

Historical Influences
on the Irish
Printed Textile Industry

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HISTORICAL INFLUENCES ON THE IRISH

PRINTED TEXTILE INDUSTRY

BY

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INTRODUCTION

Unfortunately the Printed Textile Industry in the South of Ireland means nothing today, what little of it exists is not worth mentioning. As I am studying the design aspect of printed textiles, it was a great disappointment to me when I realised that if I wanted to work in my chosen field I would most probably have to travel abroad.

A year or so ago, I was thumbing through a magazine, when an interesting design caught my eye, it was a piece of printed fabric entitled the 'Volunteer Chintz', I was intrigued to discover that this fabric was a replica of an eighteenth century fabric printed in Leixlip, Co. Kildare. I asked myself how it was that 18th century Ireland had a printed textile industry but 20th century Ireland did not.

During the summer of 1991, with my final year and thesis approaching, I decided to see if I could find any information on the 18th century printed textile industry in Ireland, as it would be an interesting subject on which to do my thesis. After initial research I became intrigued by the subject but not by the details, I was more interested in why the industry decayed. At first, when it became clear that no manufacturers survived into the second half of the 19th century, I thought that perhaps the Famine was responsible.

Unfortunately, I had a lot to learn about Irish History and the more I read about Irish History, the more involved I became.

I soon discovered the reasons for the decline of the printed textile industry in Ireland and also the reasons why it started here in the early 18th century. I now found that my thesis was first and foremost about the history of Ireland over 150 years (the end of the 17th century to the middle of the 19th century), and only secondly, about the printed textile industry itself. I have done a lot of reading and I feel that to talk about the lifespan of printed textiles in Ireland you must talk primarily about the history of the country at that time because this history dictated the direction that the printed textile industry was to take.

Although the printed textiles produced in Ireland were much sought after and can be assumed, from documentation and samples available, to be of the highest quality it was unfortunate that for this industry to live, another had to die; the Woollen Industry had been thriving and was of the highest standard but, due to jealousy from the English, prohibitive laws were applied to the Woollen Industry at the end of the 17th century, thus ruining the Woollen Trade. As compensation, the English had encouraged the Linen Industry, an industry that they could not be jealous of as they had none to speak of themselves. Of course

the printed textile industry probably owes its existence to the linen industry as with no linen there would probably have been no printing industry. This is an example of how history was the reason behind every stage of the printed textile industries existence.

I thoroughly enjoyed researching this thesis, the hardest part was the writing stage as I had so much information and I could only use a percentage of it. I do not think the reader will enjoy reading my thesis as much as I enjoyed researching it, as only I can identify with a piece of information that may have taken hours or days to find and upon finding it the feeling of self satisfaction made it all worth while.

CHAPTER 1

(i)

A LOOK AT THE HISTORY OF IRELAND UP TO THE END OF THE 17TH CENTURY CONCENTRATING ON THE POSITION OF HER INDUSTRIES.

During the 17th century, Ireland was ruled by the English Monarchs, Monarchs who cared very little for the Irish people. The Irish were treated badly as can be seen from the writings of Mrs. J. R. Green:-

Every vestige of the their tradition was doomed _ their religion was forbidden, and the Staff of Patrick and the Cross of Columcille destroyed, with every other national relic; their schools were scattered, their learned men hunted down, their books burnt; native industries were abolished; the inauguration chairs of their chiefs were broken in pieces, and the law of the race torn up, codes of inheritance, of land tenure, of contract between neighbours or between Lord and man.(1)

Charles I and Charles II ruled England and Ireland during the 17th century; both men helped with the near destruction of Irish trade to England and her colonies. During the reign of Charles I, who was beheaded in 1649 (2), the then Lord Lieutenant to Ireland, Thomas Wentworth, attempted to discourage the Irish Woollen Trade in order to make Ireland dependant on England for clothing and thus boost the English Woollen Trade. Large sums of money were subsequently spent on the Irish Linen Trade as way of compensation (3).

Charles II was only on the English Throne three years, and yet during

this time he managed to nearly choke Ireland of her export trade. During the 17th century Ireland's chief exports were animals, animal products, wool and woollen manufacture and hides⁽⁴⁾. During his reign, Charles II changed all this. First, prohibitive duties were imposed on selected imports to England and to the colonies, Ireland was allowed to export only servants, horses, victuals and salts (4). It was believed that this act would:-

Make this kingdom a staple, not only of the commodities of those plantations, but also of the commodities of other countries and places for the supplying of them, and it being the usage of other countries to keep their plantation trade to themselves. (4)

In 1663 (5), Ireland was forbidden to export cattle, sheep, swine, beef, pork and bacon into England. Then in 1666 (5), mutton, lamb, butter and cheese were also prohibited from being exported into England.

The industry of Dublin city would not have been affected greatly by the above Acts as she did not produce the prohibited goods. Dublin's main source of industrial wealth was in her woollen manufacture. This strong trade was established by English and Huguenot weavers at the end of the 17th century (6); they had settled in Dublin on account of her cheapness of labour and the excellent quality of Irish Wool. As Ireland's cattle and dairy trade suffered, her woollen trade prospered with large quantities of woollen manufacture being exported to the continent. This woollen trade was not a recent development, for as

early as the reign of Henry III, Ireland had been exporting woollen goods to England; there is also reliable evidence that shows Irish woollen goods being exported to Italy in the 14th century (7).

The English woollen manufacturers realised how strong the Irish woollen trade was and they began to fear that their own trade would suffer so they petitioned their own government to help them. In the years 1698 - 1699, the exportation of woollen products was prohibited in Ireland (8); this made English woollen manufacture stable but ruined Ireland's woollen trade. Of the 12,000 protestant families who prospered by the woollen trade up to 1698, many found themselves living in poverty after 1699 (9). While the woollen trade in Ireland was being discouraged by England, the English were again encouraging the Irish Linen trade as England had no notable linen trade of her own and therefore did not feel threatened by Irish woollen trade.

The cattle and woollen trades were not the only trades to be ruined by England; many of Ireland's minor industries had heavy duties imposed on their manufactures when they were imported into England. At the same time, manufactures that England imported into Ireland had very small duties imposed on them (10), thus crippling Ireland's industries and strengthening those of England.

During the 18th century, Ireland was ruled by an Irish Parliament which was based in Dublin. An Act passed in the reign of George I (1714 - 1727) (11), gave the English Parliament full right to legislate for Ireland. At the same time Poynings Law, dating from the reign of Henry VII, denied the Irish Parliament from making laws for Ireland without first having approval from the king and his council in England (12). Having an Irish Parliament based in Dublin did not make much difference to the general lives of the Irish people but it did make Dublin an important city. The Irish Parliament consisted of English and Anglo-Irish aristocracy, and commercial magnates. They ruled the Irish people with extreme strictness and their first priority was with the English and Anglo-Irish living in Ireland. This Parliament ruled Ireland for nearly a hundred years (1691 - 1782) (13). Mrs. J. R. Green describes it and its role as:-

A strong government purely English, was given it's opportunity - prolonged, undisturbed, uncontrolled - to advance "the King's Service" the dependency of Ireland upon England, and "the comfort or security of any English in it" (14).

