

**The Secret Life of Design in Ulster's Interwar Linen Industry:  
a critical analysis of the contributions of the Old Bleach Linen Company.**

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I confirm that the word count of this these is less than 100,000 words.

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of my friend Roger Allen

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The majority of the illustrations within the thesis are taken from original sources. Some of which have been reproduced here from poor quality imagery but are still useful visual records and many of which have not been published before.

### Introduction

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Fig. 5.4 Left: “For Formal Use”, The Irish Linen Society, *The Century*, 1919. Right: “For Beauty”, The Irish Linen Society, *Vogue*, 1920. Source: ProQuest.

Fig. 5.5 The Linen Guildsman, July 1927. Note the inclusion of Old Bleach Linen in the J.R. Jones’ Sons & Company advertisement. Source: John Gilliland’s guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.6 (Table) Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild, Cost of National U.S. Magazine Advertising Program, 1926-27. Source: John Gilliland’s guard book of Guild activity, LIRA, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.7 “The Mystery of Loveliness”, November 1927. Source: John Gilliland’s guard book, Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.8 Left: “Suitably suited to the Modern Table”, *Vogue*, October 1928. Right: “Linen Damask: Loomed Luxury for the Table”, *Vogue*, January 1930. Source: The Vogue Archive, ProQuest.

Fig. 5.9 Section of the Style Advisor's 9th Style Report on "Last Minute News on the Colour Situation in Dress Linens for Summer 1932", February 1932. Published in *Lindaguild News*. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library.

Fig. 5.10 John Gilliland & Co. Catalogue Pages from 1925 and 1926. Left: Hand printed "Nil Crush" linens, 'Iriselle' frocks, Right: Hand blocked printed linen frocks. "special spacing of printing". Source: John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.11 "Standard lines make easy sales" and "Carrying the message to the Millions", Irish Linen Guild Retail Trade Brochure. Source: John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.12 "Ireland's Lovely Linens: Opportunities for 'House Proud' Women", *The Kentish Gazette and Canterbury Press*, March 10, 1934. Source: ILG Papers, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.13 Left: Three photographs depicting Miss Belfast 1830 and Miss Belfast 1930 (in "Ulster made frocks") participating in the British Empire Week Parade with both paying a visit to the Empire Marketing Board Kitchen in the bottom photograph. *The Northern Whig*, May 17, 1930. Right: Irish Linen Queen at an Irish Linen Guild Exhibition at Queen's University, Belfast. 'Glendun' furnishing fabric by Old Bleach is seen directly behind Major Herdman. *Belfast News-Letter*, July 21, 1937. Source: ILG press cuttings book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.14 Irish Linen Guild stand at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London, from *The Belfast Telegraph*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1933. Source: Irish Linen Guild Press Cuttings Book, LIRA, Lisburn Museum and Linen Centre.

Fig. 5.15 The offending Old Bleach literature at the Scottish Empire Exhibition, 1938. Left: Furnishings pamphlet featuring fabrics from the company's series 'Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach'. Back from left: 'Pandora' by Marion Dorn, 'Ceres' by Nicolas de Molas, 'Persian Rose' by Eva Crofts; Front from left: 'Delos' by Ashley Havinden, 'Fugue' by Paul Nash, 'Sirius' by Albert Rutherston. All screen-printed linen/linen & rayon mix. Right: Four-page pamphlet relating to a short history of the company. Source: Scottish Empire Exhibition Minutes, PRONI: COM/16/13.

Fig. 5.16 Left: Northern Ireland Stand within the Travel and Tourism Pavilion showing part of the linen exhibit. Right: Vogue Pattern 558 in black Moygashel linen and Vogue Pattern 7678 in dotted pink Coolaire linen. "Vogue Pattern Dresses Grace the Ulster Pavilion at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition." *Vogue Pattern Book*, June-July 1938. Source: PRONI: COM/16/25 and COM/16/13.

Fig. 5.17 'Donegal' is on the top right of the page from *The Crompton Prize Fund Scheme Reference Collection*, 1936-37, alongside 'Fanad' by Old Bleach on the left and bottom, a weave of two warps and three wefts by Warner & Sons Ltd, 'sheet' (page) twelve. Image on right: detail of 'Donegal'. Source: The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

Fig. 5.18 Left: The hanging of furnishing fabrics at The Royal Academy's Exhibition of British Art in Industry at Burlington House, *The Manchester Guardian*, January 4 1935. Right: 'Nerissa' by Old Bleach, as featured in *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher's* review of textiles and furnished rooms at the Burlington House Exhibition, January 12 1935. Source: Industrial Art Collection files, Manchester Art Gallery and National Art Library, VAM, London.

Fig. 5.19 Left: 'Creel' – 'a perfect design for almost any purpose, neither modern nor antique, but always fresh', Cushions designed by Norman Fitzroy Webb and 'Milan' – 'the inspiration for this design is really from Constantinople and the Near East, but it has been imported to Italy in the Lombard style, and hence the name.' Descriptions from Old Bleach catalogues 1936 and 1938-1939. Source: Old Bleach Archive and (Image of cushions from an Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics photocopied catalogue held in) The Whitworth Gallery.

Fig. 5.20 Left: Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics – ‘Birch Bark’, ‘Rhythm’ and ‘Cobra’ framed by lighting by Best & Lloyd Ltd and others, ‘Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home’, City Art Gallery, Manchester, 1933. Right: Detail of upholstery fabric (on armchair) on the Old Bleach stand at British Industries Fair, 1933, as featured in the British Industrial Art Exhibition. Source: left: Industrial Art Collection Files, Manchester Art Gallery Archives. Right: Old Bleach Archive, Photograph Album, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 5.21 From left: ‘Glengarry’, ‘EC11’, ‘Corrib’ and ‘Samoa’. Gift from Old Bleach to the Industrial Art Collection, Manchester City Art Gallery, 1934. Source: The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

Fig. 5.22 Top from left: ‘Charolette’, ‘Glenavy’ and ‘Jack Tar’. Bottom from left: ‘Ferrard’, ‘Kilgarvin’ and Winnie-The-Pooh. Gifted to the Industrial Art Collection and displayed at the Manchester ‘Exhibition of Everyday Things’, 1936. Source: Photograph taken by author with permission, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

Fig. 5.23 Ashley Havinden for Old Bleach. Left: “Some Table Talks”, company booklet on new damask table cloth designs, c. 1935. Middle and Right: “Fabric Party” Invitation for furnishing fabrics, 1938. Source: Ashley Havinden Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh: GMA A39/4/329.

Fig. 5.24 Left: “Warings [sic] Review of Bedroom Equipment for 1935” with new modern towel designs from Old Bleach: No.s 1 & 2 - hand-run needlework borders on coloured huckaback, 3 & 4 - crepe weave in zebra stripe and new embroidery effect and 5 - coloured rainbow towels, *Vogue*, February 6 1935. Right: “Fabric Choices: that make smart frocks”, four of the new Spiralspun dress linen range by Old Bleach on the top row. Stevenson’s Moygashel dress are also featured at the bottom of the page. *Vogue Pattern Book*, August-September 1935. Source: National Art Library, VAM.

Fig. 5.25 Left: Spiralspun Linens Launch Invitation by Ashley Havinden; Middle: Photograph of the bridal dress in Londonderry House, *Birmingham Post*, 17 February 1935; Right: Full page advertisement designed by Ashley Havinden in *Vogue*, 20 March 1935. Source: Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh; John Gilliland’s Press Cutting’s Book, LIRA, Lisburn; National Art Library, VAM, London.

## Chapter Six: Old Bleach’s Design Imperative

Fig. 6.1 Old Bleach Design Competition, 1900-1901, *The Architectural Review for The Artist and Craftsman*. A total of seventeen cash prizes were available in order to attract a wide range of entries. The towel design was ‘open to ladies only’, most probably appealing to the home maker’s amateur *attempts* at design, whereas the table cloth design might demand the professional male designer’s *workmanship*. Source: *The Architectural Review for The Artist and Craftsman*, ProQuest, 2012.

Fig. 6.2 Linen Damask Table Cloth Designs: Swansea, Anemone, Ancaster, La France, Jacobean, September, Rose Marie, Tudor, Derby and Wedgwood Columbia, Old Bleach Price List September 1929. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.3 Left: Wild Rose (A 82) Right: Wild Rose (B 82). Source: Booklet of Electros, 1935, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.4 Florals within the pages of Old Bleach’s Design Library. Left: Bartko’s *1000 Motive*, 1935. Right: loose page from *The Artworkers’ Studio*, 1928. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.5 ‘Adelphi’ and ‘Normanton’ comprise heavier Baroque motifs with full table top design and deep borders, while ‘Adam’ and ‘Claremont’ offer lighter neo classical decorative features. Source: Old Bleach Booklet of Electros, 1935. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.6 Top: Detail of Planche from *Le Pautre* (1880) with pencilled marks by Old Bleach designers  
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Fig. 6.7 Left: 'Clarendon', 1935, hand painted double damask linen table cloth with floral and classical motifs of a floral bouquet amid a richly decorated classical frame with complementary looping border.  
Right: Page depicting floral bouquet within a neo-classical ornamental frame in Frank Lewis's *Flower Arrangements: A Book of Designs for the Designing Studio*, 1949. Source: Table Cloth, Author's Collection; Book, Old Bleach Design Library, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.8 Left: 'Lenox Autumn' double damask table cloth designed for the American Market and featured in the Irish and Scottish Damask Guild promotional campaign in the late Twenties (without its porcelain counterpart). The design was successful enough for production to continue into the late 1930s. Right: 'Lenox Autumn' Porcelain Set, still in production since 1918. Source: *Some Table Talks*, booklet on Old Bleach Table Damask designed by Ashley Havinden, Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh. Image of Lenox ware courtesy of Macy's Department Store.

Fig. 6.9 Left: "From the Collar of a Venetian Nobleman. Musée de Cluny", Fig. 22 in *History of Lace*, (to face p.47). Right: "San Marco" damask table cloth by Old Bleach, 1932. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.10 The angular and graphic design of 'Portia' damask table cloth. Source: *Some Table Talks*, booklet on Old Bleach Table Damask designed by Ashley Havinden, Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh.

Fig. 6.11 Left: 'Lido' damask design table cloth as a photographic 'Representation' with design registration number 347875, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1935, Board of Trade Design Representations; Top Right: Woven linen furnishing fabric design by Old Bleach as a photographic 'Representation' with design registration number 346082, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1935, Board of Trade Design Representations; Bottom Right: 'Katja' by Wolf Bauer, textile design for Knoll International Ltd., 1971. Source: Old Bleach designs, Board of Trade Design Registers and Representations, The National Archives, Kew. 'Katja' textile from *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*.

Fig. 6.12 Two of the three Irish themed table cloths by Old Bleach, both with motifs borrowed from The Book of Kells. Source: Old Bleach Book of Electros, 1935, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.13 "Old Bleach Towels" catalogue, 1900, shows 'Fancy Ends', 'Daisy', 'Fancy Weave' and 'Peacocks and Yew Trees'. Source: T.C.K. 0118, National Art Library, VAM, London.

Fig. 6.14 Old Bleach Bordered Towels, Price List, 1929. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.15 Books of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs, 1950 – 1953. Source: Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 6.16 Left: "Brocade. Typical of Hindu pattern. Madras"; "Woollen Cloth, embroidered in chain-stitch with coloured silks. Sind, Bombay Presidency; about 1850." Right: "Two portions of the tail and pockets of a velvet coat, embroidered with coloured silk ribbons and silk thread. French; second half of 18<sup>th</sup> cent." Source: "Museums and Photographs" Cuttings Book, Old Bleach Design Library, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Fig. 6.17 Top left: 'Floral Emblems', (designed to celebrate the Coronation using the eleven floral emblems of the Commonwealth), 1954; Top right: 'Iris', 1952; Bottom left: 'Flowers and Foliage, 1947; Bottom right:



'Bouquet', 1939. Source: Lisburn Museum and Irish Linen Centre; 'Bouquet', 6<sup>th</sup> *Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs*, Collection of Author.

Fig. 6.18 'Wild Flowers' embroidery design and its graphical layout in the 6<sup>th</sup> *Old Bleach Book of Embroidery Designs* (1939) follows a number of modernist design principles: extended use of negative space, reduced subject content, asymmetric positioning, minimal typography and sans serif font. Source: Collection of Author.

Fig. 6.19 Marion Stoll Embroidery from 1923, featured in "Birds in Embroidery", *The Embroideress*, No.17, Vol. 3, 1927, pp. 406-408. Source: Collection of Author.

Fig. 6.20 Coloured Plate of a made-up Transfer Design (waistcoat) that accompanied *The Embroideress*. Source: *The Embroideress*, No. 22, Vol. 3, 1927, pp. 509-512. Source: Collection of Author.

Fig. 6.21 An early "Slemish" Furnishing Linens Brochure, 1932, featuring ten modern designs and one 'translation of a reproduction design'. Source: Industrial Art Collection, Manchester Art Gallery.

Fig. 6.22 'Morello' (cherry blossom), 'Versailles' (flowing rhythm of cascade and fountain), 'Milan' (inspiration from Constantinople and the Near East, in the Lombard (Italian) style) and 'Birch Bark' (shaded stripe). "Slemish" Furnishing Linens Brochure, 1932. Source: Industrial Art Collection, Manchester Art Gallery.

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Fig. 6.24 'Mandalay' by Felix C. Gotto in blue and coral colourways. The coral coloured cloth is accompanied by 'Rathlin', both show the fineness of the linen weave. Source: left – Clothworkers' Centre, V&A; right – private collection of Mrs Juliet Morley.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It has taken me nearly twenty years to stop looking elsewhere for good design; it was right here all the time and all it took was a realisation that any textile production, small or large, produces design worth studying. The Island of Ireland has often been defined by its politics and its cultural identity has somewhat suffered from that. Thankfully, a scholarly resurgence of interest in the artistic life of Ulster is taking place. In addition, there is a wealth of information waiting to be interrogated stored throughout various institutions, both public and private. I am indebted to those who made available to me material that is prima facie evidence of Ulster's capability in producing world class design. I hope I have done justice to their generosity.

I could have produced a perfectly adequate thesis from a number of easily accessible resources but the discovery of a small privately held archive of the Old Bleach Linen Company has made a significant difference in how we understand the character and ambition of provincial design. George Graham OBE made an audacious rescue of the company papers when tasked with their destruction. He has acted as guardian to this precious repository of industrial heritage and with his family, welcomed me with open hearts and doors, I could call by the house any time and it was often hard to leave the craic. Arthur and Linda Houston, from the Randalstown History Society too were endlessly hospitable, allowing me in to their home to view the Old Bleach Minute Books. Arthur has spent years researching the company and generously has shared his notes with me and quick to respond to emails. This research would be considerably poorer without their collective support. Ganching sent me an account of her mother's (1<sup>st</sup>) job at Old Bleach in 1941, an evocative story of a 14-year-old entering the mill with limited possibilities, I have re-read it many times to avoid idealizing the industry. Pamela Evans has a long family connection to Old Bleach and has built up a lovely little collection of Old Bleach ephemera, which she kindly allowed me to borrow from; among which was a tiny book of cloth samples barely 6" x 8", my first close inspection of Old Bleach furnishing fabrics from the 1930s, I was hooked.

A number of local institutions have graciously granted access to holdings and archives. I am most grateful to Ciaran Toal and Elaine Flanigan at the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum for both the Old Bleach holdings of mainly fancy linens and the trove that is the LIRA library; Peter Carson and Valerie Wilson at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum where the Living Linen Oral Project is held and indispensable to linen researchers (thanks also to the historian Jonathan Hamill – we will meet some day); Elaine Hill at the Braid Museum, Ballymena, and Vivienne Pollock, Ulster Museum suggested a number of useful leads. Des McCabe and Brett Irwin at the Public Records of Northern Ireland (PRONI) were very helpful in the machinations of records keeping and access. Frances Bailey, allowed me to (productively) delve through the textile collection at Mount Stewart. The staff across various local libraries, who patiently retrieved my endless and often obscure requests: The Linenhall Library, Belfast Central Library and the Newspaper Library. Their knowledge and willingness to help me seek out arcane material was invaluable to the project.

Ursula Mitchel, University Archivist at Queen's University, Belfast, was so adept and obliging in suggesting a number of sources from the University's Special Collections, her full replies to my enquiries should be alone given distinct credit. In my own institution, Ulster University, I am most grateful to Marion Khorshidian and her team of librarians, who unfailingly followed up on requests and made suggestions for sources that I no doubt would have remained unaware of.

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I also had the good fortune to bump into Mary Schoeser during several visits to the Clothworkers' Centre and her textile knowledge while encyclopaedic is shared in the most collegial spirit; her enthusiasm alone should be bottled and sold. In the same vein, I am thankful to and inspired by a number of design and textile historians in both their own work and responses to my enquiries: Ruth Artmonsky, Chris Boydell, Lesley Jackson, Philip Sykas, Linda Eaton, Lynn Hulse and Kathleen Curtis Wilson. They have immeasurably enriched how I think about the role and impact of design and textiles *and* how to be generous with that knowledge. Bethany Sinclair (Monash University, Australia) shared her contact book in order to wend my way in to records and archives not formally available, what a gal.

I live by a small seaside town, Newcastle in County Down, and a name like Gotto stands out. It transpired the remaining family member living locally was in fact the nephew of Felix C. Gotto, designer in the Old Bleach Studio of many outstanding designs. Kit Gotto, along with his cousin Mary Robertson, kindly helped put me in touch with Felix's daughter, Juliet Morley, who had persuaded her father to write his memoirs in the 1990s. It was very special meeting Juliet whose hospitality was unerring, allowing me full access to

Felix's private papers. It was a great breakthrough for the research; for the first time, we now have a better picture of the provenance in the quality of design carried out at Old Bleach.

My colleagues and friends at Ulster University have been helpful and inspiring, over the years and more recently with this project: in particular, Mike Catto, Emma McVeigh, Karen Nickell, Trish Belford, Cherie Driver and Catherine Brown. I would also acknowledge a number of colleagues who are just simply very enjoyable to work with. Additional scholarly advice and friendship came from my supervisors Professor Elizabeth Crooke and Professor Ian Montgomery, thank you both. I am also grateful to Ulster University's Research Graduate School (now the Doctoral College) especially Professor Neil Hewitt, Irene Moreland and Julie Adair, The Pasold Research Fund and Winterthur Museum, Delaware.

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These acknowledgements show two things: the tendrils and connections that can be made in the research of industrial textiles that can help us understand the role and significance of design and more importantly, how many people contribute to the production of a thesis. In some way, we are all authors of this work.

## SUMMARY

The Ulster linen industry was renowned throughout the world for its high-quality linen products, making an easy transition from hand loom to power loom production in the mid nineteenth century where its craft origins advanced into highly profitable industrial scale manufacturing. Inevitably then, scholars of linen have tended to focus on its industrial history, encompassing the economic, business, political and social features and impact of the trade. Recent scholarship has taken a more nuanced approach by conceptualizing aspects such as gender and class particularly in the areas of production and consumption. However, the role of design within the linen industry in Northern Ireland has been largely overlooked by historians; this thesis attempts to partially redress this oversight.

