Photographer: Aisling Moore 10/1/ 2022

Botany Weaving Mills are now key specialists in the design and manufacture of transport seat and curtain fabrics and carpets.

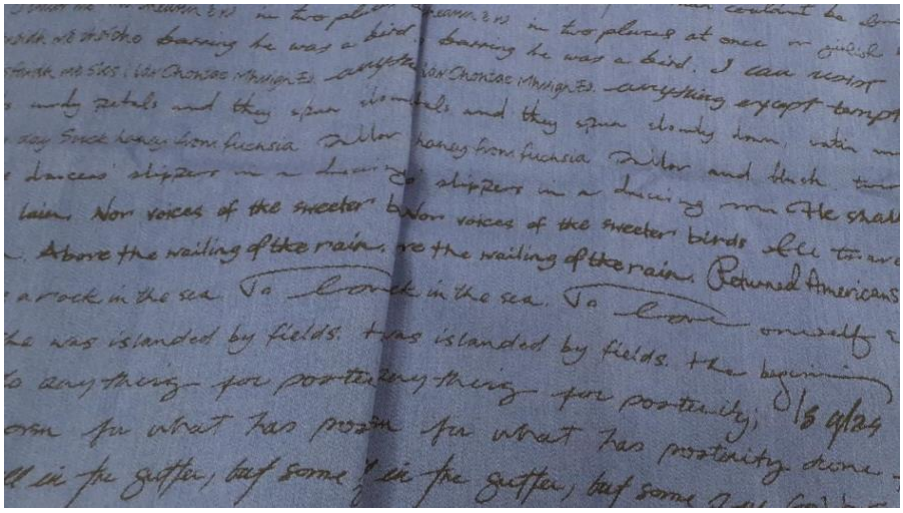

Figure 23: Material used on Aer Lingus transatlantic flights
(Botany Weavers Archive) Photograph: Aisling Moore 10/1/2022

Figure 24: Sample materials
Botany Weaving Mills
(Photographer Aisling Moore 10/1/22)

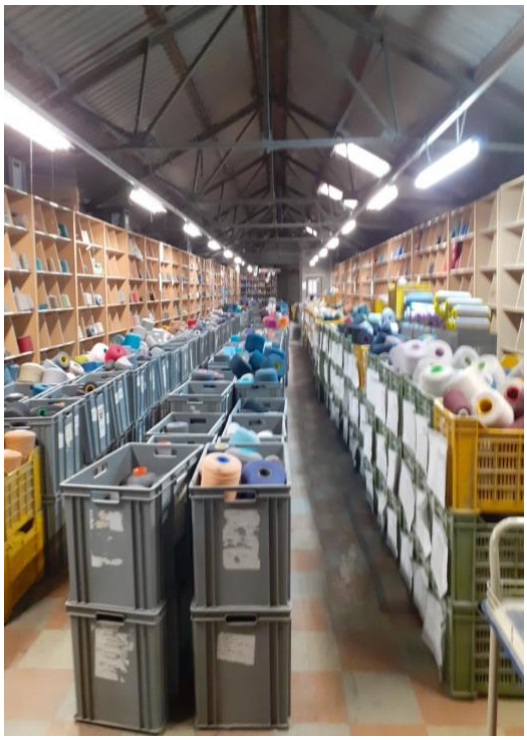

Figure 25: Storage area for yarns, Botany Weaving Mills
(Photographer Aisling Moore 10/1/22)

Major clients include: Aer Lingus, British Airways, Etihad, Qantas, Air Canada, Virgin Atlantic, Air France, All Nippon Airways, United Airlines. Other clients include the Irish Defence Forces and An Garda Síochána.

Figure 26: British Airways uniform
Botany Weavers Archive (Photograph: Aisling Moore 10/1/2022)

Figure 27: Garda Uniform
Botany Weavers Archive (Photograph: Aisling Moore, 10/1/2022)

Botany Weaving Mills weave **only** in the Liberties on purpose made looms. A tour of the factory floor with Mairead McLean, Botany's top textile designer to see the looms in operation was a sight to behold. Large Jacquard looms producing beautiful textured fabrics and smaller dobby looms producing fabrics with 3D designs in a variety of finishes to meet customer orders.