It is only right to mention at this point that not all the English and Anglo-Irish Landlords, etc., treated the Irish people badly; some tried their best to improve their tenants' lives.

As Dublin was now the seat of Parliament, a Parliament consisting of many wealthy English and Anglo-Irish, it also now became home to

a great social circle which meant a lot more money was in circulation in Dublin to be spent. It was only logical that Ireland should produce goods for home consumption, not only to avoid paying duties on imported goods but also to keep within the country instead of lining the pockets of foreign manufacturers.



FIG 1

ILLUSTRATION OF WOODBLOCK PRINTING ONTO FABRIC

(ii)

HOW THE PRINTED TEXTILE INDUSTRY DEVELOPED AND FARED IN EUROPE.

The method of woodblock printing on fabric had been occurring on a small scale in Europe, mainly in the Rhenish provinces, since the late middle ages (1) (see fig.1). The result of this woodblock printing was simple designs usually in black, on linen or silk; this was to change into elaborate colourful designs when India and the Far East were opened to the West by the English and Dutch East Indian companies in the early 17th century (2). The European market was flooded with merchandise from the Far East and India. Included in the imported merchandise were stained cottons known as 'Indiennes', 'Perses'(2), or 'Chintz' (3). These stained cottons became very popular in France, then Europe, for use in fashions and furnishing around the middle of the 17th century (2). They were popular because they were novel, decorative and above all they were washable, an achievement the Europeans had not gained with colour on fabric.

The Europeans tried to reproduce these fabrics themselves, but they would not be successful until they learnt the Oriental technique of using mordants to fix the dyes. At first this new industry was welcomed by the prohibition of imported chintz in most European

countries. In 1686 (4), after a cry for help from the French silk and velvet makers, the industry was banned in France.

The skilled artisans who had produced the fabrics in France now emigrated to countries such as England, Holland, Switzerland and Germany where they helped to found printing manufactures. The prohibitions concerning printed fabric manufacture in France were to be raised in 1759 (5), after which France would enter a great era associated with Oberkampt of Jouy.

The English, as was their custom, followed the French fashions and the Indian printed fabrics became very popular. English woollen manufacturers seriously opposed the importation of the Indian printed fabrics and the imitations which were being produced in England. The English woollen trade made development of the printed textile industry difficult, but when the madder and resist technique for fixing dyes was brought over by the skilled French refugees at the end of the 17th century, the printed textile industry in England was secured.

With many English and Anglo-Irish aristocrats and commercial magnates now residing in Ireland there was a market and a desire for these novel, gaily coloured fabrics. The fabrics could very easily have been imported into Ireland from England as duties on them would have

been small, but Ireland herself was in a very good position to set up her own printed textile industry because unlike the English woollen manufactures, the Irish woollen trade was in no position to oppose the setting up of a printed textile industry in Ireland. This was because, as previously mentioned, Irish woollen goods were prohibited from exportation. This had led to the skilled woollen workers emigrating. Now woollen products produced were of much coarser texture and poorer quality than they had been previously. These manufactures did not appeal to the gentry but to the poorer classes. The gentry preferred to dress themselves in imported woollens and Irish cottons and linens.

Unlike England, Ireland produced the finest quality linen. Arthur Dobbs, writing in 1729, points out that Irish Linens to the value of £177,000 a year were sent to England and 'made a manufacture there, by being stamp'd and stain'd' which then increased their price by another 10d, a yard, so giving a gain of £147,500 (6). Since by this time Ireland was forbidden to export 'checked, striped, printed, painted, stained or dyed linens of Irish manufacture' (7), she could print for her own home consumption and save money from imports.

As can be seen from the above paragraphs, Ireland was able to welcome an industry in printed textiles with open arms. She had a

ready market, one which the Irish woollen manufacturers could not fill, she had a successful linen industry and she also had her own cotton industry, so fabric need not be as costly as it would have been if the fabrics had to be imported, as in England. Many of Ireland's established industries had suffered from prohibitive laws and duties to the extent that many ceased to operate. Ireland was now in the position to build up industries that could supply and survive the small market that would be open to them.

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- (6) DOBBS, Arthur, An Essay on the Trade and Improvements of Ireland, Dublin, 1729, p.p. 54-63
- (7) LEASK, 1937, p.50

* This article will be referred to as _ LEASK, 1937 _ throughout the rest of the footnotes.

CHAPTER 2

HOW THE PRINTED TEXTILE INDUSTRY WAS ENCOURAGED IN IRELAND AND SOME HISTORICAL POINTS THAT INFLUENCED IT

I would be glad to know by what secret method it is that we grow a rich and flourishing people, without liberty, trade, manufactures, inhabitants, money, or the privilege of coining; without industry, labour or improvements of lands, and with more than half of the rent and Profits of the whole kingdom annually exported, for which we receive not a single farthing. And to make up [for] all this, nothing worth mentioning, except the Linnen of the North, a Trade casual, corrupted and at mercy, and some Butter from Cork. If we do flourish, it must be against every law of nature and reason, like the Thorn of Glastonbury, that blossoms in the midst of winter. (1)

The above was written by Swift and was published in 1727. It seems obvious that Ireland's only industries were linen and butter and that she needed more industries than this. There was money in Ireland now that there was a Parliament in Dublin. There should have been more money, money that landlords collected, but often the landlords found it hard to collect the rents and some of the landlords that did manage to collect the rents lived in England so the money wasn't in Ireland to be spent. The beginning of the 18th century was the ideal time for new industries such as that of printed textiles, to be started in Ireland. They were needed in order to help in Ireland's economy by producing goods that otherwise would have had to have been imported.

The first application for an establishment for the carrying out of the 'extraordinary invention of staining and printing all colours on all manners of linen, calicos, etc., never found out in the kingdom of Ireland' (2), was by John Ponsand and David Cossort in 1693⁽³⁾. But it was another twenty years or so later that an establishment for printing and staining linens and cottons actually materialised in Ireland.

In 1711, the trustees of the Linen Hall, which was situated at the 'Rere of Bolton Street and North-King Street'(4), Dublin, realised how important the printed textile industry was to the Irish Linen Industry and so, along with the Dublin Society and the Irish Parliament, they awarded grants for the erection of printing machinery, buildings, etc., through out the 18th century (5). Early in the 18th century they unsuccessfully petitioned the legislation that Irish printed linens be freely exported to the English Colonies.