The popular view of linen is one usually formed around a familiarity with household linen goods, 'fancy linens' that were conventional in design and it seemed, remained so for many years. There is good reason for this perception as linen firms in their marketing amplified the putative concept of quality above any other product features. Nevertheless, a number of linen companies in Northern Ireland were committed to design as an integral part of their products and brand, none more so than The Old Bleach Linen Company from Randalstown; the case study for this thesis. This County Antrim firm, founded in 1864, quickly established a reputation for best quality linens of distinguished design work and one of the few linen firms to register their designs with the Board of Trade from the mid 1870s. By the turn of the 1930s, the Company expanded their already huge array of products by launching a range of linen furnishing fabrics which were readily acquired by notable museum collections, namely the Victoria & Albert Museum in London and The Manchester City Museum and Art Gallery. It is mainly this range of linen goods the thesis considers in the context of modernity (alongside alternative narratives of continuity and tradition) and the drive by reformers for exemplars of 'good design'. Despite the terms 'modern' and 'good' often being used interchangeably by reformers, commercially minded textile manufacturers saw no conflict in producing diverse lines of modern, period, decorative, plain and figured designs in order to maximise as many markets and tastes as possible. In a period of slump, restricting one's range was unthinkable. Even so, period and reproduction designs were often modern interpretations or at least, woven on state of the art power looms, there was nothing antiquated about them.

Drawing on a rescued but sadly incomplete and uncatalogued privately held collection of Old Bleach material and a range of archives, special collections and libraries, across the United Kingdom, this research provides a new body of knowledge in the position of textile design in the province in relation to Great Britain. This thesis will make help recover the once lost design history of the Ulster textile industry during the interwar years and how it is situated within the Industrial Art Movement. In addition, it will fill a gap in the knowledge of one of Northern Ireland's best known textile firms and add substantially to Ulster's extant, if patchy, industrial history.



## NOTES AND ABBREVIATIONS

*Geography: terms and definitions*

**Northern Ireland (NI)** comprises six counties and has been part of the United Kingdom since 1922.

**Ulster** is a province in the North of Ireland comprising nine counties, six of which are in Northern Ireland and three, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan are in the South of Ireland.

**Great Britain** comprises the nations of England, Scotland and Wales.

**Ireland** refers to the island of Ireland.

**Republic of Ireland** comprises the twenty-six counties governed by the Irish Government.

## ABBREVIATIONS

**AAC** Art Advisory Council (NI)

**AAD** Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

**BCC** British Colour Council

**BIF** British Industries Fair

**BIIA** British Institute of Industrial Art

**CAI** Council for Art and Industry

**COID** Council of Industrial Design

**DIA** the Design and Industries Association

**DSIR** Department of Scientific and Industrial Research

**FBI** Federation of British Industries

**FSC** Flax Supply Committee

**HEA** Handkerchief and Embroidery Association

**HLPGA** Household Linen and Piece Goods Association

**IAC (NI)** Industrial Art Committee (Northern Ireland)

**ILG** Irish Linen Guild

**ILS** Irish Linen Society

**ILTC** Irish Linen Trade Corporation

**ILMA** Irish Linen Merchants' Association

**IPLMA** Irish Power Loom Manufacturers' Association

**ISLDG** Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild

**LIRA** Lambeg Industrial Research Association

**LLL** Longer Life Linen

**MARS** Modern Architectural Research Group

**NRD** National Register of Industrial Art Designers

**OBLC** Old Bleach Linen Company

**QUB** Queen's University Belfast

**RCA** The Royal College of Art

**RIBA** The Royal Institute of British Architects

**RSA** The Royal Society of Arts

**SIA** Society of Industrial Artists

**UIDA** Ulster Industries Development Association

**VAM** The Victoria and Albert Museum (also referred to as V&A)

**YBDA** Yarn Bleachers and Dyers Association

## **NOTE ON ACCESS TO CONTENTS**

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Context: Why the Research Is Needed**

As Northern Ireland's once premier industry, the linen trade has attracted considerable scholarly attention throughout its illustrious history. Its literature has sought to interrogate and explain the significance of an industry that transitioned from agrarian foundations to mechanized industry that resulted in trading into all corners of the globe. The principal modes of enquiry have come from diverse and overlapping historical disciplines as economic, political, social and cultural histories. Economic history dominated early scholarship, with important contributions from Gill (1925), Beacham (1944) and Isles & Cuthbert (1957) and later, the Department of Economics and the Institute of Irish Studies at Queen's University, Belfast, and Keith Jeffrey and Philip Ollerenshaw then at the University of Ulster (2013).<sup>1</sup> Emerging from this, came scrutiny of the social conditions of linen production by historians, sociologists and anthropologists such as Betty Messenger (1975), Marilyn Cohen (1997) and local historian W.H. Crawford (2005).<sup>2</sup> These contributions have shaped our understanding of the linen industry's growth and decline, successes and failures and locate those within the wider context of rival textile industries particularly in Scotland and England. Importantly, given the political turbulence of Irish history, much of the scholarship takes on a multidisciplinary hue and recognizes the value, or at least the potential, in drawing on discrete approaches or methodologies to offer fresh contexts and perspectives into textile scholarship. For example, contributions to the anthologies, *The European Linen Industry in Historical Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 2003) and *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland: 1650-1950* (Ulster Historical Foundation, 2005) come from related occupations including curation, archiving, archaeology and academia.<sup>3</sup>

Yet, the role of design does not feature substantively throughout the scholarship of Irish linen's history. There is some acknowledgement by the aforementioned disciplines in the domestic (proto industrialized) and industrialized industry but these are often afforded a mere paragraph in an academic essay, for example, Ollerenshaw (2003) notes the comparative importance of design in the fine linen end of the trade than the coarser trade in Scotland. His examples are from the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and usefully indicate salient design issues then, 'A small but growing number of people criticized Irish linen manufacturers for unadventurous, boring design...In 1907 Irish firms were accused of paying insufficient attention to New York fashion or to European sample catalogues, "we have been told by a manufacturer who is in close touch with the New York market that the trouble lies in our designs; they are not equal to those of our competitors."' <sup>4</sup> There are a few exceptions where the design of linen is central to the research, David Mitchell's essay on "Linen Damask Production: Technology Transfer and Design, 1580-1760" and "An 18<sup>th</sup> Century Damask Tablecloth from Ireland" by Elizabeth Lewis but these only cover the period of proto industrialization up to the 18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>5</sup> More recently, Kathleen Curtis Wilson's sweeping survey, *Irish People, Irish Linen* (2011) is the first attempt to encompass the industry in full and in colour. The imagery accompanying the book enlivens the social and cultural history of Irish linen and while

it may understandably lack scholarly detail and nuance, particularly on design, it still makes an important contribution to the story of linen.

Within the disciplines of design history and textile history, the Northern Irish linen industry has been afforded little or no dedicated scholarly attention unless substantial representation exists within a national or regional museum collection. The case study for this thesis, the Old Bleach Linen Company from Randalstown, County Antrim, is well represented in Inter and Post War furnishing fabrics in collections held at the Victoria and Albert Museum and the Whitworth Gallery in Manchester, yet the Ulster Museums have no substantive knowledge or holdings of the Company's furnishing fabrics (their Old Bleach holdings are limited to 'fancy goods' – damask tablecloths, huckaback towels, tea towels, tray cloths, that perhaps tell a more familiar story of the Ulster linen industry). Design historians (and curators) who cite Old Bleach Linen Company usually do so in the context of the development of modern textile design in the interwar period. Boydell (1995), Jackson (2002), Mendes (1979 and 2010), Samuels (2008) and Fraser and Paul (1998) have mainly drawn their information and examples from the aforementioned English museum collections and until now, much of what we know of Old Bleach came from these institutions and contemporary literature from the 1930s.<sup>6</sup> Mendes' assessment is typical of the treatment 'a [similar] careful yet modern approach to the weaving and printing of superb Irish linens characterized the work of the Old Bleach Linen Co. Ltd' (Mendes, 1979).<sup>7</sup> There appears to be consensus among contemporary and recent historians that their contribution to the textile industry was pioneering and of national significance, yet scholarship on Old Bleach remains scant. That is not to say scholarly efforts were not undertaken. Keepers of textile collections at the Victoria & Albert Museum (henceforth V&A), The Whitworth and Manchester Art Galleries attempted enquiries in the mid 1970s and mid 1990s but made little or no progress, stymied by a lack of response from Ulster institutions.<sup>8</sup> In a letter from the Whitworth curator to the design historian Lesley Jackson, then at the Manchester City Art Gallery, about a large sample book of Old Bleach furnishing fabrics Jackson had rescued from the Halifax store 'Leemings' (upon closing down) and gifted to the Whitworth, Frances Pritchard acknowledged the paucity of information on the company, 'Twenty seven [of the twenty nine fabric samples] have their designs handwritten on the labels so I feel confident we will be able to identify them relatively easily, although there is not very much published information on the company.'<sup>9</sup> It seemed English design historians recognised the company's importance but have been frustrated by an apparent inaccessibility to evidence.

In 1995, the design historian Christine Boydell wrote on the great changes in the UK textile industry in the 1930s (*Journal of Design History*, Vol. 8, No.1). Her evocative description and account of this period, which has influenced this enquiry, raises as many questions as it answers. Like much scholarship on textiles and modernity, she named Old Bleach as part of a stable of innovative textile companies but reserves her scrutiny for English and Scottish manufacturers (such as Donald Brothers, Edinburgh Weavers, Sanderson, Warner and G.P. & J. Baker). Within the last decade, there has been an emerging Irish design history

scholarship with publications such as *Ireland, Design and Visual Culture: negotiating modernity, 1922-1992* (King & Sisson, eds., 2010) and conferences as *Mise Éire? Shaping a nation through design* (Design and Crafts Council, 2016), these represent a germinal contribution to Irish design history but one that is focused on cultural and material production in the Republic of Ireland and is short on the inclusion of textiles. Most recently, a Heritage Lottery Fund project, led by Senior Research Fellow at Ulster University, Trish Belford, has utilized a set of (1,600) glass plates featuring the linen designs of William Liddell Ltd.<sup>10</sup> The project seeks to find new ways to interpret the designs for a contemporary market and in doing so, reinvigorates the interest and understanding in our industrial design heritage. The industrial design history of Northern Ireland has somewhat fallen through the cracks, it is the task of this thesis to contribute to recovering lost information and knowledge, lost history, that can help our understanding of the crucial role design played in a once profitable and admired industry.

### **Research Aims and Objectives**

The original aim of this research was to critically analyse and evaluate the contribution of the Old Bleach Linen Company to the British Industrial Art Movement of the 1930s in its promulgation of the concept and practice of 'good design'. However, as the research progressed, the persistent question of 'why do we know so little about design in Ulster's linen industry?' came to govern the processing of both textual and contextual material. The dominant narratives of Irish linen's history are calcified in concepts of heritage and legacy, although the disciplines of economic history and political history have helped explain how embattled the industry had become. However, I aim to show how, even in straitened times and circumstances, great design can come out of unexpected quarters. The interwar period saw inordinate challenges for the linen trade and various local initiatives, such as Irish Linen Society (1920), Irish Linen Trade Corporation (1920) and Irish Linen Guild (1928), attempted to strategically fortify the industry. I aim to investigate whether this was antithetical or complementary with the aims and objectives of British based initiatives such as the Design and Industries Association, Council for Art & Industry, the British Institute of Industrial Art and Society of Industrial Artists. On the one hand, protectionist legislation promoted manufacturing in the UK yet the role of the designer remained precarious; these contradictions also form part of the enquiry.

There was never any doubt over whether there was a design facet to Ulster's fine linen trade, but there were no prior scholarly attempts to define the character of design and how that may have been similar to or indeed distinctive from textile design elsewhere in the United Kingdom. It is only relatively recently that an interest in provincial and regional design histories have come to the fore of scholarship. This research makes a necessary contribution to this growing canon. A further aim for the research is to produce a body of foundational knowledge that is capable of initiating future work on Ulster's design culture. It is a research field in its infancy and I am confident there are many untold design histories still hidden throughout the North of Ireland.

## Scope and Limitations

From the outset, I wanted to focus the study on the Interwar period for a number of reasons. It was an acutely unstable time for the linen industry in Northern Ireland. Politically and economically the new Province faced myriad, and arguably insuperable, challenges that commanded attention from the contemporary press and scholarly quarters. The political trials included negotiating Northern Ireland's position and identity within the United Kingdom and British Empire and Commonwealth and its 'new' relationship with the Irish Free State. Nationalist and loyalist businesses faced boycotts created by a Molotov cocktail of anti-partitionism and sectarian intolerance, which as Ollerenshaw argues 'had far reaching consequences for the conduct of the local government'.<sup>11</sup> Economically, the linen industry was profoundly affected by competition from cotton and new fibres which could be produced more cheaply and quickly due to a more reliable source of raw material; during 1934 raw material prices rose by 70% and according to Jonathan Hamill by 1938, 90% of the flax used in Northern Ireland was imported.<sup>12</sup> Higher tariffs and currency instability saw linen's key market, the United States, take 78% less linen (by weight) from the United Kingdom than it had before the Great War.<sup>13</sup> The so-called protectionism of the 'Empire Flax Growing Scheme' did not, as hoped, deliver the linen industry from outright defeat. The industry resisted structural change (although all the old staple industries did), one reason for this put forward by economic historians was that rationalization was difficult because privately owned firms (the majority of linen firms in Northern Ireland) had to write off capital.<sup>14</sup>

Tradition too played a critical role, where linen firms were reluctant to streamline their range of goods, within fancy goods, in their 1938 price list Old Bleach were producing an *embarrassment of riches*, with over forty variations of household textiles including tray cloths, runners, napkins, tea cosies, table cloths, hand towels, handkerchiefs, tea towels, antimacassars, sheeting, pillowcases, bedspreads, cushion covers, piece linens, toilet sets, nightdress cases, brush and comb bags, luncheon sets and church linens. All available embroidered (hand and machine), appliquéd, with lace mounting, scalloped or hand-painted and offered in a range of qualities and weave structures (crash, huckaback, diaper, sheer and cambric were available in towelling) and not to mention dress linens and furnishing fabrics.<sup>15</sup> Even Old Bleach, considered as a progressive firm then and now, could not resist extensive product lines. Surviving price lists spanning a thirteen-year period, from 1925 to 1938, show little change in the variety of goods but include new innovations and additions to the range, for example, in 1932, a new range of "Ready-to-work" traced towels were assembled in an envelope with instructions and thread for working and in 1936 a 'new process Matt finish' was available in medium weight dress linen.<sup>16</sup>



Fig. 0.1 Scenes from The Old Bleach Linen Company factory, Randalstown, County Antrim. Left: hand-painting and hand embroidering were undertaken in conjunction mechanized factory production, *The Daily Mirror*, May 28, 1929. Source: The Newspaper Library, Central Library, Belfast.

Provincial and regional industries are often considered as being parochial but the linen industry up to 1914 was a truly global trade, its shrinking markets are also of interest to this research, at the point where design becomes an emerging ideology in the discourse if not the manufacture and consumption of textiles in the post great war years. Prior to the war, ideologically driven values of quality and (Irish) provenance were defining features of linen marketing. Fine linen firms used the term 'quality' with abandon, regardless of the quantifiable measure of the quality claimed.<sup>17</sup> In doing so, it fortified reputations built over hundreds of years of linen producing excellence. Design as an attribute was not promoted vigorously. However, Old Bleach distinguished itself by the dual assets of quality and design, backed by design registration from its earliest days and in some part, recognition of their contribution to the decorative arts from the V&A.<sup>18</sup>

There is no doubt a cultural lag was evident in the new Province and my research attempts to locate local responses to modernity in design.<sup>19</sup> The number of British organizations established to promote design reform along with Government support in the 1930s had evolved into the Industrial Art Movement, however in Northern Ireland the condition of modernity had yet to gain traction. There were pockets of interest but it took state intervention in the shape of an industrial art committee in 1933 to interrogate and reveal the level of design discourse and practice throughout the Province. I devote two chapters to this enquiry and its outcomes; working from the original Committee papers held at the Public Records Office (PRONI), I undertake a close analytical reading of the witness evidence that is rich in detail on local attitudes towards the role and status of design and designers in education and industry. Indeed, a number of witnesses were brought over from England and offered invaluable comparative testimony. It served to highlight the atypical character of Northern Ireland in a post partition age. These chapters also show how the new government of Northern Ireland attempted to strategically *reposition* the linen industry to make it economically competitive within the home and global markets by improving art education and supporting industry by means of an advisory council.<sup>20</sup> Such was the strength of ambivalence towards modernizing, in every sense, the linen industry effectively sealed its own fate. In economically buoyant



times, adventures in new designs were tried, Old Bleach's head of design, Norman Fitzroy Webb acknowledged, as a member of the Industrial Art Committee during one of the hearings, the momentary success of *modern* damask cloth during the boom years in America.<sup>21</sup> However, in a contracting industry where insecurity ran high, design battled to be understood and appreciated. Yet, Old Bleach appeared to view design as integral rather than inevitable or even imperceptible to their business model, 'I have not the faintest doubt but that art is a practical and necessary element in production.'<sup>22</sup> I argue that their contribution to textile design was significant and exceptional, especially in the context of the Ulster industry. Contemporary commentators and scholars unfailingly describe the linen industry's 'complacency', 'conservatism' and 'parochialism' served by "idleness and lethargy"<sup>23</sup>, Old Bleach was none of these and in fact, was consistent and outstanding in their drive to distinguish themselves as linen purveyors "unrivalled in design and quality."<sup>24</sup>

In the context of the wider British textile industry, they were comparable to a stable of design conscious and well respected firms like Old Glamis (Donald Bros., Dundee), Allan Walton Textiles and Edinburgh Weavers and are so represented in the contemporary design press. Rather than retrench in the early 1930s, not yet recovered from a worldwide economic depression, they launched their furnishing fabrics range, named "Slemish" after the legendary mountain in County Antrim claimed as Saint Patrick's first home in Ireland, it was one of the reasons they flourished during the Interwar period.



Fig. 0.2 Old Bleach "Slemish" Furnishing Fabrics brochure. Early 1930s.  
Source: Industrial Art Collection, Textiles: Old Bleach File,  
Manchester Art Gallery.

In describing the concept of creative and adaptive responses (in the context of the early Irish linen industry) Denis O'Hearn suggests 'sectors or firms that respond to change by doing something new (by innovating) make a creative response – they utilize new technologies or forms of organization in order to

compete and accumulate.'<sup>25</sup> The Interwar years see a gamut of 'creative responses' from Old Bleach and is another reason why this period acts a temporal parameter for the thesis.

The temporal limitation of the Interwar years in no way suggests Old Bleach only became design aware during this period. The company had been registering designs shortly after the inception of the Trade Marks Act in August 1875 and their postwar production built on the success of the furnishing fabrics line by expanding into a carpet production in 1947. It is however, in the interwar years that we see a flourishing of design ambition and activity, demonstrated by commercial successes with a number of creative and technical innovations. They developed fast dyes and pioneered hand-painted cloth in the 1920s. By the early 1930s, the design studio had expanded and with the addition of family member Felix C. Gotto, the introduction of furnishing fabrics and the perfect conduit to sell them through, in Industrial Art initiatives, the company was at its zenith despite the Linen Industry's contraction.