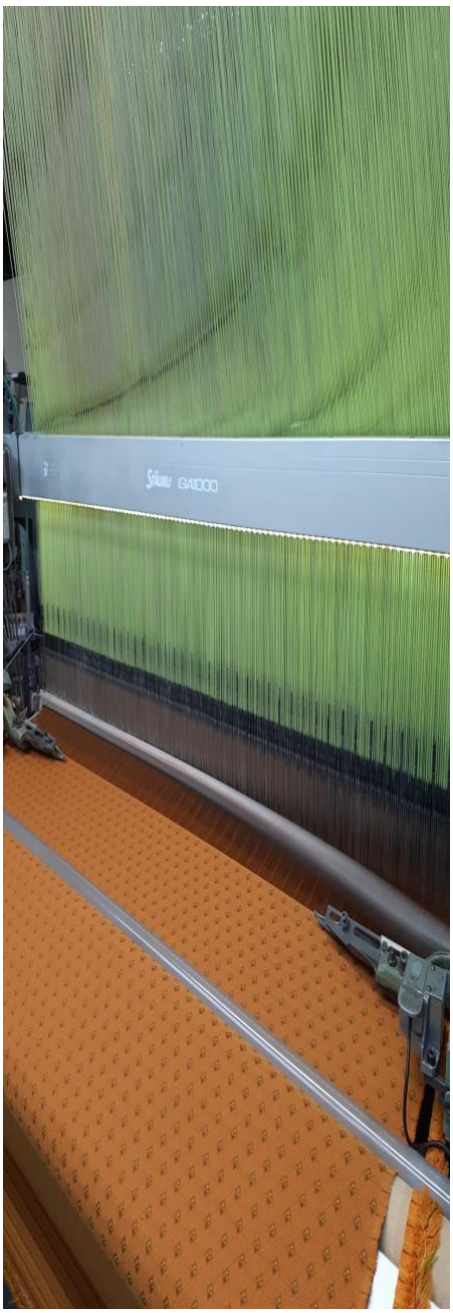

Figure 28: Jacquard Loom in operation in Botany
(Photograph: Aisling Moore 10/1/22)

Figure 29: Computerised programme for loom in Botany
(Photograph: Aisling Moore 10/1/22)

When asking David where the name Botany came from he said "We got the name from the type of wool found on sheep around Botany Bay in Australia. The name has not changed since 1934".

5.2 Community level activity

Currently in the Liberties, the tradition in weaving is actively being promoted in community settings through workshops, seminars and viable entrepreneurial projects.

The Yarn School

Figure 30: logo of Yarn School (Yarn School)

Figure 31: Photograph of Marja Almqvist, (Yarn School)

Marja Almqvist is the founder of the Yarn School - a community based textile school in Dublin 8. She holds a degree in textile design from NCAD and has worked in the community for over 20 years. She has an great understanding of the tradition in textile work in the Liberties and brings this part of its heritage into her workshops. Marja has worked with local community groups on numerous projects over recent years in conjunction with Dublin City Council.

Marja has managed a number exciting projects of note including, ***Rebel Women*** and The ***Suffragette Hat Project.***

Figure 32: Photograph of the 'Rebel Women' project and visit to Aras an Uachtarain. (Hilary Morley, Making.ie, 2020)

In April of 2021, Marja, was guest speaker at a community based Zoom-workshop called

'Talking with Textiles' which I conducted in liaison with Hilda Mungareza and Austin Campbell from the RECDP.

She was discussing her fascinating new project with flax. Marja plans to grow flax in the community as part of her new sustainability initiative in Flanagan's Field in Fatima Gardens, an idea she got from her home country of Sweden.

Figure 33: Poster 'Talking with Textiles' (RECDP, 2021)

She shared with us her plans for the many workshops organised for this year including tapestry, beginners and advanced level in weaving and textiles. She ran a project in 2021 called ‘making.ie’ about weaving in the Liberties, during Covid.