The earliest documented evidence to be found in the proceedings of the trustees of the Linen Board is from 1727, when Daniel Chappell petitioned for the sum of 28 18s 6d to enable him to purchase and cut timber for prints and grounds (3). Chappell opened his establishment with aid from the trustees of the Linen Board. They supplied him with buildings and lands in Ballsbridge and he was also supplied with a sum of money to use in starting up the manufacture. The trustees

of the Linen Board continued to supply Chappell with money until 1735 when they became dissatisfied with him because they had been receiving a number of complaints about the work he was producing.(3)

1727 is the first documented date for the establishment of a printed textile manufacture (6). But there may have been other manufactures operating at an earlier date in this field. When Samuel Grant sent in a petition for Parliamentary aid in 1763, he stated that his father had, in 1715, emigrated from England to Dublin where he had set up a printed textile manufacture which he operated until his death (6). Mary Knabbs, who was Samuel Grants sister, states in her 1762 petition for Parliamentary aid that her father built the printing works, which she now ran, in Palmerstown, around 1720, and that it was the first factory of its kind to operate in Ireland (7). There is no other evidence to support the claims of Samuel Grant and Mary Knabbs but from the evidence in their separate petitions it is possible that there father was the first, or one of the first to have started a printed textile manufacture in Ireland.

During the 18th century approximately sixty - seventy printed textile manufactures where established in Ireland. Many of these manufactures did not have a long life span. The reasons for this were money, and often lack of knowledge of the industry.

Printed textile manufacture was a very expensive business to become involved in. The initial cost of equipping a business was very large and then the ongoing expense could be added – fabrics had to be bought before they could be printed on, etc., many of the people who became involved in printed textile manufacture did not seem to realise the expense that would occur. Therefore, it can be said that many of these establishments closed due to bad money management and lack of knowledge of the industry.

The trustees of the Linen Board, the Dublin Society and the Irish Parliament did, as previously mentioned, award grants and premiums. These were helpful to the manufacturers who used them wisely. The Dublin Society was not just interested in providing money to set up establishments but it also set out to try and improve the standard of pattern drawing for industrial purposes, such as delph ware, silks, damasks, etc., as well as printed linens and cottons (8). It achieved this by offering prizes of money for the best designs submitted to them. The first prize offered for designs for printed linens was in 1745, and was open to children under 15 years of age (8). In 1758, the age limit was raised to 18 years (8). The winning designs became the property of the Dublin Society and could be viewed and copied by printed textile manufacturers but they could not be borrowed. The prizes continued to be awarded until 1796 (8).

The Peace of Aix La Chapelle in 1748, brought a great European war to an end; 1748 also showed a change in Ireland's fortunes. The National Exchequer soon showed surplus funds; the English crown and the Irish House of Commons disputed over these surplus funds. The outcome of this dispute was to Ireland's advantage: surplus funds from the National Exchequer were now to be distributed between useful public works and in the encouragement of Irish industries, this settlement between the English crown and the Irish Parliament marked the beginning of an Irish Parliament that started to think of Ireland as their responsibility and not just the English and Anglo-Irish who resided there (9).

The printed textile industry in Ireland had started by 1748 and grants and premiums were already available to petitioners but after 1748 more money was allotted to this trade. Of the money that was to be distributed between public works and Irish industries, around 8,000 was allotted to the assistance of the development of printing or stamping linens and cottons. It was the Dublin Society who had the task of awarding this money to manufacturers of printed and stamped linens and cottons. During the years 1764 - 1770, premiums were awarded on a percentage basis (no more than 10%) on the total value of printed work sent in by the competing manufacturers; this was divided between pieces of fabric printed by woodblock and copperplates (10).

In 1769, they were given for productions on linens or cottons of Irish manufacture suitable for furniture or garments only (11). These premiums were discontinued in 1770 as it was felt the printing side of the linen and cotton industries received sufficient funds from the Linen Board, although in 1781 small premiums were offered for plain printed cottons with dark or coloured grounds.

By the time of the American war in 1775, economic conditions in Ireland were far different from what they had been less than a 100 years previously; the Irish cattle and woollen trades may have been destroyed but Irish commerce was in flourishing condition. After England had prohibited the export of Irish cattle and woollen produce, Ireland had decided to concentrate on a provisional trade; this was now flourishing with large quantities of beef, butter, hides and tallow (hard animal fat) being exported to England, her colonies in America and the continent. The linen trade exports had trebled, but unfortunately due to prohibition laws printed linens could not be exported to the same extent. Printed linens were prohibited from being exported to England and her colonies but there is evidence (12) to show that she exported printed linens and other printed fabrics elsewhere.

In giving evidence for Mary Knabbs petition in 1762, Mr. Edward Braughall, a dealer in textiles, stated that he exported many pieces

abroad giving the example that he had at that time £400 worth in Spain (13).

Ada Leask states that Irish made copies of the famous French 'Toiles de Jouy' (14) were sent in quantity to New York, Philadelphia and other cities, although the majority of these pieces were sent in the years 1780 to 1800 (15). During the second half of the 18th century, Irish newspapers often referred to the demand from America, Spain and Portugal for Irish printed fabrics (16).

Arthur Young, who wrote a guide for people travelling around Ireland, remarked in his guide that since 1748 Ireland had perhaps made greater advances than any other country in Europe. He noted the gradual improvement of Irish towns during the same period _ 'a strong mark,' as he truly observes, 'of rising prosperity' (17).

In 1775, when the American war broke out, England prohibited provisional trade to the colonies and also to France; colonial non-importation agreements aimed against England also affected Ireland _ her linen trade suffered greatly (18). This would not have really affected printed fabric exports as they were already prohibited from being exported to the countries that linen was now prohibited from being exported to under the non-importation agreements. Printed

fabrics were affected in a different way _ with England's manufactures suddenly without many of their foreign markets, they began to flood the markets still open to them, i.e. Ireland, with their manufactures.

With England engaged heavily in the American war she needed all the troops that she had to be involved in this war. Therefore English troops based in Ireland were withdrawn, leaving Ireland unprotected. The protestant gentry in Ireland feared for their safety as Ireland was very vulnerable to the pirates that were now freely swarming the seas; to protect themselves they formed the Volunteer Army; 40,000 men joined up and by 1781 another 40,000 had joined.

The Volunteers supported the non-importation agreements and also declared full free trade and a free parliament for Ireland. In 1780, the act that forbade Ireland to export her woollen manufacture to England and her colonies was repealed; unfortunately Irish woollen manufacture was not the strong trade it used to be and it could not compete with the finer products already on the markets from other countries. In 1781, at a great meeting held at Dungannon, in the north of Ireland, the Volunteers declared for a free parliament. The Act of George I, which bound Ireland to obey laws made in England was repealed; the Irish parliament could now legislate for herself.

Mr. Edward Clarke, who owned a copperplate printing place at Palmerstown, Co. Dublin, and an Irish furniture cotton-warehouse in Werburgh Street, Dublin, was responsible for a fabric called the 'Volunteer Furniture', which commemorates the review for the province of Leinster, held on the 3rd June, 1782, in the Phoenix Park (19).