## **Methodology**

In writing the original proposal, it was clear the research journey would not be a neat, linear progression, simply investigating material in one or two local archives or libraries. In fact, the research journey became a literal one, examining archives held in public institutions in Edinburgh, Manchester, London and private papers in Suffolk (to visit the daughter of Old Bleach in-house designer Felix C. Gotto). That vital archive material was (easily) accessible in English and Scottish institutions somewhat poignantly highlights how careless Northern Ireland has been over their companies' and collective industrial history. For example, The Linen Museum in Lisburn have no 'complete' company archives and Mossley Mill at Newtownabbey have a new(ish) museum but possess no archive and exhibits are mainly borrowed.<sup>26</sup> Piecing together each institution's Old Bleach holdings has revealed a schism between metropolitan and rural taste and choice (in linen at least) and has been useful in indicating the two faces/sides of a company, known for different things in different countries. In doing so, it only tells a partial story of a company and points to bias and potential charges of elitism, for example the V&A returned some (possibly unsolicited) linen household goods to Old Bleach in the 1930s. Whether these two facets of the company were intentional is more difficult for the scholar to determine. Not only in the gathering of empirical evidence but interpreting its institutional provenance can contribute to answering the core research question of what we know about design in Ulster's linen industry and the example of Old Bleach's contribution to the history of textile design. From archival material, local and national, the evidence suggests Old Bleach actively sought out the same design-aware, adventurous and affluent customer as its English textile rivals for its furnishing fabrics, whereas, if we can extrapolate from archives, records and grey literature held in Northern Ireland, the local market's appetite for linen was sated by fancy goods. However, both sides of the company's output required the same methodological and rigorous design approach and the company's surviving design library provides sufficient evidence to attest to this; the ultimate chapter considers the company's design approach to *both* fancy goods (part 1) and their acclaimed furnishing fabrics (part 2).

Throughout all of the research endeavours, I was seeking out evidence to locate the role of design in Ulster's linen industry and Old Bleach's place within, or indeed outside of that. Initial research was based on the scholarship and historiography around the Linen Industry and the Industrial Art Movement, before moving towards primary source material, for example, examining the firm's textiles held in the Clothworkers' Centre (VAM) and The Whitworth Gallery (Manchester). The majority of the Old Bleach textiles held in both institutions hail from the Interwar period and are connected, in either direct or oblique ways, to the Industrial Art Movement. These collections were acquired for their contribution to the reforming concept of 'good design' and in doing so, help fortify the company's significance, they have been invaluable to our understanding of Old Bleach's position and reputation within the design history of British textiles. Notwithstanding, they do not tell a complete story, museum collections often are composed of fragments, with untidy, accidental or subjective acquisitions and the knowledge produced from my research, collated from a diverse range of arcane sources, will enrich those collections.<sup>27</sup>

The discovery of a small compact archive (now held privately) was undoubtedly a great boon to the research. One of the last managers in the company, after another takeover, was tasked with destroying company records. Having worked in Old Bleach for much of his professional life, George Graham, was aghast at the casualness of the suggestion. In typical pragmatic form, he filled boxes and suitcases and then his car with as much as it would hold. Such clear-sighted thinking and civic-minded liberality has preserved a trove of our industrial history in Northern Ireland that hitherto could have been so easily lost.

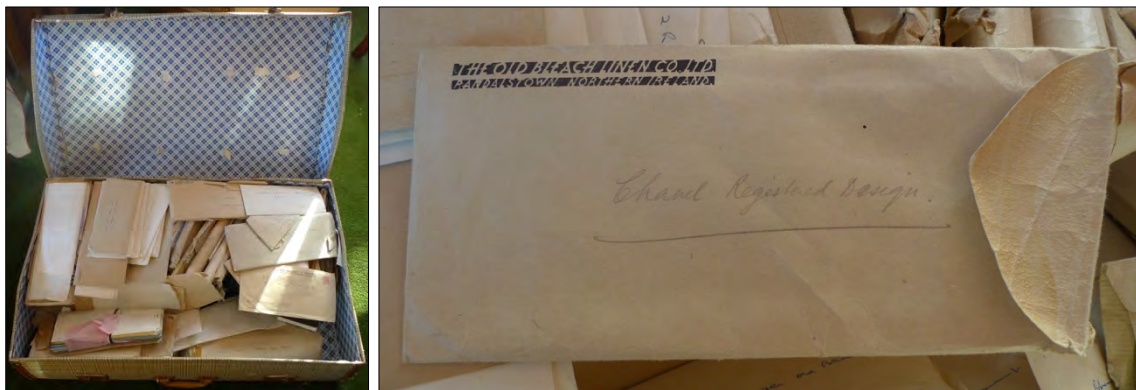


Fig. 0.3 Left: George's Suitcase. Right: a letter in the suitcase – Chanel's Registered Design, Certificate of Design Registration with the Board of Trade, 30 January 1933. Source: Author's photographs, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

So too was his (and his family's) personal generosity to me, as an outsider (from County Down!) and genuine delight that Old Bleach might finally be properly acknowledged to a wider audience for the contribution and legacy it made to Ulster's Linen Industry. While much of the rescued archive is comprised of business and production records, and alas no pattern books and few sample books, we can still gain insight from the irreplaceable Minute Books (guarded by the equally convivial Arthur and Linda Houston from The Randalstown Historical Society) and a range of press cuttings books into the position of design

within the company. From a design perspective and critical to this thesis, the surviving design library has been an enlightening collection of how and what Old Bleach designers were exposed to and inspired by. The library's content spans just over one hundred years, from an exhibition catalogue from Paris, 1867, to another French, slim trade product catalogue from 1978-79. There is an assortment of publications in germane subject areas in art and design, and by no means dominated by textiles; such as ceramics, architecture, typography, painting and block and lino-cut printing. This compact collection of books and folios demonstrate a catholic taste in design but one that was unequivocally interested in *superior* design and manufacture. Indeed, the design library is reflected back at us in Old Bleach's designs, for example, a company advertisement published in *Punch or the London Charivari* and *Tatler* in 1932 featured the 'new fadeless embroidered linen' with Japonisme<sup>28</sup> appliqué entitled "Fuji-Yama" and the ubiquitous "Willow" pattern appeared regularly across the range of fancy goods; there are a number of volumes in the library on Oriental design.<sup>29</sup> There are also a number of significant publications, that show the company's desire to produce both period and modern design of the highest order, outstanding among the library is a compilation, by the firm, in a guard book of "Museums and Photographs" (n.d.) and several (incomplete) folios, namely 1<sup>st</sup> editions of Sonia Delaunay's *Tapis et Tissus*, (1929) *Compositions, Couleurs, Idées*, from 1930, and *Nouvelles Compositions Décoratives* by Serge Gladky (1925).



Fig. 0.4 Two folios from the Old Bleach design library. Left: Verneuil, M.P. (1925) *Etoffes et Tapis Etrangers: Exposition des Arts Decoratifs*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Paris, Albert Levy. Right: Clouzot, Henri, (1925) *Tentures Murales et Papiers Modemes*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Paris, Ch. Massin & Cie. Source: Author's photographs, Old Bleach Archive.

Being able to work closely with such primary material have been an enlightening privilege and has helped build a fuller and more precise sense of a geographically provincial textile manufacturer, but one with a distinctly transnational outlook and au courant with design developments. While there is no single explicit methodology, I draw on a number of methods that support the aims of the research. To understand the archival material, I have employed object analysis, content analysis and a typological approach. Object

analysis was useful for a number of reasons: it could help in the assessment of Old Bleach's interpretation of the modern, and why institutions viewed their textiles as 'good design', it offered evidence of the creative and technical variations by the company and obtained precise descriptions of the textiles. Manufacturers often talk of the 'handle' of the cloth and the study of the empirical object was essential to understand not just the feel of the cloth but fundamental aspects of the cloth's design such as the scale of repeat patterns. Content Analysis was used to identify categories, frequency and complexity of (damask) patterns and indeed their design sources. The data from this method offered some revealing insight into the condition of design and modernity in 'fancy goods' linen. A typological approach was used as an organising method to measure if modern design had made any considerable impact in the linen industry's output and if these designs were determined by their market destinations. These have been useful in organising the volume of information and in detecting emerging issues and themes that help explain the role and status of design in the new province. The mixed methodology is a pragmatic response to the core research question, 'Why do we know so little about design and designing in Ulster's linen industry?' and produces a qualitative analysis of the secret life of design in Ulster's Interwar linen industry.

## **Significance**

In the early part of this Introduction, I acknowledged how the history of Ulster's linen industry has been contextualised through a number of historical perspectives: chiefly economic, political and social. These approaches have all made valuable contributions to our understanding of a once vital trade but they have, for varying reasons, marginalized the role of design. In doing so, they underestimated, or at least misunderstood, the contribution and value design could make to an individual company's reputation and the industry at large. To date, no attempt has been made to substantively consider the role and status of design in Ulster's textile history until now. At the outset of this enquiry, my interest largely resided in the Old Bleach Linen Company because of their acknowledged contribution of well-designed linen furnishing fabrics during a period of design reform. In order to understand how a linen company from Ulster became part of the British Industrial Art Movement, it was crucial to situate them in the once prosperous industry from whence they came. Except, no one had told that story either. It became increasingly apparent that I broaden the scope of the study, to determine the extent design had featured in linen's history and historiography and where Old Bleach fitted within that narrative. In that respect, this body of research is also foundational to future research. In this thesis, I have attempted to do two things: create new knowledge about the role and status of textile design in Ulster's linen industry and situate a progressive textile company, Old Bleach, in a local, national and transnational design context. These could be told as two discrete stories but their intersections are what interest me most, and it is in this complexity where my scholarly contribution lies. I have drawn on a miscellany of sources that have included hitherto unidentified or uninvestigated materials and from these, have made fresh connections and insights. My contribution to knowledge is both a response to past oversights and to ask and attempt to answer

questions about the cultural significance of design in Interwar Ulster. This thesis marks the first attempt in undertaking a design history of textiles in Ulster's Interwar linen industry.

## Structure

Historians of the Irish linen industry generally agree that by the Great War, the industry was in steep decline. Indeed, contemporary commentators had noted fundamental and dramatic shifts in the supply and price of flax and protectionist tariffs indicated 'a disquieting diminution.' From 1922, Northern Ireland is cleaved from the Irish Free State and thus attempts to articulate a new political self-governing and cultural identity in the face of declining heavy industries. Chapter 1 contextualises the geo-political landscape for the linen industry during a period of immense upheaval and I show how the trade continued to innovate and seek out new markets with research and development in production methods and products. At the same time, British design reform, commonly known as the Industrial Art Movement, was establishing itself across a number of private bodies and Government departments in a sustained (if somewhat disjointed) effort to improve standards in the design of mass produced goods and in the raising of public taste and standards in living. These two states of flux between the wars have meant the narrative of textile design in and of Northern Ireland has been misshapen and mislaid. In order to reassemble, at least parts of, the story, it is useful to understand the conduit of design reform and locate where Old Bleach fitted within it. Paradoxically, much of what we know of the Old Bleach Linen Company is through the efforts of the Industrial Art Movement in England throughout the Thirties and the scholarship of design and textile historians interested in industrial art from the 1930s who have accessed the material artefacts. Only the two aforementioned museums hold worthwhile collections of Old Bleach furnishing fabrics from that time. Lamentably, there are no institutions in Northern Ireland with knowledge or holdings of the furnishing fabrics.<sup>30</sup>

The subject of design reform's structural framework in England and its incipience in Northern Ireland is examined and critiqued in Chapter 2, which also considers the arrested artistic environment of the newly formed Province. Official design reform did finally reach Northern Ireland in 1933 through the convening of a *Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland* some two years after the Board of Trade's Gorrell Committee was established. The Inquiry revealed the local linen industry was poorly served in artistic matters with a great number of structural weaknesses in art education precluding design careers in the linen industry and with manufacturers regularly purchasing designs from elsewhere who argued the supply was thus fulfilled, in effect choking the possibility of a local design industry. The Report's findings exposed entrenched conservatism and subsequent marginalization towards the arts; its conclusions and recommendations called for full and sweeping reform in art education with the formation of an Art Advisory Council. These early chapters provide insight from a range of primary sources (many of which are unpublished and brought to light for the first time), into the unique condition of Northern Ireland in the Interwar period.

Chapters Three and Four are structurally separate but thematically overlapping and critically assess the salient issues and practical matters affecting art education and industry in Northern Ireland in relation to design reform. Chapter 3 considers the diagnostic nature of the Inquiry in relation to Art Education and assesses the scope and effectiveness of the resultant Council. Tripartite in structure, this chapter surveys the original Memorandum prepared for the Industrial Art Committee, interrogates the evidence offered throughout the Inquiry and evaluates the recommendations and outcomes. The Linen Industry's response to the matter of industrial art is the subject of Chapter 4. Witness evidence from industrialists heard at the Inquiry offered a sceptical view of and pessimistic forecast for the role of design, despite rare unanimity that good design was lacking but imperative. These (and other) contradictions defined the disorder within the linen industry at the time. In addition, the status of designers and 'important factors influencing the contemporary linen market' are also under consideration in this chapter to provide a demonstration of ambivalence towards the benefits of good design in spite of the clarion call and momentum of design reformers, this additional evidence offers insight into an industry wide position that held dear conservative values.

The Industrial Art Movement's preferred mode of education and promotion was the exhibition and one taken up enthusiastically by Old Bleach; the company featured in many of the most influential design exhibitions throughout the 1930s. Chapter 5 interrogates the increasingly prominent role promotion played in design reform and in the business of selling. Regardless of the exhibition's agenda (be it political, didactic or economic), the individual company found new ways to display its wares and attract potentially new markets. This chapter also evaluates the methods Old Bleach adopted in promoting the company in order to consolidate its market position. As long standing clients of the leading Advertising Agency in London, W.S. Crawford, they promoted the company as urbane and modern, a clear shift from their early advertising that encouraged the consumer of linen's bucolic origins rather than any grim industrial reality.

The final chapter critically synthesises and evaluates Old Bleach's contribution to Northern Ireland's textile history. In Chapter 6, I argue they made a significant contribution to both textile history *and* design history by their industrial pedigree and commitment to well-designed goods. This has been acknowledged by design historians before, but their assessment has been limited by mainly two museum collections (restricted to only furnishing fabrics) and contemporary accounts; my research has fortified this assessment by providing new, fuller and more accurate information and knowledge on the company's design output. Many manufacturers of 'Irish Linen' produced high quality linen goods but Old Bleach were considerably swifter and amenable to new innovation and actively responded to the tenets and practice of design reform within a national and international context. As the evidence offered throughout the thesis, they were exemplars of 'good design' and in their exemplariness their lost history was assured; they were almost too good at what they did. Old Bleach were wedded to the concept of quality (in linen production)

which, in hindsight, was a moribund legacy of Victorian proportions. Northern Ireland's difficult recent past has allowed much of its industrial heritage to slip away unseen and unexplored. This thesis attempts to recover that history and provide a narrative of design excellence that was under our noses all this time.



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<sup>1</sup> Gill (1925) *The Rise of The Irish Linen Industry*; Beacham (1944) 'The Ulster Linen Industry', *Economica*; Isles & Cuthbert, *An Economic Survey of Northern Ireland* (1957); Jeffrey and Ollerenshaw, *An Irish Empire? Aspects of Ireland and the British Empire* (1996).

<sup>2</sup> Messenger (1975) *Picking up the Threads: A Study in Industrial Folklore*; Cohen (1997) *The Warp of Ulster's Past: Interdisciplinary perspectives in the Irish Linen Industry, 1700-1920*; Crawford (2005) *Domestic Industry in Ireland: The Experience of the Linen Industry*.

<sup>3</sup> Particularly useful contributions to my investigation has come from Philip Ollerenshaw's "Business Boycotts and the Partition of Ireland, pp. 205-227 and Jonathan Hamill's "The Irish Flax Famine and the Second World War", pp. 228-254, both in *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland: 1650-1950*.

<sup>4</sup> *Irish Textile Journal*, 15 Jan. 1907, p. 2 in P. Ollerenshaw, "Stagnation, War, and Depression: The UK Linen Industry 1900-1930", *The European Linen Industry in Historical Perspective*, Pasold Studies in Textile History, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 285-307. The author utilizes the same source again to point out the conservatism in the linen design in 'Problems of the European Linen Industry, 1870-1914' in Cohen, M. (ed.) *The Warp of Ulster's Past*, pp.202-203.

<sup>5</sup> Mitchell's essay is published in *The European Linen Industry in Historical Perspective*, Pasold Studies in Textile History, Oxford University Press, 2003, pp. 61-98 and Lewis's essay (with a contribution on the conservation by Marion Lamb) is available in *Textile History*, Vol. 15, (2), Jan. 1984, pp.235-244.

<sup>6</sup> Boydell, C. "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?" *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 8, No.1, 1995, pp.27-42; Jackson, L. (2002) *Twentieth Century Pattern Design*, London, Mitchell Beazley; Mendes, V. (1992) *The Victoria and Albert Museum's Textile Collection: British Textiles from 1900 to 1937*, London, V&A Publishing; Mendes, V. "British Textiles from 1900-1937", in Parry, L. et al, *British Textiles: 1700 to the Present*, 2010, London, V&A Publishing, pp. 345-399; Samuels, C. (2008) *Art Deco Textiles*, London, V&A Publishing; Fraser, J & L. Paul, "Art, Industry and Everyday Things: Manchester City Art Gallery and Industrial Art between the Wars", *The Journal of Decorative Arts Society*, vol. 22, 1998, pp.43-57.

<sup>7</sup> Mendes, "Carpets and Furnishing Textiles", *Thirties: British art and design before the war*, Hayward Gallery, Arts Council of Great Britain, 1979, p.90.

<sup>8</sup> Assistant Keeper of textiles at the V&A, Valerie Mendes wrote to the chief designer at Old Bleach in August 1975, then owned by Carrington Viyella, seeking information on Marion Dorn. There is no evidence in the V&A file of a response from the company, (V&A Museum Registry, Nominal File on Marion Dorn, MA/1/D1432, AAD). In 1996, Liz Paul from the Manchester City Art Gallery, wrote to the Linen Centre in Lisburn, the Ulster Museum, Belfast and the National Museum of Ireland, with it seems only a response from the latter directing her to the former contacts, ("Industrial Art Textiles – Old Bleach" file, Manchester Art Gallery). Lesley Jackson contacted the Clotworthy Arts Centre in Antrim in 2001 but the reply was so delayed and beyond usefulness at that time (author email correspondence with Jackson, 27/06/2016). Frances Pritchard progressed somewhat further with contributions from Christine Boydell and Lesley Jackson and several days in PRONI resulted in a paper on Old Bleach, "Old Bleach Linen Company: a case study from a curatorial viewpoint" for *Ars Textrina: International Textiles Conference*, University of Leeds, 2009. The paper is unpublished, I am grateful to Frances Pritchard for giving me a copy of the paper.