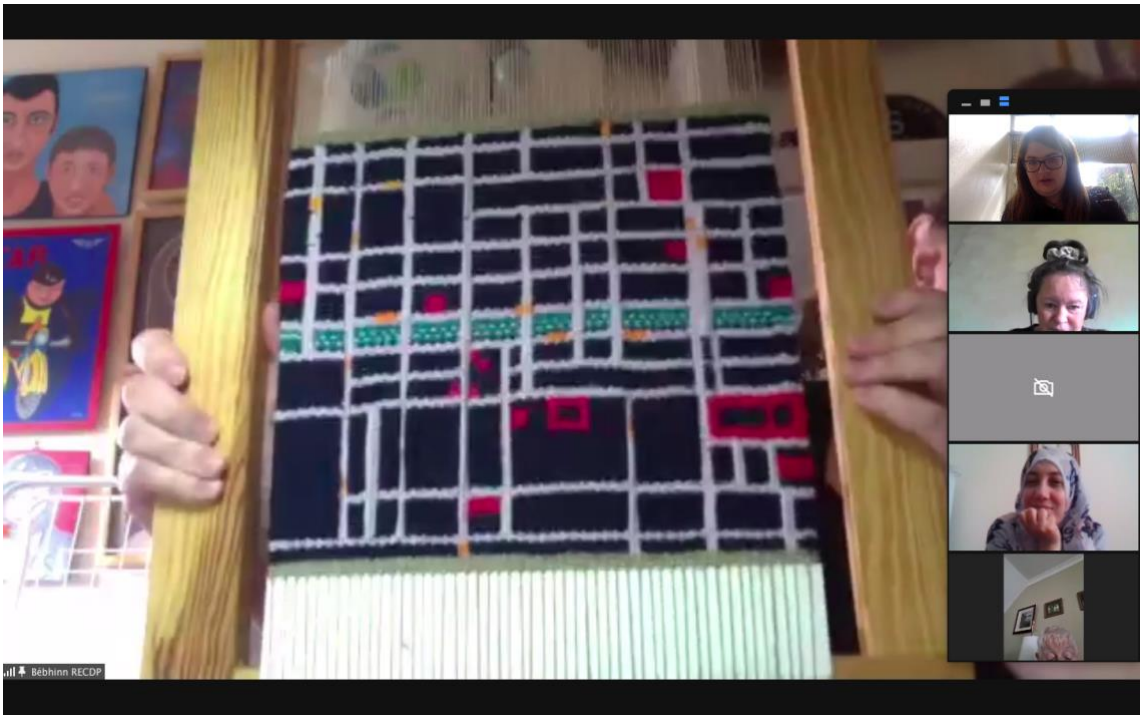

Figure 34 : Talking with Textiles Zoom Workshop (Photograph Aisling Moore, 2021)

Marja told us that she planned to mark the 100th anniversary of the truce in the Irish War of Independence this year with a special project working with a group called the Tenter’s 100 – celebrating the centenary of first public housing in the area. She mentioned other areas she was working on, which included family workshops and the libraries of Dolphins Barn and Inchicore.

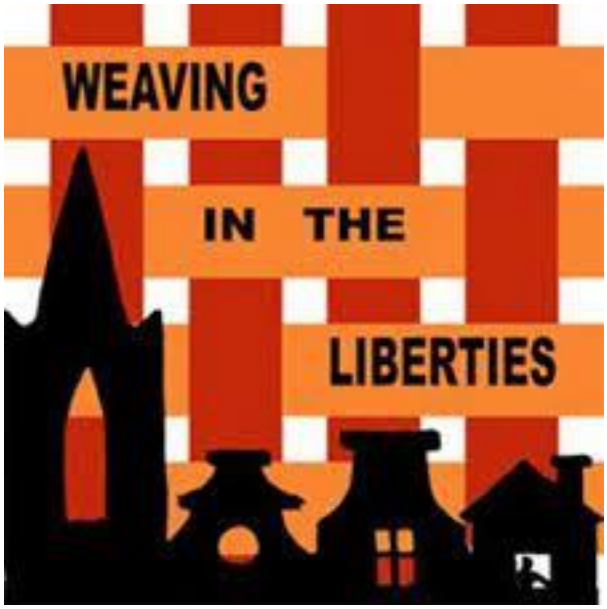

Figure 35: Logo ‘Weaving in the Liberties’ (Weaving in the Liberties.ie 2022)

Weaving in the Liberties Project

This project started in 2018, with the aim of promoting the weaving tradition in the Liberties. It is a partnership between Marja Almqvist, textile artist and Cathy Scuffil, Dublin City Council Historian in Residence who have previously worked together on many projects.