This fabric was printed by Mr. Harpur, proprietor of the printing works in Leixlip, and was probably designed by Gabriel Beranger, who lived in Ireland between 1750 and 1817, and was a well known French artist (20); the 'Volunteer Furniture' is in his style of work and corresponds very closely to sketches of his which are preserved in the Royal Irish Academy (21).

The 'Volunteer Furniture' was advertised for sale on the 25th November, 1783, in the Dublin Evening Post:-

No.12, Werburgh Street, Dublin, who has now ready for inspection the greatest variety of chintz and other new and elegant furniture, cottons and linens (finished from copperplate) ever offered to sale in this kingdom: particularly a volunteer furniture which is an exact representation of the last provincial review in the Phoenix Park; with a striking likeness of Lord Charlemont, as reviewing general and every other matter fully represented that was worth observation at that review; and also every other pleasing object in and about the Fifteen Acres (the Review ground).

The American war of 1775 did not seem to create any major problems in the printed textile industry. In 1780 when the act forbidding the export of the woollen manufactures was repealed, it could have

destroyed some of the printed textile industry were it not for the fact that the woollen manufactures could not produce quality goods any more due to the emigration of the skilled workers while the prohibiting act was in operation.

If anything, the printed textile industry seemed to have been flourishing. Copperplate printing (22) by 1775 had been adopted by several leading manufacturers (23) and trade to America, Spain and Portugal was strong.

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- (9) WEBB, Industrial Dublin since 1698 and the Silk Industry in Dublin, p.p. 21-22
- (10) LEASK, 1937, p.31
- (11) Dub.Soc.Proc. 2 Feb 1769 in LEASK, 1937, p.31
- (12) See paragraphs following
- (13) LEASK, 1937, p.37
- (14) Fabric originally designed and manufactured at Jouy, France, by Oberkampt. Oberkampt turned printed fabrics from decorative pieces to artistic works during the 18th Century.

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- (21) LEASK, Ada, "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the 18th Century. III", Journal of the Co Kildare Archaeological Society, VOL 13, 1955, p.295
- (22) Copperplate printing was first used successfully by Theophilus Thompson and Francis Nixon at their works in Drumcondra; they discovered a thickener for the mordant inks used in copperplate printing which resulted in the finished fabrics being washable.
- (23) LEASK, "The Volunteer Furniture", p.416

CHAPTER 3

(i)

DISCUSSING THE QUALITY OF DESIGN AND PRODUCTION OF PIECES OF PRINTED FABRIC PRODUCED IN IRELAND IN THE 18TH CENTURY.

The 'Volunteer Furniture' has already been discussed in Chapter 2, but it was only discussed in relation to the historic event which it illustrates. In order to assess the quality of printed textiles produced in Ireland in the 18th century we must examine pieces of fabric known to have originated from the said time and place. The 'Volunteer Furniture' is one of such pieces that can be associated with the Irish printed textile industry of the 18th century.

Edward Clarke advertised the 'Volunteer Furniture' for sale in the Dublin Evening Post on the 25th November, 1783 (1); on the 14th September, 1782, in the Dublin Evening Post the following advertisement appeared:-

We have the pleasure to inform the public, that Mr Harpur of Leixlip, linen printer, has now nearly finished on cotton from copperplate, for Mr Clarke, proprietor of the Irish Furniture Cotton-warehouse, in Werburgh-Street, a volunteer furniture in chintz colours, which is an exact representation of the last provincial Review in the Phoenix Park,

As you can see, there is over a year between the above advertisement and the advertisement announcing the sale of the fabric. The first advertisement appeared just over 3 months after the event, which it was illustrating, took place. Since the printing season, May - September, was so soon over after the event, it would be inconceivable to have produced the fabric sooner than it was. The reasons for this are - first, the design had to be researched, drawn and worked into a repeat and then the 33" square copperplate (2) needed for printing had to be engraved; this was a time consuming job. It can so be presumed that by the time the copperplates were ready the printing season would have being over and production of the fabric would have had to have being postponed until the printing season of 1783. The entire fabric colours were not printed with copperplate only, the basic colour was printed by this method; the remainder of colours were added by either woodblocks or were 'pencilled' (3) in (2).

Ada Leask in her article on 'linen and cotton printing at Leixlip in the 18th century' (4) describes the complications involved in printing in the 18th century:-

Even to obtain a pattern in one tint of red alone, it was necessary to treat the linen or cotton with suitable mordants; to dry it for twelve hours; to rinse it in running water; to roll it in bundles to press the water out; to place it in a bath of madder and cochineal; to bleach it on the grass for five or six days (the morning dews of May - September considered being particularly good) and perhaps to water seven or eight times in the day, least the fabric become too dry and the colours be dulled. And all

this was in addition to the woodblock, or copperplate work, for the actual pattern (4).