<sup>9</sup> Letter from Pritchard to Jackson, 23 July 1996, "Industrial Art Textiles – Old Bleach" File, Manchester Art Gallery.

<sup>10</sup> The two-year project runs from 2016-2018, called "Reviving William Liddell's Damask Designs" aims to create a range of fabrics for the contemporary interiors market. The project is also community oriented with a series of three roadshows where the public can bring along artefacts linked to the linen industry and have their stories recorded and digitally catalogued. <http://www.shuttlesandshafts.com>. The 1,600 glass plates were offered to the School of Art and Design's research unit (the now defunct 'Interface'), University of Ulster in 2007.

<sup>11</sup> Ollerenshaw, "Business Boycotts and the partition of Ireland", *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland: 1650-1950*, p.206.

<sup>12</sup> Hamill, "The Irish Flax Famine and the Second World War", *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland: 1650-1950*, p.229.

<sup>13</sup> Ollerenshaw, "Stagnation, War and Depression: The UK Linen Industry, 1900-1930", pp.285 – 307

<sup>14</sup> Ronald Weir has argued that Scotland faced similar responses to rationalisation and diversification to those in Ulster during the interwar period, particularly its dependence on traditional heavy industries. "Structural Change and the Scottish Economy, 1918-1939", *ReFRESH*, Vol. 19 Autumn 1994, pp.5-8. Essay available from [www.ehs.org.uk](http://www.ehs.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup> Old Bleach Price List, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1938, Old Bleach Linen Company Archive, private collection, Randalstown.

<sup>16</sup> Old Bleach Price List, 20<sup>th</sup> March 1936, Old Bleach Linen Company Archive, private collection, Randalstown.

<sup>17</sup> Quantifiably the quality of the end product depended on the quality of flax, yarn and cloth and the quality of processing from retting, scutching and hackling the flax to spinning the yarn to bleaching, weaving, beetling, calendaring and finishing the cloth throughout the mill and factory. Justifiably Old Bleach who claimed high quality

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sought out yarns made from Courtrai flax, and bought the best local yarn from Herdman's, Sion Mills and Andrews' mill in Comber. They bleached on the greens and continually innovated to find ways to improve the quality of their cloth. For further information on how yarn was quantified, see N. Biggs, "A Tale Untangled: measuring the fineness of yarn", *Textile History*, Volume 35, issue 1, 2004, pp.120-129.

<sup>18</sup> The relationship with the V&A began in June 1917 when Norman Fitzroy Webb offered a reproduction set of engravings of the Old Linen Trade Prints to the Museum's Engravings department, it was finally accepted into the Photography Collection. Later in 1933, the Museum began collecting Old Bleach's newly launched furnishing fabrics, beginning with 'Sperrin' and 'Rhythm' and continued into the fifties with the Festival Pattern Group fabrics. (V&A Museum Registry, Nominal File on Old Bleach Linen Company, MA/1/0181, AAD).

<sup>19</sup> See Guy Woodward's *Culture, Northern Ireland and the Second World War*, Oxford University Press, 2015, for a broader treatment of cultural life in Ulster in the 1930s and 1940s.

<sup>20</sup> Sensibly, the Industrial Art Committee focussed on just two local industries, textiles and printing.

<sup>21</sup> See Chapter 4 of this thesis, pp.5-6.

<sup>22</sup> Head of Design at Old Bleach, Norman Fitzroy Webb, "The Training of Textile Designers", lecture given at The Textile Institute, Peebles, and reprinted in *The Irish Textile Journal*, 17 June 1938, pp.6-7.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Johnson of Jennymount Street Mills, Belfast quoted in *Irish Textile Journal*, December 15, 1904, pp.155-156. Taken from Ollerenshaw, "Problems of the European Linen Industry, 1870-1914", p.204.

<sup>24</sup> Old Bleach Linen Price List, August, 1926. Old Bleach Linen Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.

<sup>25</sup> O'Hearn, D. "Irish Linen: A Peripheral Industry", in *The Warp of Ulster's Past*, pp.161-190. Conversely on the concept of adaptive responses, O'Hearn explained 'others respond by extending their existing practices.'

<sup>26</sup> It is perhaps only more recently, that an appreciation of the importance of artefactual material can help us better understand the detail of the linen industry rather than admire its magnitude and lament its decline. However, there remains considerable room for improving access and facility for researchers.

<sup>27</sup> I have worked closely with staff from both institutions to develop this body of information and knowledge. I am indebted to Frances Pritchard at The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester and Susanne Smith, Centre Manager of the Clothworkers' Centre, VAM, for their knowledge and support of the project.

<sup>28</sup> The influence of Japanese art and culture was introduced to European audiences at the World's Fair, Paris, 1867, which incidentally is the earliest volume in the Old Bleach design library.

<sup>29</sup> Larkin, T. J. (1906) *A Collection of Antique Chinese Rugs*, 1st edition, London, T.J. Larkin and Neugebauer, Rudolf and Julius Orendi, (1909) *Handbuch des Orientalischen Teppichkunde*, Leipzig, Verlag von Karl W. Hiersemann.

<sup>30</sup> A (spare) pair of Old Bleach linen curtains, from Girton College, Cambridge, was gifted to the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum in 1992, by The Victoria & Albert Museum but no other Old Bleach furnishing fabrics are represented in any of the museum collections in Northern Ireland. (V&A Museum Registry, Nominal File on Old Bleach Linen Company, MA/1/0181, AAD.)

## CHAPTER ONE<sup>1</sup>

### **‘Apathy and Drift’: The Condition of the Linen Industry in Northern Ireland during the Interwar Period**

The interwar period in Europe and America is commonly recollected with a number of epithets such as; ‘the jazz age’ and ‘the roaring twenties’ and later in the 1930s, ‘the devil’s decade’ and ‘the black years’, which point to a period of extremities. Indeed, the era saw great prosperity, abject poverty and financial ruination, often contemporaneously. The scholarship in and of this period has by necessity, scrutinized the geopolitical climate and subsequent economic policy decisions and judged them harshly yet paradoxically, according to A.J.P. Taylor ‘most people enjoyed a richer life’ with exponential material advantage.<sup>2</sup> But beyond individual comfort, the British Empire was distinctly uncomfortable; where once inviolable, it was dazed by modernity. In a way, modernity transformed and arguably usurped previously held values of continuity, stability, tradition and power. Even by the turn of the twentieth century, Great Britain, having built an economy and super-power on distinctly nineteenth century industries such as coal, steel, textiles, iron and shipbuilding, was slow to develop new industries such as chemicals, electrical engineering and novel consumer durables.

#### **1.1 Diminished Nation?**

The historiography of the Interwar years in Britain identifies a concatenation of conditions that left a once apparently boundless industrial nation much diminished. The heavy industries in particular bore the brunt of concepts of progress. One example historians agree on was (and what would become the ruinous effect of) resistance to full industrial organization owing to small and family or privately owned firms. Certainly in accounts of Northern Ireland’s manufacturing this has been cited as one of the many causative factors in the moribund linen industry.<sup>3</sup> In England, a programme of rationalization saw the creation or expansion of manufacturing giants such as I.C.I. (Imperial Chemical Industries through a merger of four chemical firms, 1926), Courtaulds (with German VGF, 1927-28), Unilever (Lever Brothers merged with Dutch Magarine Unie, 1929).<sup>4</sup> However, it was often the passing of parliamentary acts that had to propel action, such as the Railways Act of 1921, where sixty companies merged to four.<sup>5</sup> In his survey of British Empire, *Industry and Empire* (1968), the Marxist historian Eric Hobsbawm argued, ‘between the wars...Britain turned from one of the least into one of the most controlled economies and largely through direct government action’.<sup>6</sup> No such structural change was achieved in Northern Ireland.

In Ireland, the historiography of the Interwar wars is not quite so well supplied. A number of important post war examinations of Northern Ireland’s economy were published with Arthur

Beacham's *The Ulster Linen Industry* in 1944, William Black's PhD (QUB) *Variations in Employment in the Linen Industry*, 1955, which then was published within Isles & Cuthbert's 1957 *An Economic Survey of Northern Ireland*. With an approximate value of linen goods manufactured in 1935 of nine million pounds, it was a significant contribution to Great Britain's gross domestic product, 40% of which the home market represented. Beacham opens his dense study acknowledging the paucity of economics writing on the subject, 'It is remarkable that so very few references are found in current economic literature to the Ulster Linen Industry in view of its importance not only to the economy of Northern Ireland but also in the economy of the United Kingdom as a whole'.<sup>7</sup> There may have been reluctance on the part of scholars and historians to treat Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State jointly despite their histories being intricately bound. Fortunately, the 1980s saw a growing interest in the economic and social complexities of, not least the industrial geography of the island. The academic David Johnson from Queen's University, Belfast has acknowledged that 'Even after partition both parts of the country had much in common' and, why wouldn't they? A political cleave was not going to exact a full and complete division of fundamental aspects like standards of living. The last thirty years have seen an appreciable rise in excellent scholarship acknowledging the significant and underrated contributions of the industries of Ulster and its relationships with Ireland and England. However, they are not supine and uncritical but instead have sought to interrogate how and why vast and profitable industries dwindled to virtually nothing.<sup>8</sup>

## **1.2 Contextualizing the Linen Industry**

This chapter is principally contextual in character as it places the textile industry of Northern Ireland in a regional and national context and a wider international context between the wars. This triangular context helps explain some of the complexities the linen industry in Northern Ireland faced in the interwar period. In a recently post partition country, Ireland and Northern Ireland were coming to terms with a new identity for the six counties (and one that has continued to be disputatious). This formal separation led manufacturers to redouble their concern about market share, after all their industry was essentially an export market and in the Irish Linen market, debate abounded, within the trade literature and contemporary newspapers over the authenticity and efficacy of branding it 'Irish'. Yet this may have been one of the minor issues and more easily resolvable of the period, more troubling was the linen competition from European countries,

Advices from New York indicate a preference, just at present, for Belgian linens owing to the slump in the franc, but this is viewed quite philosophically here. If American users prefer the Belgian article at something under the Irish price, regardless of quality, they are perfectly welcome to it. The live New York importer who sticks to Irish will come out on top right enough, and those who push Belgian linens as a substitute may not improve their position ultimately. Price is not everything.<sup>9</sup>

Partition also promised the potential to exploit Empire markets and for the linen men of Ulster this was their prize. Demonstrating this point was Northern Ireland's inclusion at the Imperial Economic Conference in London, 1923, it was strategically imperative and while not wishing to be seen as a Dominion of Empire, the province sought a discrete status within the United Kingdom. Linen industry representatives (and in turn empire loyalists) sought to secure 'mutual advantage...and lasting benefits to the people'.<sup>10</sup>

The chapter also evaluates the main challenges to and weaknesses in the linen industry in Northern Ireland throughout the Interwar period. Key issues varied in scope and nature, some were acute, local and resolvable within industry while others were chronic and outside of the control of even the Empire, such as the worldwide depression from 1929-39.<sup>11</sup> These challenges were instrumental in bringing about a range of organizational responses and solutions, some were short term to aid recovery from the war and some possessed an ambition and strategy to return the industry to its prewar distinction. These 'solutions' arose from a variety of sources: politicians (from both the newly devolved government in Northern Ireland and Westminster), industry (vocal associations and leading industry figures) and the local and national media played a vital role and platform for the transmission of issues and developments. The latter, in particular trade literature such as *The Irish Textile Journal*, *the Linen Trade Circular*, *The Textile Recorder*, *The Textile Mercury*, *The Cabinet Maker* and *Complete House Furnisher* are invaluable sources in contributing to our understanding of the magnitude of the industry and why it was important to sustain its viability.<sup>12</sup> They are a rich source of current conditions and shrewd opinion and have been used throughout this chapter to denote industry activity and discourse. As essential conduits for the dissemination of developments in the industry and matters affecting it, the media platform was no mere neutral organ; it warned, it advised and in hindsight, it foretold.

### **1.3 Industry Reality vs. Unreality**

If the immediate post years experienced an economic boom with an *annus mirabilis* in late 1919, then the spring of 1920 brought forth 'a period of abnormal depression'.<sup>13</sup> According to the *Report of the Committee on the Principal Causes of the Depression in the Irish Linen Industry* (1928) by 1927 'exports of linen amounted to approximately 74,000,000 square yards or less than one half of the prewar volume'.<sup>14</sup> The report dolefully proceeded with an assortment of statistical evidence that left the readership, i.e. members of the linen industry, in doubt as to the condition of Ulster's principal industry; on its most important market and the one that reflected all linen market movement, the USA, it outlined that in spite of increased population (from 92 million in 1910 to 117 million in 1926) and greater national wealth, imports were not where they should be, only marginally increased from imported linen goods from 1913 (\$33,255,386 to \$45,642,964).<sup>15</sup> It ominously continued, 'not only has the consumption of linen in the U.S.

decreased in this way, but the British share of the American market, thus restricted, has suffered a disquieting diminution.'<sup>16</sup> And then, on top of that, warned of the ascendancy of foreign competition and its threat to the predominance of Irish linen goods.

The value of this political, economic and social context helps us understand the role and status of design in the linen industry explored in later chapters. Design as an integral part of the process of textile production was so marginalized to be virtually invisible. The first stage in the weaving of a damask cloth is the drawing of the design and yet it has effectively been written out of linen history. Throughout the historiography of linen, little consideration is paid to the process and output of design; instead attention is given over either to issues in agrarian cultivation and harvesting or the industrial aspects of production, mercantilism and consumption. Histories of flax and linen production tell a narrative of intensive labour and adversity in working conditions and production methods yet show a quite contradictory visual representation which relies on the romance of the land, a bucolic idyll of (presumably) contented farm or factory workers, lifting light loads with their pristine white washed cottages or neatly arranged factory buildings conveniently nearby. In fact, it was a diversion, but a useful one picked up as a marketing tool from as early as the 1880s. James Humbert Craig's painting, 'Northern Ireland Flax Growing', commissioned by the Empire Marketing Board in 1930 is a good example of a notional concept in the fecundity of the land.<sup>17</sup>



Fig. 1.1 James Humbert Craig, 'Northern Ireland Flax Growing', Empire Marketing Board, 1930.  
Source: The National Archives, Kew, CO 956/287.

The iconography within the composition attests to how, in this instance, the British Government wanted the rest of the country to view (and perhaps comprehend) Northern Ireland's empire contribution, a visual reminder of the gentle (i.e. antediluvian) method of farm production, before it progressed to the industrial perdition of the factory.<sup>18</sup> In publishing, a preference for visual

incongruity has accompanied many accounts of Irish linen, for example a detail from a William Hincks print, Plate VIII '...the Brown Linen Market at Banbridge in the County of Downe' from 1783 accompanies Philip Ollerenshaw's essay on business boycotts during the partition of Ireland.<sup>19</sup> Often the imagery of the linen industry has been treated as imprecisely and marginally as the design process. This relegation is an organizing feature of this thesis, which asks why the creative process was so evidently unrecorded throughout the history of the linen industry and subsequently has been largely overlooked by historians.

In the immediate post Great War years, the term 'design' barely featured in contemporary industry media, when it appears, it is non-contentious, descriptive and merely showcases new styles, known as 'motives' and suggestions. However, with emerging structural support for urgent reform by way of governmental support and industry organization (see Chapters 2 and 3) and the nascent professionalizing design industry (see Chapter 4), design as concept and practice, slowly and surely emerged in contemporary industry literature. By the mid to late thirties, design discourse indicates an industry confidence that belied its actual state.<sup>20</sup>

#### **1.4 Official Intervention**

The state of the linen industry in the years directly following the war necessitated demand for government intervention via official inquiry into a range of urgent issues, the Flax Control Board and the Flax Order (both 1917) had its two appointed committees: The Flax Supplies Committee (which ran from 1917 to 1920) and the Flax Allocation. In addition, the Departmental Committee was appointed to 'Consider the Position of the Textile Trades after the War' (the report was the commissioned in 1916 and published in 1918).<sup>21</sup> The former concerned itself with raw material and the dependence of the industry on the supply of raw material from France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Russia (particularly Russia given its collapse in 1917) and sought ways to ameliorate developments in cheap and reliable flax supply at home, while the latter surveyed and subsequently reported on, among other concerns, the apparent lack of industry support for specialist textile education but the implications of that meant a lag between British and foreign textile competition (this issue is discussed fully in Chapter 4, "'Just Draw Me a Chrysanthemum': The Manufacturer and the Designer in the Linen Trade"). The Flax Control Board had representation from a wide range of government departments (Board of Trade, Ministry of Munitions, War Office) alongside industry associations and union presence but the Ulster relationship with the (Westminster) government was not as strong as the Scottish industry's links chiefly due to the coarse trade, whereas Northern Ireland's regional specialism was in the medium to fine linens. Philip Ollerenshaw has noted and described 'much friction between government and business' in Scotland and Ireland in the post war period, involving cancellation of contracts,<sup>22</sup>

existing stock for the Air Board (a vast 25 million yards, not easily disposed of) and resumption of production in peacetime.<sup>23</sup>

### 1.5 Industrial Research

Despite frictions, there was evidence of a concerted (and often joint) effort in government and industry to constructively recover from wartime restrictions by strategically planning for the industry's future. Central to this was the need to wean the local industry off the reliance on foreign flax supply by devising high quality flax seed to be grown on home soil, up to this time only ten percent of annual supply was cultivated in Ulster. In 1919, the Linen Institute Research Association (LIRA) established a research laboratory and testing unit at Lambeg, Lisburn.<sup>24</sup>

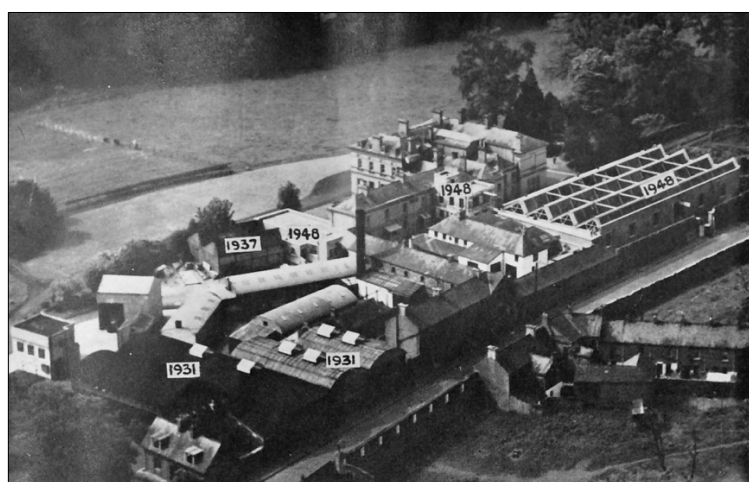


Fig. 1.2. Aerial photograph of LIRA, Lambeg, published in the New York magazine, *Linens and Domestics*, 1951. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library.