Future plans include the ***‘Weavebox Project’*** - an introduction to weaving and its history in the Liberties with its first online and face-to-face workshops happening in September 2022. Other projects in the pipeline are with the Solas Project which is working with a local youth support group in a woodwork project aimed at producing and selling ‘Liberties made’ weaving equipment. Marja also plans to establish a ‘Weaving Shed’, along the lines of the Men’s Shed projects (The Liberties Dublin, 2021).

5.3 Educational opportunities

Through my research, I discovered many educational courses related to weaving and textile production are available in the Liberties, each offering academic qualifications.

Figure 36 : NCAD logo (NCAD)

NCAD offer educational courses in Textile Surface Design, Textile Art and Artefact. Rachael Tuffy, tutor in TSD explained to me that these courses were originally set up during the 1970s by Lillias Mitchell, who I discovered was the founder of the Irish Guild of Weavers, Spinners & Dyers. Lillias was driven by a passion to educate people in the art of weaving and dying.

Lillias Mitchell was born in Dublin in 1915, She was invited by the Department of Education to set up a weaving department in NCAD in 1950, which she did. The following year she set up two weaving rooms in NCAD. As the weaving department grew, it was moved to two huts in the garden of Dail Eireann where Lillias continued her teaching in dyeing and spinning until her retirement in 1979. (National Gallery of Ireland, 2012).

Rachael explained to me that in recent years, weaving has become more popular in NCAD with a lean towards sustainable processes. She mentioned future plans regarding the setting up of a textile museum in the Tenter's area of the Liberties, which sounds very exciting.

Stitch 'n' Bitch – based in NCAD for knitter lovers. This college society is a fun way to get involved in making and creating textiles. Its open to everyone in the college to join.

Figure 37: Stitch 'n' Bitch logo (NCAD)

Figure 38: Liberties College logo (Liberties College)

Liberties College in Bull Alley run a course called *'Textiles – Heritage, Craft, Revival and Renewal* ' (ref: 5M2208). Paula Delany tutor, explained to me that it gives students the opportunity to learn skills in weaving, lace-making, patchwork, embroidery and quilting that is studied from a historical and contemporary perspective. She went to say that there was an increased interest in the course since it started.

Figure 39: FETCH logo (Fetch Courses)

FETCH are providing a course called '*Crafts – Weaving for Beginners'* (ref: 3370240) which is Govt. funded, free, part-time and run in Liberties College and Libraries in the Liberties. It introduces weaving by hand on frame looms via face to face or online.

Chapter 6:

Conclusion

Conclusion

The purpose of my research was to find out more about the textile industry that once thrived in the Liberties area. As a student in NCAD studying textiles in fine art – I felt the connection needed to be explored.

My research unveiled the story of a cottage industry being infused with new life in the 17th and 18th century, when the Huguenots arrived –bringing with them skills in silk and poplin weaving and integrating into the community.

I discovered how the Industrial Age brought new technology and with that, change. There was a move away from the cottage industry to factories using new looms such as the Jacquard which resulted in a decline in the demand for hand weavers. A small number of large manufacturers controlled the now thriving poplin market in Dublin using these new processes.

My research points to underlying factors that led to the industry's eventual decline. It also highlighted the demand for the Irish poplin tie – which saved many companies such as Atkinson's, who still market this tie today.

In trying to establish what was happening on the ground today, I was thrilled to discover the last remaining textile factory, Botany Weaving Mills, which has operated off Cork Street since 1934. I also became aware of a myriad of workshops, seminars and classes in textile weaving conducted at community level by colleges and vested interest groups in efforts to maintain the tradition.

My limitations related mostly to time constraints and available space. With more time on my side, I would have liked to have conducted additional interviews with local individuals and

business from the area. I also would have liked to include a section on the fashion houses in the Liberties that once existed, such as Henry White, but unfortunately, space was limited.

Finally, when I came to study at NCAD, I knew little about the textile industry in the Liberties. What I have learned is that its textile heritage is sewn into the very fabric of its community at many levels, and I look forward to developing my studies and engagement more in this area.

Word count: 6001

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