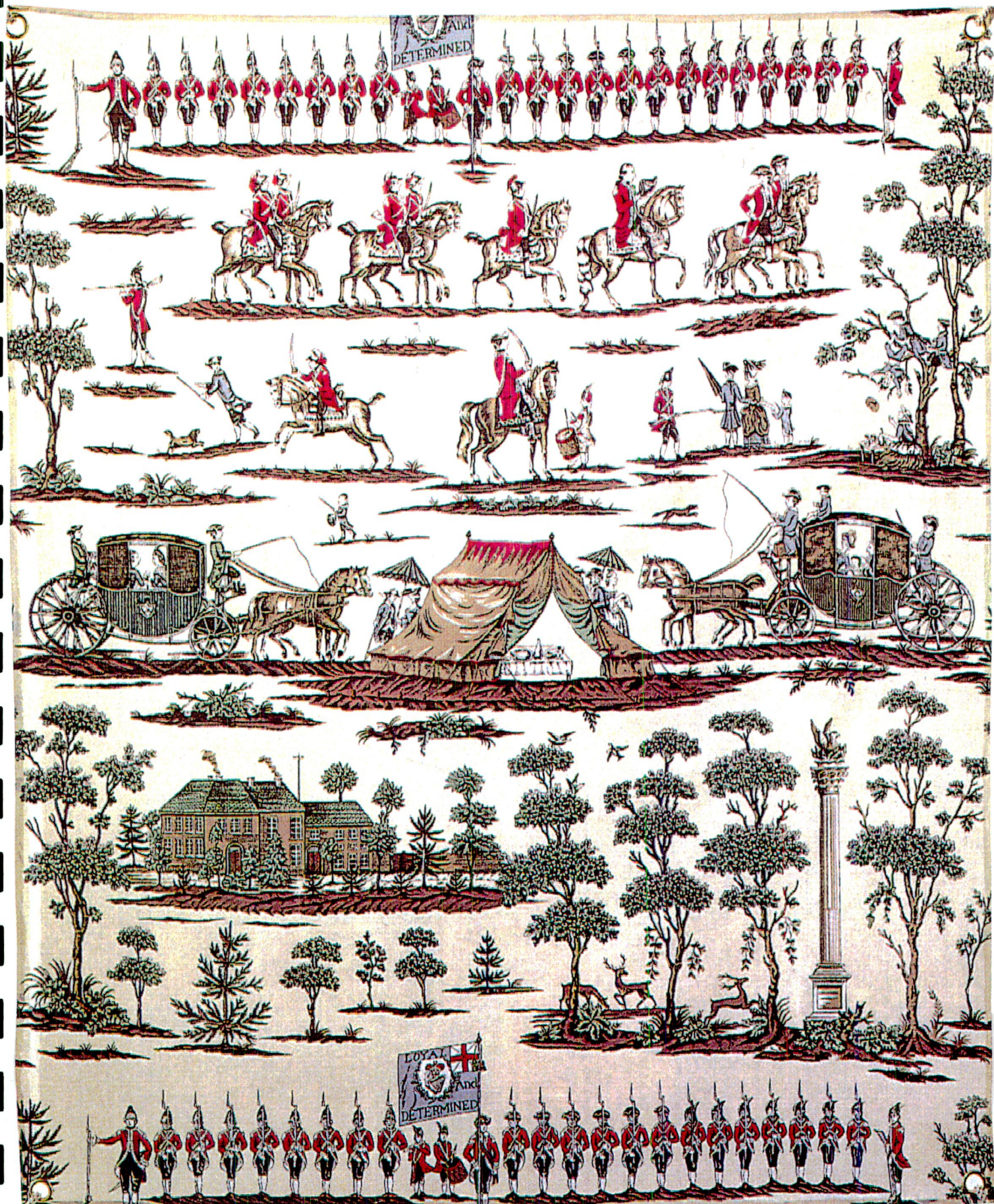


FIG 2

THE VOLUNTEER FURNITURE



The 'Volunteer Furniture' (see fig.2) is a multi-coloured linen and cotton print (5); the principle colour of the fabric design appears to be a dark brown which outlines the images in the design, there appears to be five further colours - red, green, purple, a light brown, and a middle tone brown - these colours were added either by woodblocks or by pencilling. It is hard to believe that the 'Volunteer Furniture' was printed by the hugely complicated methods that were used in the 18th century. No fault whatsoever can be found with the print; even today, with all the computer technology that is available, many printed fabrics are not registered properly; today's average fabric cannot compare to the technically perfect 'Volunteer Furniture'.

Mr. Harpur and his Leixlip factory must have had an excellent reputation, for when the first advertisement in relation to the 'Volunteer Furniture', was published in 1782, the public were informed that:-

That it is allowed by judges to be in every distinct respect the most masterly piece of copper-plate printing ever offered to sale in this, or perhaps any other country, and is a very convincing proof of the merit of numbers of manufacturers were they properly encouraged. (6)