Jointly funded by the government and the industry (with annual membership subscription based on the size of the company<sup>25</sup>) its remit aimed to take a longer view in terms of research and development. The twentieth century saw great strides in the value and development of science and technology, the vulnerable textile industry would benefit from these progressive initiatives, although as Michael Sanderson in his 1972 essay suggests our knowledge of these developments have been through conduits such as the Department of Scientific and Industrial Research (DSIR) and therefore little was known about private firms' industrial research, by necessity they were "loth to disclose private details of their own research activities and expenditure".<sup>26</sup> Nevertheless, LIRA symbolized a determined effort to support a (it was hoped) recovering industry. The Association's original twenty lines of enquiry thought most important to the trade included: the selection and breeding of improved strains of flax seed for sowing purposes, the commercial and industrial value of oil from immature flax seed, investigation into mechanical weaving and scientific costing. It did not include the highly topical 'labour saving as a motive for research' as a priority objective despite industry dissatisfaction over the labour intensive wet retting process.<sup>27</sup> The



programme achieved many of the original aims and objectives and continued with new areas for research with five sub-committees responsible for discrete stages of linen cultivation, production and consumption.<sup>28</sup> A guest lecture series ran regularly that reflected the Association's lines of enquiry and occasionally acknowledged the role of design; "The Selection of Design in the Linen Industry", by Audrey J. Martin was given in 1933.<sup>29</sup>

Because of its funding structure, industry staff could be seconded up to two years at LIRA (paid for by the seconding firm) to train at an advanced level in innovative (and possibly riskier) research which firms were reluctant to take on. Much of the scientific research that took place was written up and published mainly in the Research Institute Memoirs (see endnote 14), which cover the spectrum of research activity from articles on, 'A Botanical Study of the Flax Plant: the Influence of Density of Stand of Crop upon the Development of the Plant' to 'Laundry Experiments with Linen Materials', while densely scientific, some of the articles were adapted for a broader audience, such as Dr. W. H. Gibson's (institute director) essay 'Future Developments in the Flax and Linen Industries', given as a paper read to the Royal Society of Arts, April 26<sup>th</sup> 1933.<sup>30</sup> This was especially important to educate the broadest possible audience on the latest innovations in textile technology and its practical applications. The RSA audience would have been an international mix adept at "enlightened thinking and collaborative action", a collegial and stimulating environment capable of generating lateral problem solving. Industrial research had gained traction and although new solutions were found, they often created new difficulties, for example, lengthy experimentation in finding an optimal (pedigree) flax seed that could grow well in the home market would be excessively costly, resulting in 'linen goods more likely to be more expensive luxury goods than in the past.'<sup>31</sup> The industry had been founded on the dependence of foreign flax supply and it was probably the most pressing issue the industry faced, the general instability that marked the interwar years exacerbated the acute supply problem and in consequence, fluctuations in price.<sup>32</sup>

## **1.6 Further Threats**

In March 1921, W.H. Webb wrote three lengthy letters to the incoming first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Sir James Craig, appealing to the unique energy he might bring to this new office.<sup>33</sup> Webb was a prolific correspondent and these letters to Craig are an amalgam of the many roles he found himself in, although written on Old Bleach Linen Company headed paper, he writes not so much as Chairman of his own company but on behalf of the whole industry. He made a robust case for the structural work the associations were doing to progress the linen industry. In between the flattery and problem solving, he reiterates a stark warning about the German linen industry's ability to organize and adapt its finance to fit with their commercial

policies, 'her commercial men are highly trained and are able to develop what they call in America "long swing policies"',<sup>34</sup> With an eye trained on Germany<sup>35</sup> he counseled,

Today when nearly the whole industrial world is at a standstill or drifting without plan or policy, Germany is the one country going steadily and purposefully ahead in spite of her present troubles...it is a most dangerous and deadly competition...unless something is done, Germany will be in possession of all our markets.<sup>36</sup>

He was not wrong, Germany's linen industry was based in the east of the country and protected somewhat from the machinations of war, they were able to secure most of their raw supply by growing it with only a small percentage bought from the Netherlands and Belgium and their sophisticated organization were then in a position to undercut competition in the most coveted market, the USA. Webb cites a communiqué from a buyer in one of the large New York stores, 'we see quite a little of the German linens in this market and the prices are very low – would be average about one half for the same qualities of Irish manufacture.'<sup>37</sup> One of Webb's solutions to see off such competition was the use of a trademark, if it 'were so entrenched in the minds of the consumers, the German trade would find it difficult to re-enter the America market.'<sup>38</sup> He gave a further example of the robustness of the trademark idea, with the Scotch Woollen Trade Mark Association's campaign to enhance pure wool but not depreciate mixed fibre goods, 'they are progressing because they had the wisdom to use their trademark, while we are languishing because we had not'.<sup>39</sup> However, Webb's outlook was more buoyant than James Mackie's assessment of the period's economy. Mackie and Sons Ltd made machinery for industry and James was an avid collector of statistics (even more so than Webb), his prognosis was particularly bleak (but ultimately had more veracity), according to Webb, 'he holds that we are in for about 30 years of depression and that there is no good struggling with the situation'.<sup>40</sup>

These threats to industry required tactical solutions which were instituted in a number of ways; one strategic approach took the form of a 'Sub-committee of the Ministry of Commerce Advisory Council for the Imperial Economic Conference' in 1923 which was in large part, made up of linen industry figures and keen to exploit the opportunity to influence the development of an Empire Flax Growing Scheme.<sup>41</sup> To meet shortages in flax supply from Europe, several initiatives were launched to making flax growing on home soil more attractive to farmers. The industry called for fixed prices for farmers, but that was deemed impossible due to the quality and quantity of what was grown (although much later, Beacham states some improvement was gained during the Second World War, where 'between 1939-1943, the acreage under flax in Northern Ireland increased from 21,000 to 90,000' with an estimated increase in tonnage in fibre from 9,000 in 1940 to 17,00 in 1943<sup>42</sup>).

In the mid 1930s, after visiting the British Industries Fair (1931), King George V, upon learning of the industry's misfortunes, offered a practical contribution of his Sandringham estate in Norfolk

as a suitable site to trial pedigree flax production.<sup>43</sup> Set up by LIRA, 'The Norfolk Flax Experimental Station' was run by Norfolk Flax Ltd from 1935 to 1939, when it was taken over by the Admiralty until 1946 when responsibility passed to the Board of Trade.<sup>44</sup> Intended to address the chronic problem of raw material supply, the project aimed to put into practice the original aims of the Linen Industry Research Association but crucially, run as a company in order to fix and therefore stabilize prices.<sup>45</sup>



Fig. 1.3 Inspection Day at Sandringham – with delegates from Scottish and Ulster linen interests, included here are Lord Craigavon, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, Lewis C. Gray of Norfolk Flax Ltd and third from the right, Norman Fitzroy Webb (in hat), Old Bleach Linen Company, *The Northern Whig*, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 1935. Source: LIRA Press Cuttings Book, LIRA, Lisburn Museum and Linen Centre.

Never one to miss a pioneering opportunity that might have advantageous Empire connections, Old Bleach bought an initial quota of one hundred and thirty shares in May 1935 and perhaps optimistically, sensing its progress purchased a further forty-four shares in March 1936. The project's vision was never fully realized and Old Bleach sold both quotas to the Admiralty upon its takeover in March and October 1939 with a fifty percent loss on the original quota of 130 shares.<sup>46</sup> Despite LIRA's pioneering work, support from the industry was not comprehensive and while their work was appreciated in the postwar years and award winning<sup>47</sup>, their contribution was by then much too late.

Sanderson posits that because of a somewhat lopsided and inevitable view of industrial research has resulted in historians exaggerating the contribution research associations actually made.<sup>48</sup> Because of this, the private firm's research endeavours have been sidelined. Many of the medium to large vertically integrated linen firms had research and development departments, and evidence suggests there was a transparent and cooperative spirit among firms. *The Irish Textile Journal* regularly published new technical developments from firms who had a reputation for being

scientifically minded, Old Bleach's latest technical innovations were afforded generous column inches and annual summaries such as "Linen Research in 1936: Possibilities of Unretted Flax" were standard features.<sup>49</sup> Certainly, the same chemical sales representatives would have visited many rival companies and been aware of and indeed communicate initiatives and developments within the industry, be they local or international; it was a fluid network.<sup>50</sup> Interwar firms, particularly in the staple industries, saw research as a way to create new lines and remain competitive.

### **1.7 The Necessity for Innovation**

Old Bleach created a number of innovations from their laboratory, which consolidated their contribution in modernizing the industry.<sup>51</sup> Best known to the consuming public, then and now, was their hand painted linens. In the early 1920s the company chemist, Robert (Bertie) McCall 'invented' the idea that fast vat dyes (which had just been perfected) could be manually painted directly on to the damask cloth, in its bleached state, but any mistakes could easily be taken out, quickly with soap and water, as the dyes were not fixed until they passed through a 'flash ageing' process, where steam cured the colour.<sup>52</sup> It originated as an alternative to embroidered table linen, which ironically was one of the company's main lines, although embroidered linens usually stayed within modest and achievable sizes, the larger cloths were large and unfeasible for embroidery. The damask ground remained white, while large teams of women hand painted individual motifs already woven into the cloth off the roll. With typical ambition, the company launched the first hand painted damask goods, proclaiming "in a large store in Fifth Avenue, New York, where their novelty and beauty created a sensation".<sup>53</sup> Quickly the hand painted cloths became commercially popular, as demand grew so did their reputation and by the early 1930s demonstrations by Old Bleach hand painters took place in prestigious department stores across England and Scotland, such as Harrods, Army and Navy, Marshall and Snelgrove, Harvey Nichols, House of Frazer and Jenner's, and according to one brochure, "some of the girls have gone to Europe on similar painting assignments".<sup>54</sup> This promotional drive was a direct method of positioning Old Bleach as an innovator in the minds of consumers, simultaneously sharing and reinforcing their innovation; how important this was to the housewife is difficult to measure but as a novelty, it was a best seller and the vogue for painted cloth remained surprisingly enduring, lasting well into the 1970s.



Fig. 1.3 Demonstration of 'Old Bleach' hand-painting, 1930s. Source: Company Photograph Album, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

The demonstration (Fig. 1.3) is denoted in restrained scientific and industrial stages, accompanied by six reagent bottles of borosilicate glass and a white lab coated demonstrator signifying the scientific origin and indeed efficacy of the process. Neatly framing the 'science' is a celestial light source from the glass roof, which rather cinematically casts the rest of the (presumably rival) stock into shade. In company promotional literature, while the recipe is never revealed, potential customers are privy to the elaborate scientific process of table linen production,

Tablecloths, napkins, tray cloths and towels are painted with special pastes prepared in the laboratory from a secret formula. These painting pastes contain vat dyestuffs especially selected for the purpose. As the dyestuffs are all guaranteed fast there is regular routine testing by the chemists to ensure a high degree of fastness. The colours are absolutely fast to washing and light. They are fast even in boiling solutions of soap or detergents. Immediately after painting the colours appear rather dull. It is necessary to put the fabric through a steaming process to render the dyes fast. Further process work in different solutions produces the true shades which are generally light and bright. After the material has been thoroughly washed and dried, the normal finishing for the particular goods is carried out.<sup>55</sup>

Hand painting was much copied by rivals but never improved upon. Old Bleach used only pastel shades of 'ethereal delicacy' that amplified the design and quality of the woven cloth, whereas competitors with inferior design and production used intense pigment, which resulted in an inferior looking product.

Throughout the 1920s and 1930s, the company continued innovating. In addition to white bleached double damask, they created a two-colour damask cloth called 'Two Tone', created by weaving a coloured yarn in the weft, available in ivory, gold, blue or green with a gold band and

appearing later in the 1932 price list, 'Permatone' is introduced, an additional offering of permanently vat dyed in 'old ivory' double damask cloth. However, these were minor advances if compared with a new type of linen developed in 1937 and launched in 1938, giving it the forthright brand name 'Longer Life Linen' (LLL) it used a new bleaching process given to the yarn and reinforced selvedge in the woven cloth. They issued promotional material with a scientific heft as prima facie evidence that this would indeed offer a truly reliable cloth to the housewife. Sales representatives were supplied (in the company price lists) with images of flax in microscopic detail of cross sections, which showed what the problem was, and a photograph of the solution: two comparative cloths, with and without the new deeper two-and-a-half-inch selvedge.

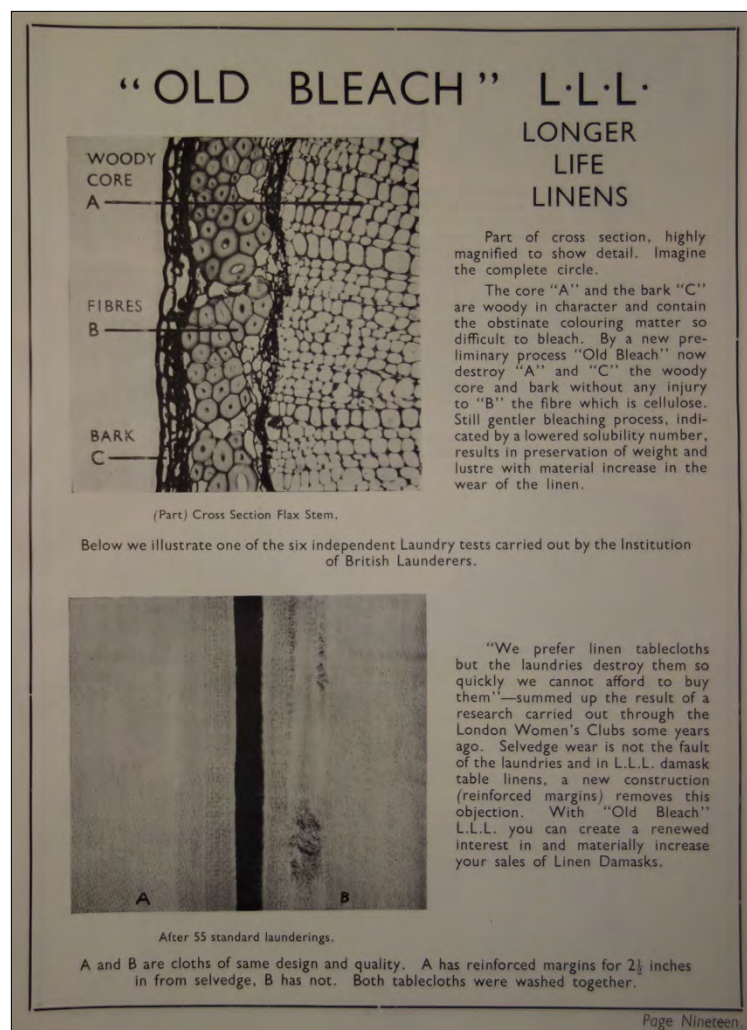


Fig. 1.4 Longer Life Linens, Old Bleach Linen Company Price List for the retailer, 1938.  
Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Inevitably the cloth without shows poor wear and the cloth with remains pristine (after 55 standard launderings carried out by the Institution of British Launderers). In soothing tones, retailers were assured, 'With Old Bleach L.L.L. you can create a renewed interest in and materially increase your sales of Linen Damasks'.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, consumers received with their purchase, a



seven point confirmation of the superiority of LLL towels with scientific overtones: 'made from the highest grade pure linen yarn, processed by our new scientific method, grass bleached to produce zephyr-soft finish, perfect absorbency, hygienic, finished with hand drawn hemstitching and fully guaranteed'.<sup>57</sup>



Fig. 1.5 'Almost revolutionary' Longer Life Linens, Old Bleach Linen Company, 1937.  
Source: Collection of Author.

So confident were they of the attributes of Longer Life Linen, Old Bleach launched a nationwide tour to demonstrate the new cloth and how it would differentiate itself from rival linen and more importantly newer fabric goods, such as cotton, rayon, linen and rayon blends, even though they produced these too. The product tour lasted from February to May 1938 and travelled through the major cities: Oxford, Bristol, Birmingham, Leicester, Sheffield, Liverpool, Manchester, Newcastle, Glasgow, Aberdeen, London, Leeds before returning to Belfast. Recorded in the Old Bleach Visitors' book, which was taken along to each meeting, are the signatories representing the most illustrious retailers: the iconic London department stores Liberty, Harrods, Selfridges and John Lewis but also of equal measure, the large regional and multiple stores like Binns Ltd., Colmer Ltd. and Kendal Milne Ltd.; designers such as J. Christopher Heal from Heal's and Ashley Havinden from Crawford's Advertising Agency, London. Perhaps most importantly, influential general and specialist, national and international press included Amalgamated Press, Australian Newspapers, Argus South African Newspapers Ltd. Fairchild Publications, Good Housekeeping, Women's Journal, Harper's Bazaar, Vogue and Architectural Review; great editorial brought the product to the attention of the widest consumer audience.<sup>58</sup> It appeared the launch of this new innovation in linen required steering at the highest level and by senior management who attended most of the events. Indeed, the Directors' Minute Books record the sanction of most of the publicity budget allocation for 1937-38 was to be devoted to LLL.<sup>59</sup>

At many of these demonstrations, competing linen companies were in attendance and keen to be informed of rival innovations and new product lines.<sup>60</sup> Certainly it was an opportunity for companies to consider options in developing their linen lines and many companies during the interwar years built science based innovation into their products and embedded the putative progressive values of science into their marketing.<sup>61</sup> If they could not get to the demonstrations, they always had the linen trade press who was most enthusiastic, with the *Linen Trade Circular* proclaiming LLL 'almost revolutionary'.<sup>62</sup> Back in 1921, W.H. Webb, chairman of Old Bleach extolled the benefits of 'Scientific Management', claiming, 'my own concern has been entirely re-organized in consultation with an American organization expert, which might be described as the German system of internal organization, humanized' while toward the end of the decade, the Irish Linen Merchants' Association (ILMA) issued a booklet entitled 'Additional Publicity for Irish Linen: a modern necessity' (1928), which opined 'a susceptible public has been educated to buy what it hears most about, and, with the development of scientific advertising, associates quality and value with the amount of publicity offered', thus a scientific, and therefore creditable, approach spread across and through virtually all aspects of culture.<sup>63</sup> Consumers were becoming familiar with science through a number of ways; the 'Social Relations of Science' movement in the early thirties gained ground in popularizing science by utilizing the mass media of the day. For example, the BBC launched a radio series of 'Science and Society' programmes broadcast at peak times and used a (often provocative) mix of scientists and literary and academic figures such as Julian Huxley and Harold Nicolson.<sup>64</sup> To convince customers of the rigour by which stores checked the quality of linen goods, linen buyers enacted a method called 'scientific buying', sheets were tested for strength and towels were tested for strength and colour by a vigorous washing test.<sup>65</sup> This regular promotion of and exposure to science meant consumers could understand how science shaped their own and proximate lives.