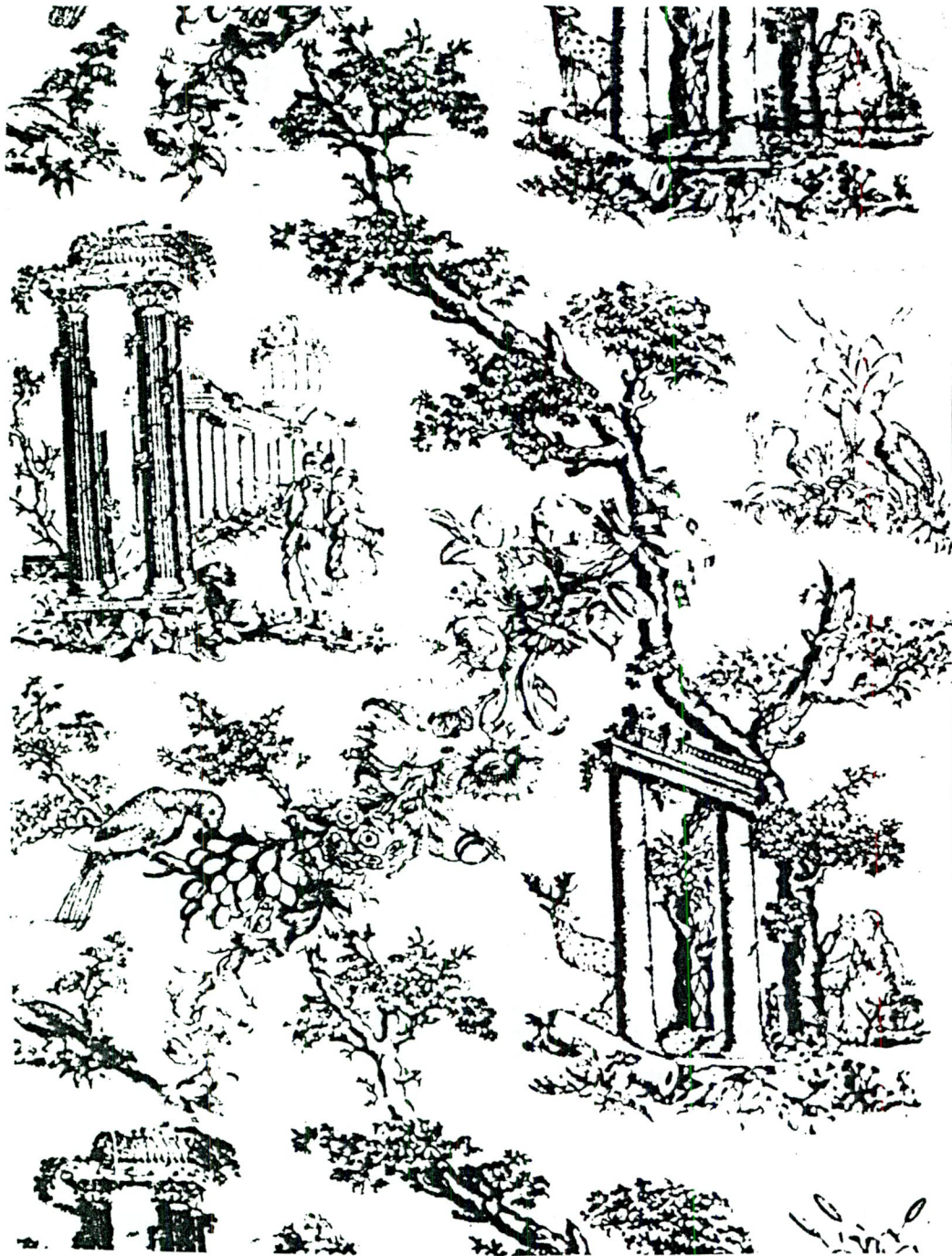


FIG 3

FABRIC (A) FROM ROBINSONS OF BALLSBRIDGE

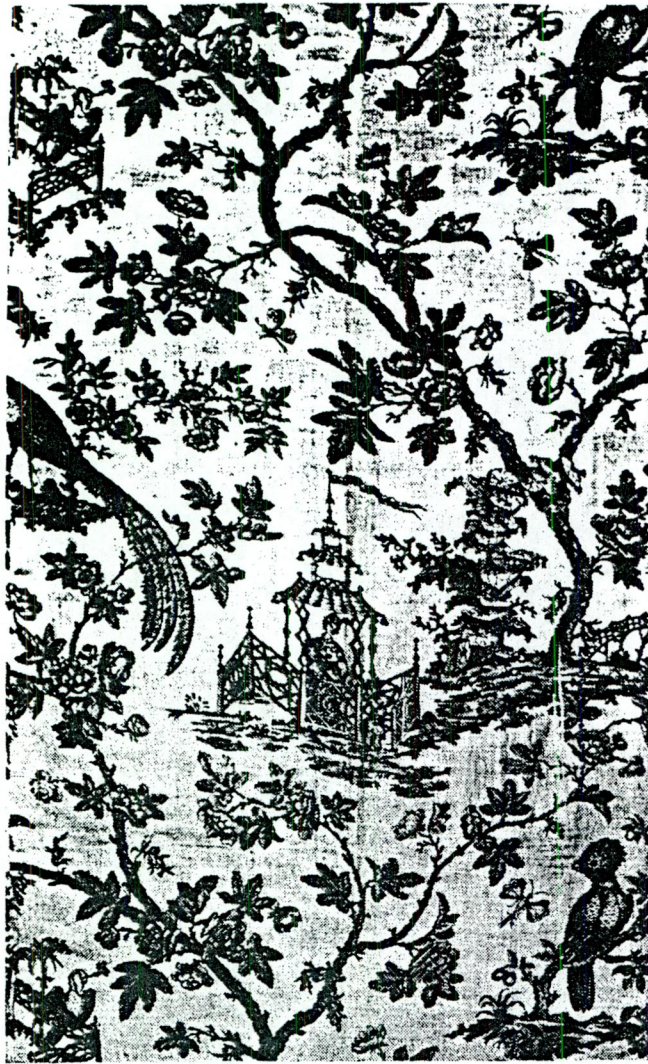


FIG 4

FABRIC (B) FROM ROBINSONS OF BALLSBRIDGE



FIG 5

FABRIC PROBABLY FROM THE DRUMCONDRA WORKS



FIG 6

EXAMPLE OF STYLE OF FRENCH FABRICS



FIG 7

EXAMPLE OF STYLE OF ENGLISH FABRICS



FIG 8

DETAIL OF FABRIC (A) FROM ROBINSONS OF BALLSBRIDGE



FIG 9

DETAIL OF FABRIC (B) FROM ROBINSONS OF BALLSBRIDGE

In the second part of this chapter 'Harpurs watering engine' is mentioned - this piece of equipment had being tested and mentioned in the Dublin Evening Post by June, 1782 (7). The basic idea of using this machine was to prevent the effects of the disturbed muddy water, thrown out of trenches during the bleaching stage of printing, on the printed colours. It is quite possible that this piece of equipment was used during the printing and preparing of the 'Volunteer Furniture'. If so, it is unfortunate that the watering engine did not catch on as printed textiles manufactured elsewhere could have improved the standard and quality of which the 'Volunteer Furniture' is an example.

Very few other examples have survived from the 18th century; Ada Leask mentions three others in her writings _ two from Robinsons of Ballsbridge (see figs.3 & 4) and one, most probably, from Drumcondra (see fig.5); all of these samples are monochrome, copperplate printed in the style of French textiles of 1750 - 1780 (8) (see fig.6), and not the style of the English textiles (see fig.7) of that period which was much heavier in style than the French textiles. The two pieces of fabric from Robinsons of Ballsbridge are known to have being from the said manufacturers because the name 'ROBINSON, BALLS BRIDGE', is inscribed in elements of the fabric design (see figs. 8 & 9). This would prevent the design from being copied and also tells us

that the designs were especially drawn up for Robinsons: one would suspect that only a manufacturer who was proud of the quality of his produce would have his name marked repeatedly on his produce; this could lead us to conclude that Robinsons were manufacturers of high quality goods. This is not surprising really, since Irish printed fabrics were in such demand in places such as America, Spain and Portugal. It also suggests that the quality of goods printed in Ireland was extremely high.

(ii)

LOOKING AT THE CIRCUMSTANCES IN THE 1780s WHICH LED TO THE CLOSURE OF MANY PRINTED TEXTILE MANUFACTURES IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND. I WILL BE HIGHLIGHTING TWO MANUFACTURES GIVING A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE BUSINESSES AND HOW THEY FARED AND THEN WHAT LED THEM TO CLOSURE IN THE LATE 1780s AND 1790s.

The 1780s was to be an unfortunate decade for printed textile manufacture in the south of Ireland. General conditions in the trade deteriorated due to several factors. In 1779 some of the restrictions on Irish trade were raised, allowing Ireland to export more freely. This meant that Ireland had to compete with England's manufacturers. In the next few years, the bounty system on exports (1) and the spirit of non-importation agreements unfortunately were to soon act against with equal power by various unfortunate developments i.e. the rejection of the proposals for protecting duties in 1784, and the failure of the voluntary non-importation agreements to combat the flood of cheap imported goods. A reading (2) of some of the evidence taken before a committee of the English House of Commons in March, 1785, shows with what alarm the success achieved by Irish printed linens and

cottons was viewed by English manufacturers. Moreover, the use of the then new 'chemical' (but non-fast) colouring processes, especially in the North of England (3), had led to much over-production, and it was these goods in particular that the English bounty system enabled English manufacturers to 'dump' and undersell in Irish markets (2).

A lot of general difficulties had been happening in the years 1784 - 1785 and this led to the closure of many printed textile manufacturers in the late 1780s.

Leixlip was the scene of one of these closures; the manufacture at Leixlip, situated just outside Dublin, had been run by several people, the last being Nathaniel Cunningham, (involved 1768 - 1781) and Thomas Harpur (involved 1768 to the manufacture's closure in 1786). Leixlip was a very successful manufacture while Cunningham and Harpur ran it, with its known work the 'Volunteer Furniture', (commissioned by Edward Clarke), printed between 1780 and 1784 (4), Leixlip's optimum years. As the 'Volunteer Furniture' has already been discussed the reader will know that the quality of work produced at Leixlip was extremely high.

Four years before the closure of the factory the following notice appeared in the Dublin Evening Post, on the 20th June, 1782,:-

We hear from Leixlip, that Mr Harpur of that town, linen

printer, has invented a watering engine for watering linens and cottons on the bleach, which he has now in use; a man and horse can do more with it than ten men could do in the usual way with scoops out of trenches, as any dry grounds by this valuable invention, with a pond of clear water in it will answer for a bleach yard. It must be of infinite service in bleaching, particularly printed goods as it will prevent the pernicious effects that disturbed muddy water thrown out of trenches had upon printed colours, and the delay it occasions in the cleaning the whites of the linens in low wet situations⁽⁵⁾.

Unfortunately, nothing more is heard of Harpurs watering engine; this would probably be due to the closure of the Leixlip manufacture and the situation in the industry at that time.

Since Leixlip was a very successfully run business which produced excellent quality produce and had a proprietor who also invented a possible revolutionary piece of equipment, the closure of the business cannot be blamed on bad management but on the situation caused by the trade conditions discussed.

Mr. Robert Brooke, who founded the town of Prosperous, Co. Kildare, a town concerned with cotton manufacture, managed to keep production going for a few years longer than the Leixlip manufacture. Although Prosperous was chiefly involved in cotton manufacture it did become involved in printed textiles, the earliest evidence of this being in 1783. Brooke had invested his own fortune in building this manufacturing town on his own land and unfortunately neither he or

his brother, Thomas Digby Brooke, who he employed as manager, knew anything about the cotton and printing industries. Brooke is the perfect example of somebody who became involved in a business and then lost it because of bad money management and lack of knowledge of the business. It was very unfortunate that Brooke was such a bad businessman as Prosperous was a manufacture of the very highest standards and his employees were treated excellently:-

Each workman was to be paid from 2 Guineas to 16 shillings and 3 pence per week, according to their different Employment, til set to work; to be furnished with Houses, Gardens, Firing, and a cow, per Family, with Grass and Hay Gratis, for the first year beside the above and Allowance or whatever they might earn if employed (6).

It was unfortunate for Brookes that he borrowed heavily to maintain his town, for by July, 1786, the works and all his remaining property had to be abandoned to his creditors. The works were kept going but by 1794 the population had dwindled away and in 1798, most of the buildings were destroyed in the Rising (7). Oddly enough, Brooke blamed the failure of his business on the 'failure (in their original form) of the commercial propositions between Great Britain and Ireland' (8).

Not many printed textile manufactures survived into the 19th century; those that did had to deal with the Act of Union between England and Ireland.

REFERENCES AND FOOTNOTES FOR CHAPTER 3

(i)

- (1) See third last paragraph of Chapter 2
- (2) LEASK, "The Volunteer Furniture", p.417
- (3) Painted in by hand.
- (4) W, Journal of the Co Kildare Archaeological Society, 1955, p.293
- (5) LEASK, "The Volunteer Furniture", p.416
- (6) LEASK, "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the 18th Century. III", p.294
- (7) See third page of part (ii) of this chapter
- (8) LEASK, "Printed Cottons from Robinsons of Ballsbridge", p.14

(ii)

- (1) Irish House of Commons Journal, Appendix P CLN in LEASK, "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the 18th Century. III", p. 297
- (2) Quoted in Appendix p.p. DXVIII - DXIV, etc. in LEASK, "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the 18th Century. III", p. 298
- (3) This led to many bankruptcies in English manufacture
- (4) LEASK, "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the 18th Century. III", p. 292
- (5) Ibid.
- (6) LEASK, Ada, "Prosperous 1776 - 1798", Journal of the Co Kildare Archaeological Society, VOL 14, 1966/67, p. 219
- (7) LEASK, op.cit, p. 230
- (8) LEASK, op.cit, p. 223

CHAPTER 4

HOW THE ACT OF UNION BETWEEN ENGLAND AND IRELAND FINALLY BROUGHT ABOUT AN END TO THE PRINTED TEXTILE INDUSTRY IN THE SOUTH OF IRELAND AND HOW THE NORTH OF IRELAND MANAGED TO MAINTAIN AND PROSPER IN THEIR INDUSTRIES.

Ireland and Great Britain were joined together in what was to become known as the United Kingdom. Ireland lost her own Parliament: her representatives met in Westminster, where for the next one hundred and twenty years (1801 - 1921), all laws governing the country were made. Unlike Scotland and Wales, Ireland had a Viceroy and Chief Secretary as representatives of the Crown. (1)

The above quotation is a definition of the Act of Union which took place between Great Britain and Ireland in 1800. This act was responsible for the many changes that were to occur in the next few decades to Irish industries.

Henry Grattan, a leading name in Irish politics at this time, did not support the Union; his feelings are summarised in the following quotation - 'I do not give up my country ... though in her tomb, she lies helpless and motionless, still on her lips is the spirit of life.' After the Union, many Irishmen were to agree with Grattan.

A Union between Great Britain and Ireland was forced upon the Irish; they were led to believe that a Union would be good for Ireland:-

Some of the Protestants favoured the measure, fearful that if Catholic Emancipation (2) were granted without a Union, Parliamentary reform would follow and give the Catholics ascendancy in the Irish Parliament; the Protestant Landlords especially, dreading such a contingency, trembled for their privileges and lands. The Catholics on the other hand, had lost all hope of getting justice from the Irish Parliament, which had shown itself so bigoted and so corrupt, and favoured a Union, as it would free them from orange ascendancy, and Dr. Troy and Lords Kenmare and Fingal were early on the Unionist side. Finally, the Ulster Linen Manufacturers, knowing that free trade with Great Britain would enrich them and that a Union would be accompanied by free trade, were in favour of a legislative union. (3)

Almost everybody seemed to favour a Union - although after it was passed it was not so popular. A pamphlet published at the end of 1798 entitled Arguments for and against a Union between Great Britain and Ireland declared that a Union would foster trade by freely admitting Irish goods to all the markets open to Great Britain; it would attract British capital to Ireland, and so develop her resources, and the example of Scottish Union was advanced to show what advantages such a Union had brought in its trail (4). This statement was true but it neglected to state that manufacturers in Great Britain had established themselves in the foreign markets and also that Great Britain would only invest money in Irish industries if they were of no threat to her own i.e. the linen industry in Ulster was to benefit greatly from the Union.

The future of printed textile manufacture in Ireland was bleak; the factors that had encouraged it to establish itself in Ireland were now disappearing. The Irish Parliament was no longer seated in Dublin; its members along with many of the Anglo-Irish and English Landlords were now based in London. Dublin became a city of Doctors, Lawyers and tradesmen who could not afford to live the life that the Lords and Ladies had done previously. Writers who described Dublin in the latter half of the 18th century spoke of its brilliant society — balls, concerts, dinners, and many other social functions. Dress and accessories of various kinds displayed the wealth of these Lords and Ladies. Many of the Irish nobility and gentry had lived only for their social lives while looking down on industry and commerce.

The Irish Parliament had consisted of one hundred and four lords and three hundred commoners. The money spent in Ireland by these members of Parliament is estimated to have been around £1,374,000 every year (5). This sum is probably underestimated and does not include the money spent by the many other members of Ireland's high society.

Now that this society of people, along with their money were now mainly based in London, it proved to be disastrous for industries such as the printed textile industry.