### **1.8 Association Glut**

Other initiatives in organizing the industry included myriad associations which often ran simultaneously but attracted much criticism over weak industry strategy, silo mentality, ineffectual influence, inadequate support and mostly, just too many representations with insufficiently defined or differentiated agendas. In short, the dots were not satisfactorily joined to create a coherent power base that could negotiate or at least influence flax prices, import duties, trade tariffs. In the Irish Linen Trade, there were approximately twenty-two associations in 1921 with three main representative sectors: raw material, manufacturing and selling. They were inter-reliant but did not operate accordingly. Each sector determined its own strategy, with having unique challenges to their own division. Industry support by membership was routinely problematic, in a private memorandum by the Irish Linen Merchants' Association on 'Estimate of Figures for Extension of Advertising Campaign to the Linen Trade Generally' it estimated approximately 25% of the



industry were not contributing to association subscriptions and yet benefitting from the publicity promotions.<sup>66</sup> In addition, associations regularly ran competitions for 'the Encouragement of Textile Design' with not inconsiderable prize money (for example £7.7.0 for the first prize in damask cloth design and the same amount for damask towel design), with the caveat that 'any design may be purchased by agreement between a member of the association and a competitor. This gave members access to good quality design and awareness of a potential talent pool to draw from.<sup>67</sup>

The Irish Linen Society (ILS) established in 1919, devoted itself to the promotion of the industry and the selling of its goods. W.H. Webb, chairman of the Old Bleach Linen Company, was well placed to oversee the society's activity. He was a proponent of the importance in all aspects of marketing; of course, it helped enormously for both his own company and the broader industry, that he was a vocal and extravagant character who like nothing better than an audience. He was one of the most ubiquitous industry spokesmen, with an appetite for loquacious oratory and an insistent personality; in the invaluable oral archive 'Living Linen'<sup>68</sup> held at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, a number of interviewees, mainly Old Bleach employees but family too, recall his dominant personality, waxed moustache and American accent.<sup>69</sup>

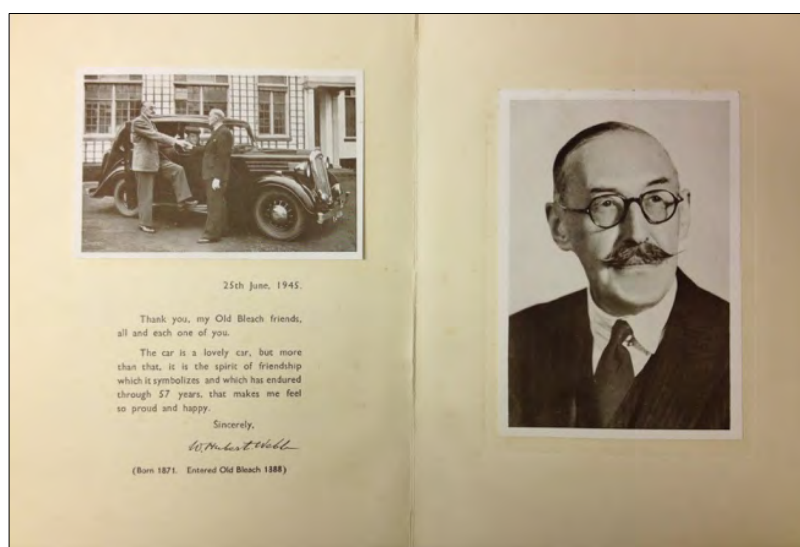


Fig. 1.6 Appreciation card from W.H. Webb to the employees of Old Bleach upon his 'retirement' in 1945. It reads, 'Thank you, my Old Bleach friends, all and each one of you. The car is lovely, but more than that, it is the spirit of friendship which it symbolizes and which has endured through 57 years, that makes me feel so proud and happy.' He continued to work until his death, at his desk in 1950. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown.

The extended family were largely educated in English public schools and spoke with crisp received pronunciation, William Hubert however was so smitten with life across the pond, he adopted an East Coast persona. He gave regular lectures, sometimes on behalf of the Society and others in representing his own family company, at august events and institutions as The Textile Institute's

annual conferences and the London School of Economics and published a series of treatise on linen with the emphasis on selling such as “Salesmanship as Applied to Linen” (1923). His energetic support of the industry, especially through marketing, continued throughout the interwar period; in the Old Bleach Directors’ Minute Books, sanction was given to “support an advertising scheme promoted by the Irish Power Loom Association for Damask Goods in the U.S.A. which would entail a contribution of £84.10.0 per annum for three years, subject to approval of the scheme as finally adopted and that 75% of total damask looms participate. A similar contribution under the Household Linen and Piece Goods Association was also authorized”.<sup>70</sup> Indeed the Old Bleach Minute Books are marked throughout with evidence of financial support for and direct engagement with local and national industry; recorded annual subscriptions are entered for the aforementioned ILS and LIRA, the Irish Linen Trade Corporation (ILTC), the Household Linen and Piece Goods Association, the Irish Power Loom Manufacturers’ Association (IPLMA), Ulster Industries Development Association (UIDA), Handkerchief and Embroidery Association, British Colour Council, Irish Linen Guild (from 1928), Federation of British Industries, Yarn Bleachers and Dyers Association.<sup>71</sup> This breadth of support is more typical of those companies who were either very nearly fully integrated or fully integrated; Old Bleach was the former, in that it did not spin but entered the system at weaving and took on the remaining process up to merchanting. Membership support was standard throughout the linen industry, particularly among the larger and more profitable firms (many membership subscriptions were calculated on annual turnover or the number of spindles or looms in the mill<sup>72</sup>). The Irish Linen Society’s membership subscription was calculated on the basis of its members’ annual turnover and in 1919, with £30,000 in the pot (later increasing to £90,000 over three years) a campaign commenced to raise sales in linen in their main market, the U.S.<sup>73</sup>

### **1.9 Getting Organized at Macro and Micro Levels**

The contraction in the linen trade was so sharply felt that in January 1928, the Irish Linen Guild was formed as an umbrella organization to represent the sectoral associations.<sup>74</sup> This additional layer was to orchestrate a cohesive programme of publicity for the industry as a whole. A trade mark was instituted (something W.H. Webb had long called for) and a series of strategic initiatives were undertaken, for example design competitions, a guild ticket for identification, fixed prices for buyers, ‘general mass attack’ in the national press (but with targeted publications<sup>75</sup>), localized publicity and for 1931-34 a zoned publicity campaign in (mainly) English shopping centres. In addition, the ILG was the first organization to bring textiles to the British Industries Fair in 1930 where it received H.R.H. The Prince of Wales to their stand.<sup>76</sup> These enterprises were a direct response to the realization that it was the home market that could act as ballast to the industry’s contraction. The Director of the Guild and tireless industry promoter, John Gilliland took aim at the female consumer, ‘we must make the housewife of today as linen conscious as her mother

was'.<sup>77</sup> This coordinated campaign was the result of the industry recognition that some form of structural change needed to take place. In 1929, a Report of the Committee appointed to Consider Remedies for the Present Position in the Irish Linen Industry in conjunction with a consultation memorandum by a Price Waterhouse & Co. accountant, Sir Gilbert Garnsey aimed to devise a scheme of amalgamation, 'we make no apology for devoting the major part of this report to a discussion of the case for amalgamation'. However, in his memorandum Garnsey advised,

That the only practicable way to proceed, in a case where there are so many independent units is to start with a few representatives' concerns, say five or six of the more important businesses. Such a nucleus would have an important psychological effect upon the remaining concerns and would provide a solid foundation upon which to build an organization destined to control the whole industry.

His suggestion of one or more holding companies, which would be a flexible structure and manage to obviate large expenditure and charges, was almost probably too drastic for the industry to be persuaded by.<sup>78</sup> The report and memorandum demonstrate a well-defined understanding of the deep threats to the industry and urgency in remedying both internal and external difficulties. The report's conclusions offered five points for consideration: 'a scheme of amalgamation, holding companies is the most suitable method, safeguarding is necessary, the industry to encourage raw supply and research into manufacturing processes and flax fibre production.'<sup>79</sup> None of these were taken up with any particular vim.

Direct industry engagement came in a number of ways; many key individuals were sufficiently energetic and perhaps ambitious enough to devote great portions of their time to the trade. W. Hubert Webb's prominent role within industry was carefully constructed through securing shares in joint stock companies to gain access to directorships, i.e. representation in a variety of companies, of which would have been to consolidate supply of material such as yarns, one such company was R. Gledhill in Saddleworth, Yorkshire who specialized in spinning high quality wool yarns.<sup>80</sup> He was also sat, in a variety of roles, on an assortment of industry association committees: President of the Chamber of Commerce, Belfast council member of the Irish Linen Merchants' Association, Chair of the aforementioned Irish Linen Society, council member of the Irish Linen Guild, Chair of the College of Technology's Textile Society. His industry engagement made him one of the most informed and prominent figures in Ulster life but undoubtedly his influence was most felt by connections he fostered in high society in the twenties and thirties. These social circles and their role in the linen trade are discussed in Chapter Five: The Linen Web(b): Promoting Irish Linen.

On an internal level, The Old Bleach Linen Company commissioned a 'Report on General Organization and Costing Methods', prepared by an industrial engineer from London, James F.

Whiteford<sup>81</sup> in September 1916, which signaled a tangible desire to maximize efficiencies in the factory and consider the redeployment of management in their respective jurisdictions (stating pragmatically 'made necessary by the death of one of your managers'). The author opens on a constructive note, 'Having regard for the abnormal conditions due to the war, the general impression received during this study was that the productive efficiency of all departments of your mill is quite satisfactory at present.' and as an initial enquiry, makes a number of modest recommendations.<sup>82</sup> He advises that such methods of efficiencies, can 'provide sufficient elasticity to accomodate [sic] substantial increase in the volume of business' and for the Sales department, 'deal properly with intelligent and unintelligent competition.' A further recommendation includes the use of symbols to indicate the class of goods, the design number, width and number of piece[s] to aid identification throughout the material's journey through the mill, but there is no evidence attention is afforded to the efficiencies of all the mill's departments, for example, how complex designs could slow down production activity. Whiteford's engagement with Old Bleach endured for a number of years in further efficiency studies which carried on to 1941 with a final 'Memorandum of Reorganization Scheme'.<sup>83</sup>

## Summary

What is clear from examining such industry (primary and secondary) records in this contextual chapter, is the major concerns spinners, manufacturers and merchants had with immediate and controllable factors such as labour efficiency, productivity of machinery, power house performance, material waste, costs of production, promotion and greater anxieties over foreign competition, fluctuations in raw material supply, fickle markets and protectionism. Taken together, the *primary* source material in particular offers us valuable insight into the valiant efforts made and indeed desperate measures taken to restore a declining industry. The *spirit of the age* was broadly scientifically minded and I have demonstrated in this chapter how a linen firm like Old Bleach could still innovate and launch improved linens on to the market, in economically challenging times and whether the female consumer wanted it or not (the question of product longevity versus fashions is discussed in Chapter 5). I have also shown the range of earnest measures taken to elicit support from influential quarters; persuasive letters were written, industry campaigning was undertaken and tangible attempts were made to organize along sectoral lines. It is possible to extrapolate from this how design was not, at least documented as, highly problematic. But there were stirrings in the industry press about design meeting expectations, *The Linen Trade Circular* on March 7<sup>th</sup> 1925 reported, 'Reports from the U.S. are better, despite the gloomy forecasts concerning dress linens, and new business is being arranged where quality and design meet importers' approval.'<sup>84</sup> This chapter has acknowledged the *emergence* of design competitions that became a regular feature in the late twenties and so pointed to a (sluggish but nonetheless) growing understanding that good design was integral to good business. So, where

did the emergence of design come from? Was design an imitative measure for Ulster manufacturers? And what took certain manufacturers, who were once on the whole unwilling to invest in new designs to commit more readily in the first stage of the cloth construction process?

This hesitancy is explored in the next chapter, which examines the theoretical and ideological positions on interwar design and the goal (promise?) of modernity or survival (for some, this was one and the same thing), the emergent design profession and the crucial role of government behind the Industrial Art Movement. By 1932, the discourse and practice on the significant contribution good design could make to the economy was consolidated in the publication of Lord Gorrell's report, *Art and Industry: Report of the Committee Appointed by the Board of Trade under the Chairmanship of Lord Gorrell on the Production and Exhibition of Articles of Good Design and Everyday Use*, a clarion call with unequivocal evidence that design (or 'industrial art' as it was then called) as agent and outcome of social change, was the essential component, in British industry and consumption. Cheryl Buckley quoted committee member, artist and critic Roger Fry (within the Gorrell Report) who, 'argued that the manufacturer had lost contact with 'educated taste', and although he was able to find and use expert advice for technical matters, when it came to the 'application of art he has no guide, no clear purpose'.<sup>85</sup> In England, the loss of contact implied it had once been tangible; In Ulster, there was little public or private discourse around the role and status of design (there was slightly more debate on art). While educating both industry and the public on design reform would become a dual imperative in Great Britain, Ulster was still gathering itself from the aftermath of Partition.

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<sup>1</sup> I owe a debt of gratitude to the recent scholarship of Philip Ollerenshaw in this chapter, whose research has schooled me in the vicissitudes of the Ulster linen industry and directed me to additional important work in this area. A further debt is due to the indefatigable Alfred S. Moore (b.1871 – d.1961), a Belfast journalist who wrote commandingly on the linen industry, becoming the linen correspondent for the Belfast News Letter in 1926 and was still writing for the New York Magazine, *Linen and Domestic*, up to his death aged 89. His papers, the Alfred S. Moore Collection, are available by appointment only in the Belfast Central Library. The title of this chapter, 'Apathy and Drift', is taken from one of his insightful articles entitled 'Linen in Great Peril: Can the Industry Recover?' No date is ascribed but it is most likely to be c. 1925 and it is unclear which publication it ultimately appeared in, it is a type written draft with some minor editing marks and additions.

<sup>2</sup> A.J.P. Taylor, *English History 1914-1945*, p.317.

<sup>3</sup> Black, W. *Variations in Employment in the Linen Industry in Northern Ireland*, unpublished PhD thesis, Queen's University Belfast, 1955; Ollerenshaw, P. 'Stagnation, War and Depression: The UK Linen Industry 1900-1930', *The European Linen Industry in Historical Perspective*, pp.285-307; Johnson, D.S. 'The Northern Ireland Economy, 1914-39', *An Economic History of Ulster, 1820-1939*, pp.184-223.

<sup>4</sup> See Cassis, Y. and T. Gourvish, "The Performance of British Business in the Twentieth Century", Chapter 5 in *The Performance of European Business in the Twentieth Century*, Oxford University Press, 2016, pp.72-80.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/cabinetpapers/themes/railways-act.htm>

<sup>6</sup> Hobsbawm, p.221, (1999 edition).

<sup>7</sup> See endnote 26 on Beacham.

<sup>8</sup> In the post war years, a concerted effort was made to properly review Northern Ireland in a mainly economic context (and from academia, namely Department of Economics, Queen's University, Belfast) in important publications such as Beacham, A. 'The Ulster Linen Industry', *Economica*, Wiley- Blackwell for LSE, 11 (2), 1944; Armstrong, D.L. 'Social and economic Conditions in the Belfast Linen Industry, 1850-1900', *Irish Historical Studies*, Vol. 7, 1951, pp. 235-269 and Isles and Cuthbert's *An Economic Survey of Northern Ireland*, 1957. Later publications as *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland 1650-1950*, edited by B. Collins, P. Ollerenshaw and T. Parkhill undertook valuable regional history research, where the linen industry features prominently.

<sup>9</sup> "Bleached and Finished Linens etc.", *The Linen Trade Circular*, January 27, 1923.

<sup>10</sup> J. Milne Barbour M.P., D. L., Chair and Managing Director of The Linen Thread Co. in Ollerenshaw, P. 'The Background to War', *Northern Ireland in the Second World War*, p.18

<sup>11</sup> Britain was the first member country to leave the Gold Standard in 1931 and in doing so, recovered earlier than France, Italy and the U.S.

<sup>12</sup> *The Irish Textile Journal* was a monthly supplement to the weekly *Linen Trade Circular*, the ITJ contained more in-depth discursive material on the latest issues and developments while the LTC was a weekly round-up of global linen markets. Both were published by H. Carter, Belfast. The latter three were English trade journals, while mainly concerned with the cotton and woollen industries, a close eye was kept on the Irish and Scottish linen trade.

<sup>13</sup> Report of the Committee on the Principal Causes of the Depression in the Irish Linen Industry (1928), PRONI: COM 27/1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> The restriction referred to here were trade tariffs levelled on British imported goods.

<sup>17</sup> This example is analyzed and evaluated more fully in Chapter Six: Old Bleach's Design Imperative.

<sup>18</sup> The Empire Marketing Board (EMB) was formed to promote the sales of empire goods within the British marketplace. Lasting seven years, from 1926 – 1933, its budget was largely used to fund scientific research into areas such as crop yields and a poster campaign of evocative empire imagery ranging from depictions of South African orange orchards, by Guy Kortright, to Canadian timber by Frank Newbould. The majority of the images were generated from London but unusually, the Irish posters came from Irish artists (one from the aforementioned J.H. Craig, five from Margaret Clarke and two from Seán Keating – the two latter artists' posters are held in the National Library of Ireland, EMB/1 – EMB/11). See M. Cronin's compact but excellent essay, 'Selling Irish Bacon: The Empire Marketing Board and Artists of the Free State', *Éire-Ireland*, the Irish American Cultural Institute, Vol. 39, Issue 3 & 4 Fall/Winter, 2004, pp.132-143, (Cronin covers Clarke and Keating's artwork for the EMB and only mentions Craig's commission in passing).

<sup>19</sup> In this example, *Industry, Trade and People in Ireland 1650-1950*, the book designers have 'complemented' each with essay with an insert image at the beginning of each chapter regardless of its content and focus.

<sup>20</sup> Contraction in the old, heavy staple industries was pronounced and by the late thirties seemed irreversible. See Aldcroft, *The Inter-War Economy: Britain 1919-1939*, Chapter 5, 'The Basic Industries', pp.137-174.

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<sup>21</sup> The industry was always vulnerable to fluctuations in supply, demand, production levels, prices, protectionism, unstable markets and consumer habits. In the aftermath of the 1907-8 America depression, the president of the Linen Merchant's Association described it as 'the most disastrous in the history of the trade'. *Irish Textile Journal*, 15 Feb. 1909, in Ollerenshaw (2003), p.288.

<sup>22</sup> Although linen manufacturers would not agree to a break clause in contracts for aeroplane cloth and insisted government help control the levels of government linen stocks coming onto the market to avoid price collapse.

<sup>23</sup> Ollerenshaw, 2003, pp. 295-297.

<sup>24</sup> The name later changed to 'Lambeg Industrial Research Association' to reflect a wider range of research, namely emerging fabrics such as polyester, 'Terylene' and rayon that could be blended with linen. The Linenhall Library, Belfast, holds a number of LIRA Research Memoirs, vols. I-VII, 1922-1938 and the Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum now own the LIRA library, although it has yet to be catalogued and access is restricted.

<sup>25</sup> Recorded in the Old Bleach Directors' Minute Books, the annual subscription was approved at £20 per annum for a three-year period, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1921.

<sup>26</sup> Sanderson, M. 'Research and the Firm in British Industry, 1919-39', *Social Studies of Science*, April 1972, Vo. 2, pp. 107-151.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.125.

<sup>28</sup> The five committees were comprised of: Agricultural and Raw Materials (Botanical Dept.), Spinning (Physics Dept.), Weaving (Physics Dept.), Bleaching and Dyeing (Chemical Dept.) and Finishing (Colloid Dept.). 'The Linen Industry Research Association in Retrospect and Prospect', LIRA Research Institute Memoirs, Vol. IV, 1928-1929, pp.3-20.