The dress and accessories mentioned above, along with fabrics used in the decoration of these peoples homes, was a great source of business for Irish printed textile manufacturers. It can only be assumed that since Irish manufactures of printed fabrics was of a very high standard then the nobility and gentry would purchase their fabrics in Ireland instead of paying higher prices for goods from England or abroad.

After 1800, the consumption of goods by the society surrounding the Irish parliament was greatly missed by industries. But it was not only spending power by this society that had helped industries: the Irish Parliament had not only promoted and encouraged native industries, but it had also protected these industries from the unfair competition created by England and her colonies by imposing protective duties on important industries that were suffering and threatening to disappear. it was not until in 1820 that industries missed the protection of an Irish Parliament, as protection duties were kept in operation for the first 20 years of the Union.

After 1820, Irish manufacturers were stripped of their protective duties and were suddenly left to compete in a market with Great Britain - a country whose manufacturers had being gaining strength while Irish

manufacturers were recovering from the state of oppression to which they had been subjected.

The years after the Union, especially after 1820, were tough times for Irish printed textile manufacturers. The manufacturers who did survive after 1800 were few in number and even fewer survived after 1820. The competition from England was too much - the English manufacturers were able to sell their products at much cheaper rates than the Irish products, due to the fact that quality was much lower and at the end of the 18th century onwards they over-produced and had to lower their prices to keep in business.

The printing works at Stratford-on-Slaney, managed to survive to the middle of the 19th century. Samuel Lewis in his Topographical Dictionary of Ireland of 1837, observed of Stratford-on-Slaney:-

.. adjoining the town, on the banks of the river, are an extensive cotton and calico printing works, established in 1792 by Messrs. Orr & Co., the present proprietors, they employed from 800 - 1,000 persons; the machinery is powered by water-power, and the average number of pieces (7) printed and finished weekly is about 2,000.(8)

1838 is the last year that Messrs. Orr & Co., appeared in the Dublin Almanac lists as Calico printers and their warehouse at 24, Merchants Quay, passed into other hands in 1839. In 1844, James Frazer in his Handbook for Travellers in Ireland (9), describes the works at

Stratford-on-Slaney as a 'cotton-spinning factory'; so we can presume, as there is no evidence to contradict the fact, that Stratford-on-Slaney had by 1844 at the latest ceased to produce printed fabrics.

James Fraser's Handbook for Travellers in Ireland 1844, also helps with its description of sites that were once busy in printed textile manufacture; of Leixlip, he says - 'like Lucan, the town of Leixlip has fallen considerably into decay; and although the vicinage possesses many objects of interest, Leixlip has ceased to be a place of general resort.' (10)

Of Prosperous, he writes; 'the decayed village of Prosperous, where some years ago a cotton factory was carried on with some great success' (11); of Ballsbridge - 'cross the Dodder by Balls'bridge, and pass through the decayed and straggling village of that name. At balls'bridge, we leave the large calico-printing works to the right' (12); and of Drumcondra, the site of the perfecting of copperplate printing, he writes - 'leaving Dublin by the suburb of Drumcondra ... ' (13), of Drumcondra he makes no reference to the fact that there was once a renowned printing factory situated there implying that the factory was long gone by 1844.

It seems to be clear that by 1844, most, if not all printed textile manufacturers had ceased producing. Ballsbridge may not have, to judge from Fraser's writings but Ada Leask, who has written extensively on the Irish printed textile industry, does not suggest that any factory was still operating in Ballsbridge as late as 1844. The 'large calico-printing works' that Fraser refers to may have been that which the Robinsons worked until 1835 when it was sold to the Royal Dublin Society (14).

The printed textile industry in the south of Ireland, did not survive the first half of the 19th century. It is a different story in the north of Ireland. The north of Ireland with its linen industry could only benefit from the Act of Union as England had no linen industry to boast about.

The geographic position of Ulster is basically the reason the north of Ireland prospered while the south struggled. In the 17th century many Scotsmen emigrated to Ireland and settled in Ulster - it being nearest to Scotland; with these new settlers a separation can be made between Ulster and the rest of Ireland. The Scottish emigrants were thrifty, hard-working and industrious, with the spirit of pioneers and determination to succeed and make progress. They worked hard in Ulster working the land and working in industries while the Irish in

the rest of Ireland spent their days waiting for the evenings when they could relax, drink and be entertained.

The linen industry in Ulster was to benefit from the emigration of French Huguenots into Ireland. The Huguenots taught the people of Ulster their knowledge of linen manufacture, turning the industry into one of the highest standards. While the Huguenots boosted the Ulster linen industry they also boosted the silk weaving industry in Dublin.

After 1800 and the Union, things were to improve in Ulster as the English invested money in the linen manufacture and any industries connected with it. Belfast soon developed into a major port and in 1825, the Belfast, Ulster and Northern Banks were founded providing the necessary financial backing for industries in Ulster. Thus, when the industrial revolution in England started, it naturally spread to Ulster but not to the rest of Ireland. Ulster industries now grew and prospered while the industries in the south of Ireland declined and decayed.

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- (3) D'ALTON, Rev. E.A., History of Ireland, Half VOL V, London, N.D., p. 82
- (4) D'ALTON, op.cit, p. 83
- (5) WEBB, Industrial Dublin Since 1698 and the Silk Industry in Dublin, p. 26
- (6) LEASK, "Linen and Cotton Printing at Leixlip in the 18th Century. III", p. 298
- (7) Each piece equals 25 yards.
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- (12) FRASER, op.cit, p. 53
- (13) FRASER, op.cit, p. 586

- (14) LEASK, "Printed Cotton from Robinsons of Ballsbridge",
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CONCLUSION

It is clear to me now that my first assumption that the famine was the cause of the decline of the printed textile industry in Ireland, was completely wrong. It is quite clear to me now that it was a number of different factors that caused the decline of the industry. The printed textile industry in Ireland was unfortunate because many of the factors which encouraged the industry to establish itself in Ireland were, over a hundred years later, encouraging its decline.

It is unfortunate that printed textiles from Ireland were to achieve such high standards because this made their extinction all the more sorrowful.

Many events in history influenced the printed textile industry but what would happen, I wonder if we could change the past. Would the printed textile industry in Ireland have survived and prospered or would it still have declined. It most probably would have become extinct anyway; one of the main reasons for this is Ireland's geographical position.

Ireland's geographical position was a great help to Ulster in previous times. Ulster prospered mainly because of her position; but today it is a different story. Ireland is an island at the very edge of a continent, far away from the centre of fashions and ideas. It would be possible to set up a printed textile industry in Ireland but why bother when fabrics can be printed very cheaply nearer to the design centres.

There are a few small printing factories in Ireland today but they are on a very small scale and not of the highest standards. It was probably better that history took place as it did because at least the printed textile industry in Ireland died with an excellent reputation and not because it was run down and tired, producing third rate fabrics.

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