<sup>29</sup> A copy of this lecture is available in the LIRA library (and listed in their catalogue from 1934), held at The Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum (by appointment only).

<sup>30</sup> Linen Industry Research Association, *Research Institute Memoirs*, Vol. V, 1927-1933.

<sup>31</sup> Beacham, A. 'Post-war Planning in the Ulster Linen Industry', *The Economic Journal*, Vol. 55, no. 217, April 1945, pp.114-121. The problems facing the industry were precisely delineated in retrospect by Beacham (1913-2012), who as an economist and leading authority on industrial organization served on a number of advising committees to British Government in the 1940s.

<sup>32</sup> Historians generally agree on this point; that of all the textiles industries, linen endured the most difficult supply conditions in the interwar years.

<sup>33</sup> Confidential letters from W.H. Webb to Sir James Craig, prior to taking up his role as first prime minister of Northern Ireland, PRONI: CAB/9/F/8/1.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, (Webb accompanied his letter of 11<sup>th</sup> March 1921, with a copy of the 'Report of the General Meeting of the German Linen Kartel'.)

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>39</sup> Confidential letters from W.H. Webb to Sir James Craig, prior to taking up his role as first prime minister of Northern Ireland, PRONI: CAB/9/F/8/1. p.13.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid*, 21<sup>st</sup> March 1921.

<sup>41</sup> Of the sixteen representatives, five were directly from the linen industry, including Old Bleach Linen Company's W.H. Webb as President of the Association of Chambers of Commerce. Other influential figures included J. Mackie (Engineering), H. Wilson (Rope), W.E. Williams (Chairman, Belfast Harbour Commissioners) and Prof. H.O. Meredith (Dept. of Economics, Queen's University, Belfast).

<sup>42</sup> Beacham, 1944, p.206.

<sup>43</sup> A most interesting topic which has received little attention other than a couple of local histories from members of the Norfolk Industrial Archaeological Society in 1980 and 1999 and a modest book, *The King's Flax and Queen's Linen* by A.G. Searle and J.W. Tuck, The Larks Press, 1999.

<sup>44</sup> Minutes of Directors' meetings of Norfolk Flax Ltd. are held at The National Archives, Kew, (BT200/13). A short propaganda film (16.41 minutes), "Linen Flax" made in 1946 by the Ministry of Supply filmed at Sandringham, recounts the various processes involved in the preparation of flax fibre; in a particularly evocative scene, a labourer is gaiting the flax, a skilled and laborious task to stand the retted bundles upright in the field in order to dry before scutching (at 11.50 minutes). <http://www.eafa.org.uk/catalogue/934>

<sup>45</sup> *The Linen Trade Circular* reported a happy derivative from flax production at Sandringham was the processing of waste into stationery for His Majesty, January 1935.

<sup>46</sup> Old Bleach Directors' Minute Books record five entries on Norfolk Flax Ltd: 25<sup>th</sup> May 1925, 130 shares of £1 each, 15/- paid; 25<sup>th</sup> March 1936, application for further 44 shares at £1 each; 23<sup>rd</sup> March 1939, 'received and accepted offer for 75% of the share capital @ 10/- per share. Present shareholders offered option to sell proportion of their holdings at 10/-. Company held 174 shares, 130 of these to be sold at

price arranged leaving 44 shares held'; 16 October 1939, Admiralty offers to buy remaining 44 shares, accepted; 4<sup>th</sup> December, 1939, £44 is received in payment for 44 shares. Therefore a 50% loss was accrued on the first quota of 130 shares for £65.

<sup>47</sup> See *Wealth from Knowledge: Studies of Innovation in Industry*, J. Langrish, M. Gibbons, W.G. Evans, F.R. Jevons, reviews eighty-four technological innovations from the Queen's Award, 1966 and 1967, of which LIRA's work is included.

<sup>48</sup> Op. Cit., Sanderson, p.111.

<sup>49</sup> *The Linen Trade Circular*, January 1937, p.6.

<sup>50</sup> I am indebted to Kevin Feenan, who spent thirty-five years in the leather tanning trade in Shrigley, County Down, for this industry knowledge. Chemical companies would regularly spend time in the client factory demonstrating and collaborating with the company to help resolve or seek out innovation in process and product development. For example, a number of years at Shrigley, were spent attempting to develop breathable waterproof hide leather (for military footwear) in conjunction with several chemical companies as Hoechst AG, Germany, and the American finishing house Stahl. The venture was stymied by company closure and its new iteration worked only in sheepskin.

<sup>51</sup> These and other innovations are discussed in this chapter from pp.11-16 and in Chapter Six.

<sup>52</sup> 'flash ageing' or 'rapid ager' describes the method of a shorter steaming to fix the dye, followed by washing the cloth to remove loose dye.

<sup>53</sup> 'Old Bleach hand-painted table damask' pamphlet, 1964, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 1964.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 1964.

<sup>56</sup> The Old Bleach Linen Company, Ltd. Price List, 21<sup>st</sup> February 1938, p.19. Old Bleach Linen Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>57</sup> 'Seven Points Confirming the Superiority of LLL Towels' Label accompanied each product with the (lifetime) guarantee 'We hereby undertake to replace these Towels which bear our Mark, should they prove unsatisfactory in use.' Collection of Author.

<sup>58</sup> Old Bleach Visitors' Book (the first entry is dated 19/08/11 and the last date is 25/02/59). This invaluable primary source acts as an inventory of the trade links Old Bleach were able to secure. As a document of the inter war and post war years, it offers insight into how networked the trade was and the markets Old Bleach sought throughout the empire. Old Bleach Linen Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>59</sup> Old Bleach Directors' Minute Books, January 28<sup>th</sup>, 1937 sanctioned £2,250 for publicity. In April 4<sup>th</sup> 1938, Norman Fitzroy Webb submitted a final general report on the LLL committee with expenditure to March 21<sup>st</sup> 1938 totaling £2, 306.3.11. At the same meeting, a generous estimated budget of £6,000 for 1938/39 is sanctioned; the modern-day equivalent is approximately £386,887.71.

<sup>60</sup> Robinson and Cleaver Ltd (Belfast), Donald Bros. (Dundee) and Heaton Tabb & Co. Ltd (Liverpool) were among the manufacturing & furnishings names, from the 1930s, featured in the Old Bleach Visitors' Book (Private Collection), Later in the 1940s the designer Felix C. Gotto would work at Heaton Tabb.

<sup>61</sup> Promotional activity in the linen industry is the subject of Chapter 5: The Linen Web(b): Promoting Irish Linen.

<sup>62</sup> "'Old Bleach" Linens' *Linen Trade Circular*, August 1938, p.4.

<sup>63</sup> In the rescued Old Bleach archive, the design library (incongruously) holds a copy of Clarence Bertrand Thompson's (ed.) *Scientific Management: a collection of the most significant articles describing the Taylor System of Management*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard Business School, Vol.1, Harvard University Press, 1914, with W. H. Webb's penciled signature handwritten in the end sheet.

<sup>64</sup> Jones, A. (2010) 'Science, the 1930s and the BBC: competition and collaboration.' *Broadcasting in the 1930s: New Media in a Time of Crisis*.

<sup>65</sup> 'Selling the Linens which I buy', by E. Lockyer, Linen Buyer for Harrods Ltd., *Irish Textile Journal*, September 1939, pp. 4-5.

<sup>66</sup> Irish Linen Merchants' Association, 'Estimate of Figures for Extension of Advertising Campaign to the Linen Trade Generally' mimeographed memorandum, in John Gilliland's 'Some Notes on the Irish Linen Industry' Newspaper Cuttings Book, 1910-1935, LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>67</sup> The Irish Linen Merchant' Association Annual Report, 1928-29, this damask competition was organized by ILMA in conjunction with the Handkerchief and Embroidery Association and Ministry of Education. The prize money total was £18.7.0; allowing for inflation, this represents just over £1,000 for five prizes in two categories. The topic of improving the standards of design in the linen trade is the subject of Chapter 4: 'Just Draw me a Chrysanthemum: The Manufacturer and the Designer in the Linen Trade.'

<sup>68</sup> From 1995-2002, the 'Living Linen Archive' recorded over 300 people involved in the Northern Ireland linen industry. There are twelve recordings relating directly to Old Bleach Linen Company and a number of interviews connected to supply, retail and wholesale who refer to OBLC, such as Roy Cox, buyer from Harrods Department Store; Angus Edward Gordon, Managing Director from Robinson and Cleaver and



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Jim Mills, Director, Hillside Textiles. This catalogue of primary source material captures an invaluable survey of how the linen network was at once both intimate and considerable.

<sup>69</sup> Mary Sandford, daughter of Patrick Brooke Webb affectionately recalled W.H. Webb as an “idealistic salesman” who could spend the company money freely (Living Linen Archive: R98-36).

<sup>70</sup> 16<sup>th</sup> May 1925, The Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd Directors’ Minute Books, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection. In the July 1925 meeting of directors, the not inconsiderable sum of £5,200 is approved under ‘service and advertising budget’. Allowing for inflation, this is the modern-day equivalent of £285,000.

<sup>71</sup> The company also demonstrated a philanthropic vein through contributions to a variety of related and unrelated charities, as the Linen and Woollen Drapers Institution (Mill Hill, Middlesex); Warehousemen, Clerks and Drapers School (Purley, Surrey) <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/warehousemen-clerks-and-drapers-schools>; The Maternity Unit, Mater Hospital (Belfast); 11<sup>th</sup> Royal Irish Rifles Association.

<sup>72</sup> Old Bleach’s contribution to LIRA in 1934 was calculated as 2/- per loom as weavers and 1/- loom as merchants, totaling £65.2.0, Old Bleach Director’s Minute Books, 27<sup>th</sup> July 1934. Private Collection.

<sup>73</sup> This campaign is discussed in more detail in Chapter 5: The Linen Web(b): Promoting Irish Linen.

<sup>74</sup> The Guild represented the Flax Spinners’ Association, the Irish Power Loom Manufacturers’ Association, the Bleachers’ and Finishers’ Association, the Irish Linen Merchants’ Association and Allied Interests.

<sup>75</sup> Those publications included: *Daily Mail*, *Daily Express*, *Daily Mirror*, *Morning Post*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Modern Women*, *Sunday Times*, *Observer* and *British Weekly*.

<sup>76</sup> Mimeographed pages of John Gilliland’s Curriculum Vitae under ‘Exhibitions and Publicity Work’, 1897-1933, LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>77</sup> John Gilliland’s private papers, LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>78</sup> ‘Method of Amalgamation’ Memorandum on Proposed Scheme of Amalgamation, Sir Gilbert Gamsey K.B.E., 19<sup>th</sup> March 1929, p.7. PRONI: COM/25/8.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> Old Bleach buy one thousand shares in the newly founded R. Gledhill Ltd that allows W.H. Webb to join the board of directors, Old Bleach Minute Books, April 29, 1936. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>81</sup> Whiteford, American by birth and a member of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers, had written a book in 1919, *Factory Management Wastes: and How to Prevent Them*, where he claimed, ‘the average factory is about 20% technical, and 80% ordinary. The technical portion, dealing with the processing and treatment of materials, is usually very efficient and well organized; the ordinary portion, dealing with the common things, the things which are done day after day, by routine, is seldom well organized. It is in the latter portion, largely because of unintentional neglect, that the greatest wastes are to be found.’ p. x (preface).

<sup>82</sup> James F. Whiteford, ‘Report on General Organisation and Costing Methods’, September 21<sup>st</sup> 1916, Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, p.1.

<sup>83</sup> Whiteford was paid 100 guineas per annum in 1940 with 20 guineas per visit, at a maximum of eight visits per year. His final memorandum on reorganisation was sent to the company in December 1941. Old Bleach Minute Books, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>84</sup> *The Linen Trade Circular* and *The Irish Textile Journal* are both available in the Belfast Central Library.

<sup>85</sup> Buckley, 2007, p.111.

## CHAPTER TWO

### **Modernity and Design Reform in Interwar Britain and Northern Ireland**

The legacy of Victorian design reform was one of a dyadic nature, where the aesthetics of design were bound up with morality. The mechanization of industry and its putative lack of social morality were roundly held responsible for a decline in design standards. Prominent design reformers like the architects and designers A.W.N. Pugin and Owen Jones promulgated veracity in design, by coupling values to their work; terms such as 'authenticity', 'propriety' and 'honesty' were urged into the minds of prospective consumers. Largely composed of the literate middle classes, these educated consumers were at once relieved their moral rectitude remained intact while choosing wallpaper and cushions. Educators, commentators and reformers frequently warned the public of the dangers of imitative decorative techniques, R.W. Edis in his book *Decoration and Furniture of the Town House* (1881) advised, 'If you are content to teach a lie in your belongings, you can hardly wonder at petty deceits being practised in other ways...All this carrying into everyday life of 'the shadow of unreality' must exercise a bad and prejudicial influence on the younger members of the house, who are thus brought up to see no wrong in the shams and deceits which are continually before them.' In short, good design could civilize people. The (paradoxical) fallacy lingered on and towards the turn of the twentieth century the Arts and Crafts practitioners had maneuvered discourse and practice towards an ethical framework that allied craftsmanship with social reform. In doing so, this shifted the attention temporarily off the consumer and on to the maker. In fact, a defining feature of debates on design standards and their attendant issues, especially that of 'taste' throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, was one where focus hopped from designer to artisan/maker to manufacturer to politician to merchant to consumer and back again; at the very least, this merry dance kept the rhetoric of design topical and in the contemporary press.

This chapter considers the structural framework around British design reform during the Interwar period where a number of agencies were established to redouble efforts to improve design standards and in doing so, helped contribute to the emergence of the professional designer mainly by moving the discourse and status of the designer into a more prominent position (although this is the subject of Chapter 4). The ground covered here has been the subject of much superb scholarship by historians like Jonathan Woodham, Julian Holder, Cheryl Buckley and while this chapter draws on these sources, it seeks to isolate and assess the various individual champions (and detractors), societies and associations' treatment of textiles rather than design in its broadest sense.<sup>1</sup> Some of the contemporary surveys of 'industrial art', as

design was then so named, marginalized or even worse, excluded textiles; in John Gloag's *Industrial Art Explained*, (1934) textile examples are not included in the plates and it seemed had no place given the inferred femininity of such products. The textile industry is afforded a mere three pages (pp.162-164), specifically referring to the 1929 report prepared by two Inspectors of Schools to aid the Joint Standing Committee (Industry and Education) of the British Cotton Industry Research Association. Instead he explained 'the character of industrial art so that its manifestations may be recognized and appraised and its possibilities understood and explored'<sup>2</sup> by proffering examples of products of the recent industrial age such as men's electrical shavers, television sets (which looked like men's electrical shavers), trains, planes, bridges, telephone boxes, industrial aluminum cooking vessels and lighting, taken together these read as a phallic inventory of the masculine age of industry. The charge against design reform's apparently modernist agenda as being essentially masculine isn't new, feminist scholarship over the last three decades has sought to move foci like textile design and home decoration more centre stage.<sup>3</sup> Christine Boydell has written cogently on the status of fabrics in the context of the modern home where 'fabrics were regarded by Modernists as subordinate to architecture' and quotes Anthony Hunt of Edinburgh Weavers who in writing for *Architectural Review* articulated his finest sales pitch to architects, '...furnishing fabrics must be compatible with the architectural features it accompanies, unless the furnishing of contemporary buildings is to become a puerile mockery of their exteriors.'<sup>4</sup>

A further objective of this chapter is to identify and evaluate the ideological, theoretical and or empirical impact these mainly English initiatives may have had on Northern Irish industrial and cultural identity. In the construction of a 'new' state within Great Britain and its Empire, Northern Ireland was anxious to gain possession of its own identity. Part of that identity was cultural but one that was politically defined. Nevertheless, there was some interest in 'the modern' by a number of small groups and individuals who were in a favourable position to promote the new artistic language. The poet and critic John Hewitt was an indefatigable proponent of contemporariness in the literary and visual arts; he was keenly aware of the resistance to the modern in Ulster and worked tirelessly to encourage audiences to open up to new ideas and approaches in the arts.<sup>5</sup> However his interests lay in visual and literary art so this chapter also considers Northern Ireland's responses to design reform; the movement had grown and prospered in London with regional outposts or at least awareness in the topicality of design, especially in the large Northern industrial cities like Manchester, Birmingham, Leicester and Nottingham. Progressive Industrialists, who wanted to protect their future livelihood, understood the significance of design and although initially cautious, did engage in a number of ways.<sup>6</sup> In Northern Ireland, the message struggled to get through the quagmire of politics and economic decline. As discussed in Chapter I, the old heavy industries were faced down by

seemingly endless crises; in that environment, Industrial Art looked like a somewhat feeble panacea. However, there were scattered examples of modernity appearing; art exhibitions and architecture were the two highly visible conduits of an interest in the latest styles and they did tend toward the aesthetic interpretation rather than the theoretical. Few domestic buildings were realized but it found broad acceptance in institutional buildings like The Whitla Hall at Queen's University (1939-1949), the twenty six schools designed by the Belfast Education architect R.S. Wilshire and myriad cinemas, mostly designed by John McBride Neill, that popped up simultaneously across the city of Belfast in the 1920s and 1930s. Buildings like The Whitla Hall borrowed from the Dutch architectural language of W.M. Dudok at Hilversum and more immediately from the continental émigrés working in England such as Walter Gropius on projects like Impington College in Cambridgeshire, in regard to its brick antecedent of the Lanyon Building (completed in 1849), while the cinemas as dazzling palaces of popular culture were symbols of a more glamorous world, not of Ulster's making.



Fig. 2.1 Left: Capitol Cinema, Antrim Road, Belfast, 1935, Architect: Thomas McLean; Right: The Whitla Hall, Queen's University, Belfast, begun 1939, Architect: John McGeagh.

Much of the artistic and architectural expression was rooted in a language from elsewhere, as Kevin Bean in his essay "Absorbing and Resisting Modernity in Northern Ireland" has pointed out 'like Britain the condition of modernity in Northern Ireland was patchy and full of ambiguity.'<sup>7</sup> Given how these novel ideas arrived in Northern Ireland, it is no wonder they remained in an inchoate form. Their authors were usually either from England or educated there; some moved to Northern Ireland for employment in practice or education, namely Queen's University or the Belfast School of Art, for example at the latter, the artist Newton Penprase moved from Cornwall in 1911 and started building his quixotic modernist home, 'Bendhu', in 1935.<sup>8</sup> These Interwar novelties remained just that and suggest a modest appetite for new and unusual inspirations. Design reform had an even harder task, as it required reciprocal support from both government and the local, enfeebled industry. Examining the broader artistic culture of Northern Ireland in this chapter can contribute to building a better understanding of why and how the role and status of design remained arrested during a period

of national design reform through the Industrial Art Movement. This cultural context also demonstrates a point of scale, where design reform as concept and agent throughout industrial Britain was comparatively vigorous and valued next to the new province's indifference in how design could mollify uneven markets and create new ones.

## 2.1 Design Reform

The agency of reform almost always contained a driving tenet of morality, even Pevsner in 1937, in his canonical survey, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, wrote of the social obligation where “to fight against the shoddy design of those goods by which most of our fellowmen are surrounded becomes a moral duty”.<sup>9</sup> Like the Victorian reformers he extends his thesis by casting out ‘sham materials and sham techniques’ as dishonest and immoral (Introduction, p.11). Pevsner closes his introduction rather gloomily, declaring ‘Things are extremely bad. When I say that 90 per cent of British industrial art is devoid of any aesthetic merit, I am not exaggerating.’ In order to prove his view was not in isolation he coopted respected opinion from leading commentators such as John de La Valette and (textile) manufacturers as F.J. Donald (Donald Bros. Ltd) who offered succour by comparison, ‘There is no getting away from the fact that our standard of taste in this country is on a terribly low level, but then...it is not particularly high in any other country...’<sup>10</sup> At the time Pevsner’s role and position helped push design standards further into the public arena, but his influence was perhaps overstated; revisionist critiques from later design historians such as Victor Margolin argued that in order for Pevsner to maintain a moral high ground, he set up a ‘Manichaeian dichotomy’<sup>11</sup> between good and evil in the arts – although a common enough practice in design reform while Stephen Games described him as more of a propagandist than thinker or scholar whose impact left a ‘generation...untroubled by his finger-wagging.’<sup>12</sup>

If Pevsner’s survey was ‘too lofty and lacking in understanding’<sup>13</sup> the poet, curator and critic Herbert Read approached the question of design standards using philosophical and aesthetic opinion (further investigating these issues in the education sector, *Education Through Art*, 1943). He was interested in ideas and practices of the new and promulgated a progressive approach to the arts, both fine and plastic. Indeed, the first edition of the book enacted the principles of good design, he engaged the Bauhaus master Herbert Bayer for the layout and typography (later reprints are given a straightforward literary treatment, probably due to cost). In it he argues for ‘a complete revision of our educational system’ but he meant looking directly to the German Bauhaus model, ‘I have no other desire in this book than to support and propagate the ideas thus expressed by Dr. Gropius.’ (pp.62-3). Although he did not entirely mean this as, like John Gloag, the Bauhaus emphasized the preeminence of architecture whereas Read was more inclined toward the good designer as abstract artist, ‘The utilitarian arts – that is to say, objects

designed primarily for use – appeal to the aesthetic sensibility as abstract art' (p.57) yet his acknowledgements (of individuals) nearly all nod to architects: Serge Chermayeff, Wells Coates, Raymond McGrath, Leslie Martin and a 'special debt' to Professor Moholy Nagy.

Read does not offer a curriculum but a 'theory of authenticity' according to David Thistlewood<sup>14</sup> and critics of Read's thesis concentrate on his emphasis on the aesthetics of form and the imagery often has to explain itself. As Robin Kinross points out in his appraisal of *Art and Industry* in *Herbert Read Reassessed* (edited by David Goodway, 1998) certain juxtapositions of objects, 'provide easy bait for anti-modernist critics who have seen the new architecture as merely mechanized and inhuman' (p.149). Read's consideration of textiles differentiates them as a category *apart* from pottery, glass, metalwork and woodwork, claiming if those materials are 'by analogy sculptural, fabrics are painterly...with a pictorial intention (as in tapestries)'<sup>15</sup>. His selected examples, as an exercise in taxonomy, do not quite support a coherent thesis. In offering a motley crew of eight photographic plates ranging from sixth to twentieth century textiles, an emphasis is laid on the formal and technical elements of cloth construction with two of the fabrics allocated within the third section of the book dealing with ornament.<sup>16</sup> In places Read's treatment of textiles reminds us of home decoration advice that was prevalent during the period, 'Curtain fabric should have sufficient weight or stiffness to hang properly; upholstering fabrics should be strong and uncrushable.'<sup>17</sup> Of the eight plates, only three are 'machine' manufactured textiles; a sample piece of machine made lace by Professor Otto Lange<sup>18</sup>, a *hand* block printed textile by Paul Nash for Allan Walton Textiles Ltd. and a union cloth of contrasting textures in cotton and wool bouclé, woven on machine looms by Edinburgh Weavers. Only the latter was fully capable of large-scale production which somewhat negated the premise of the book. His reductive treatment of textiles, as form and ornament (by which he meant pattern), is somewhat typical of how the *discourse* of textiles developed and was arguably steered throughout the Modern Movement.

Kinross also suggests Read was convinced the Bauhaus was still 'a better, more complete integration of art and industry than anything Britain had to offer', yet didn't fully take into account concepts of British-ness in resolute matters of national taste and identity, a circumspection to learn from the German State lingered in to the interwar years and with good reason, I return to these concepts in Chapter 5. Although often politically vague and slim on industry detail, *Art and Industry* remains an influential text from the period mainly because much of the key thinking about *design quality* is germane to today's standards. While individual voices could proselytize to an already recruited constituency who worked in the fields of art and design, it was the formally organized associations, both private and semi-official, who made a greater impact on the wider audience.

## 2.2 The Design and Industries Association<sup>19</sup>

The task of educating both manufacturer and public became the *raison d'être* of the design reform movement, but it became so tightly packaged and complicated by ideological and theoretical ambition that it has left design historians ambivalent about its successes and less so about its failures. The Design and Industries Association (DIA) initiated much of the early interwar enterprises and publicity about design standards. Established by a number of like-minded designers after visiting the Deutscher Werkbund's Cologne Exhibition in 1914 and later a special exhibition of German goods at the Goldsmith's Hall in London in March 1915, the DIA's inaugural meeting was held a swift two months later in May 1915. In the carefully worded (but still frank) memorandum that began the DIA, the signatories tendered a clarion call to the Board of Trade to extend efforts that in order for the British manufacturer to compete with German and Austrian industries, the standard of design and design education must be raised, 'Under our present incohesive [sic] conditions, they [individual artists and craftsmen] have practically no influence upon the trade designer or workman, and as a result the standard even of mediocrity among the rank and file is a deplorably low one. It is here that efficient training and intelligent demand would do so much to raise the general level.'<sup>20</sup> This they argued was only conceivable under the auspices of the Board of Trade with cooperation from the Board of Education, where 'it is desirable above all things to bring the two into a true relationship so that education may become a preparation for commerce, and commerce the fulfillment of education.'<sup>21</sup> No doubt its heft came from the pedigree of its founding members, all captains of their respective and diverse industries, among whom included Ambrose Heal (Heal & Sons Ltd), Gordon Selfridge (Selfridge Ltd), Frank Pick (London Passenger Transport) and the author and liberal optimist H.G. Wells. The textile industry was ably represented by two of its titans, James Morton of Sundour Fabrics Ltd and the silk manufacturer Frank Warner, Warner & Sons, both deeply committed to quality manufacture, technical innovation and good design.<sup>22</sup> The Association then organized members into trade groups with the textiles trade group represented by William Foxton (1861-1945).<sup>23</sup> In 1917, the DIA launched a competition for designs for printed fabrics. Two designs were to be submitted, one for the machine and one for hand printed fabrics. Raymond Plummer suggested this was a reminder of 'the Association's divided loyalties' between the Arts & Crafts influence and the Werkbund's machine ethic which then lasted for a decade, but hand printing was still an active and immediately yielding process in the interwar period and was not viewed as a strictly high-minded crafts exercise. Nevertheless, it was a criticism that clung to the Association throughout its history despite a more concerted effort in the 1930s to espouse the rigour of International Modernism and translate them into an Anglicized version more palatable to the British public.<sup>24</sup>

The Association maintained an unstinting belief in the efficacy of the exhibition, in an article entitled 'Museums and the Design and Industries Association' published in *The American Magazine of Art*, March 1916, Harry Peach outlined their strategy of propaganda and education; at the top of the list was exhibitions, 'by holding exhibitions of the best current examples of commercial products demonstrating the foregoing point of view.' Exhibitions were curated at headquarters, Queen Square, London or in the case of the 'Printing Exhibition', at the School of Art in Leicester and available to any 'responsible body' free but for the expense of packing, insurance and carriage. Of course, exhibitions were not intended to be limited to the rarefied environment of museums and galleries, the Association sought ways into the social imagination by going to the receptive student body and consumer. Exhibitions were held in educational institutions and palaces of commerce – big shops and department stores. Indeed, the first travelling exhibition made it to Belfast after shows in Ipswich and Derby.<sup>25</sup>

### **2.3 The DIA in Northern Ireland**

'The Exhibition of Design and Workmanship in Printing' was held at the Belfast Municipal Technical Institute from 27th November to 9th December 1916.<sup>26</sup> The loan exhibition was composed of two collections curated by the Association; the larger collection went to London, Liverpool, Leicester, Leeds, Edinburgh and Dublin with the slightly smaller exhibition arriving in Belfast on the 23rd November 1916, with only three days to hang it. The Association previewed any catalogue prepared for a regional exhibition for the purposes of philosophical parity and an upholding of first principles of 'fitness for purpose', honesty, dignity of work, respect for material and sound workmanship (with perhaps the two latter criteria applying less to printing matter). The Belfast exhibition is comparatively modest next to Edinburgh's, as the latter comprised a lengthy and impressive list of works of historical import lent by the Faculty of Advocates of Edinburgh, printing matter by the local printing houses (including art lithographs by members of the Senefelder Club<sup>27</sup>) and student work from the Edinburgh College of Art integrated with the DIA collection. It appears Belfast did not have adequate time to collect sufficient material to mount a complementary show of local talent (as per DIA's suggestion) and so relied solely on the DIA exhibits. In the prefatory note of the catalogue it set out the body's aims, 'it desires to establish closer co-operation between manufacturers, distribution, workers, designers and educationists. The need for a movement to stimulate a national spirit of co-operation for the recognition of the value of design in industry is felt to be of vital necessity at the present moment.' That nexus of nationhood and design, extended throughout the empire is discussed more fully in Chapter 4. The catalogue (as manifesto) continues with a declarative bid to improve the status of the designer, 'freedom is necessary for artistic achievement and we are not unmindful that the chief danger of reforming zeal is to fetter individuality: to substitute new



shackles for old' and in betraying the specificity of the *printing* exhibition offered a definition of design with a series of unfitting (i.e. generic) examples including chairs and biscuit boxes.

The exhibition comprised exemplary printing matter from posters, fine book printing, fashion plates, magazines, letter-headings from a range of English and French sources with a selection of student work in lithography and typography from both Leicester and Camberwell Schools of Art. While the content was similar across the loan exhibitions, it is only thanks to the Dublin and Edinburgh catalogues that we can understand the quality of the exhibits as they have made full attribution to each item exhibited whereas the Belfast catalogue merely offers a basic description of the artefact without authorship or provenance offered.<sup>28</sup> Examples of work came from the most admired commercial artists of the day, many of whom were working across artistic disciplines and some well-known for their textile designs; names included F. Gregory Brown, Edward McKnight Kauffer, Winifred Nicholson, Minnie McLeish and Paul Nash. McLeish was a freelance textile designer with a versatile style, who could switch from painterly to graphic with ease, her best-known work was in the floral idiom although she did convey her versatility in the poster for the Belfast exhibition (Fig. 2.2).<sup>29</sup>



Fig. 2.2 Original Exhibition Poster by textile designer Minnie McLeish, 1916. Source: PRONI: BCT/6/14/3, Author's Photograph.

In his address at the opening of the exhibition, the chair of the Library and Technical Instruction Committee, Alderman Mercier (J.P.), praised the embryonic work of the DIA, expressed sympathy with its aims and emphasized a larger industrial context in which Belfast could compete,

Belfast, with its numerous printing interests and its high reputation in this industry, cannot afford to stand aside from a general movement to include suitability of design in industrial efficiency, and in opening this exhibition the committee hope that interest will be stimulated among the general public and that the printing trade will not be slow to take inspiration from the work shown.<sup>30</sup>

It was hoped local interests could seize a momentum offered by an external body that could potentially modernize the industry and consequently translate into larger markets. In the subsequent report to the DIA by the exhibition organizer John Earls, vice principal of the Institute, recorded a tally of nearly 3,200 visitors had visited the exhibition over twelve days and declared it 'successful in bringing forward the importance of taste in printed matter.'<sup>31</sup> Its impact was further felt, not least from within the college where Earls was emboldened to write to the suppliers of printing matter to the exhibition for sample material for their own reference collection to aid instruction in the printing trades department and in art classes. A number of illustrious names from sectors such as publishing (Heinemann and B.T. Batsford), retail (Harrods, Heal & Son, Derry and Toms) and manufacturing (Royal Doulton Pottery and Wyvern Spinning Mills) donated generously.

While it would be somewhat unjust to compare the Belfast and Edinburgh exhibitions, there were a number of factors that might signify a lack of confidence in Belfast in the training and industry of printing through the conduit of design. No doubt, there was good *technical* printing work undertaken in the trade and in education, and in R. A. Dawson, the headmaster of the School of Art at Belfast, a commitment was in place to improve standards in design; his lecture, 'The Value of Design in Modern Printing' accompanied the exhibition and used it to differentiate *workmanship* from *design*; 'Design', he argued 'is the feeling directing the tool, the brain governing the machine. Design is the human consideration imposed upon industry and saving it from being mere brutality.' In addition, the teaching programme across the school indicated an ambition to produce high quality artistic output, however these were not necessarily experimental, avant-garde or even particularly 'modern'. Even by 1939, conservatism is evident in the College of Art prospectus; a photograph of 'specimens of embroidery' is included and suggests the approach still resided in craftsmanship rather than any espousal of continental influence or aesthetic capturing the zeitgeist.



Fig. 2.3 'Specimens of Embroidery', Belfast College of Art Prospectus, 1939-1940. Source: PRONI: BCT/6/14/3.

Belfast also lacked the vitality of a large design network although throughout the Interwar period this did evolve, for example the DIA's membership in 1916 totalled two hundred and ninety-two and claimed 'linen manufacturers from Belfast' as part of its constituency.<sup>32</sup> Many of the medium to large linen firms had key contracts and offices in London and were thus exposed to new developments in art and design for example Old Bleach had engaged the leading London Advertising Agency W.S. Crawford since 1918. In its first outing at The Whitechapel Art Gallery, London, a healthy 30,000 visited the printing exhibition (over a six-week period) while just over 3,000 attended its iteration in Belfast (in just under two weeks), as an early effort in design reform in the immediate post war years, seeds were sown.<sup>33</sup> Having DIA branches with influential businessmen as key members made a further distinction between Belfast and the other UK cities and undoubtedly put Belfast to a disadvantage. Later in this chapter I discuss the broader signs and impact in developments in modern visual arts thinking and practice in Northern Ireland during this period.

## 2.4 Textiles and the DIA

Noel Carrington acknowledged that if printing was selected as the industry for the first experiment in exhibiting, textiles 'from their wide range of use in the home and in dress, ranked first in importance'.<sup>34</sup> He claimed the DIA held high hopes of the textile trade for a number of reasons: it employed more designers than almost any other industry, it maintained close links with fashion and many of the craft textile workers who joined the Association had occasionally designed for the trade. Given Manchester's historic position in textile manufacture it was accorded a textiles exhibition planned for 1919. According to Raymond Plummer, over sixty textile firms were contacted but only three responded. Undeterred it went ahead, in the

Manchester Art Gallery and was decreed a success claiming visitor numbers over 75,000 and led to Manchester becoming the second and most active Association branch. Importantly it had the backing of key figures, Councillor A.P. Simon (who later became the president of the Manchester branch<sup>35</sup>) and industry men like Charles Sixsmith<sup>36</sup> and James Morton (founding member). A further smaller textile exhibition in 1921/22 held in the Association's headquarters at Queen Square included addresses by Minnie McLeish, E.B. Clegg and William Foxton and much later in 1938 at the Woman's Fair and Exhibition at Olympia, the DIA's (along with the Society of Industrial Arts – SIA) stand made an earnest appeal to the housewife 'illustrating the importance of design in domestic objects'. Within the stand, the designer Riette Sturge Moore arranged a display of furnishing textiles including Courtaulds, Donald Brothers, Edinburgh Weavers, Helios, Morton Sundour, Warner & Sons and Old Bleach Linen, which Plummer claimed 'proved to be highly attractive to the general public which appeared to be surprised that such textiles existed at all – showing, once again, that there is unquestionably a big market for the sort of thing the DIA as a body respects.'<sup>37</sup>

## 2.5 Good Design and The Modern

In 1931, the advertising authority, Sir William Crawford spoke at a DIA luncheon meeting on 'Design: A Necessity' where he assured his (already converted) audience that "good design pays – always in the long run". While the DIA's roots were solidly planted within an Arts and Crafts philosophy, they progressively wished to separate themselves from the Morrisian reality that Arts and Crafts goods became ciphers of the 'swinish luxury of the rich'.<sup>38</sup> If the foundational tenets of the DIA were honorable, notably their slogan 'nothing need be ugly'<sup>39</sup>, the resources to practise these were strained and early on, it seemed not all members fully backed the assumption that good design meant modern design. The weaver and textile designer Minnie McLeish's avowal 'we do not understand this modern movement in design, and do not like it. We may be right or we may be wrong, but at any rate we have no part in it.' disclosed a resistance to something, perhaps change or simply its continental hue, that beleaguered the DIA's larger efforts to pursue progress.<sup>40</sup> McLeish did nevertheless acknowledge how accomplished The Bauhaus in the late twenties, by then in Dessau, employed modern methods of 'the researches being made...about the purpose of life and the things made there for.' and counselled how the DIA would do well to study this approach.<sup>41</sup>

Inspired by the cool-headed Teutonic 'Pioneers of the Modern Movement'<sup>42</sup>, International architects and designers such as Walter Gropius at The Bauhaus School of Art in Weimar and Peter Behrens at AEG<sup>43</sup>, Berlin, were admired for their capacity for the *rational* and *modern order* was held up as a civilizing force while *standardization* not only provided a true democracy of taste but one that could secure the greatest efficiencies. In the Association's Yearbook 1924-

25, 'Design in Modern Life and Industry', the householder and housewife is urged to "plan the selection of their domestic equipment, their furniture and general home surroundings, and if they choose only things that do their job in the most satisfying, simple and serviceable manner, then their home may be well planned, even if their house is not." Of course, this pragmatism failed to take into account the human predilection for sentimentality, a process of cathexis that could result in kitschy (over)consumption and one that cartoonist Osbert Lancaster neatly captured in his iconic vignettes of English eccentricity.



Fig. 2.4 Left: 'Ordinary Cottage' where 'innumerable ornaments and pictures, for the true cottager retains that passion for objects, which the cultured have so signally abandoned'. Right: 'Cultured Cottage' objects are 'now symbols firmly displayed between inverted commas.' Source: *Homes Sweet Homes*, Osbert Lancaster, 1939.

While the DIA claimed textiles to be of primary importance, their published literature contains little dedicated examination of textile design per se. In the aforementioned yearbook, no textiles appeared throughout the one hundred and twenty-six plates unless ancillary to a room scheme or included as a prop. Indeed, pattern and ornamentation feature only in painted pottery in which it was conceded that without some decorated ware 'our surroundings would be intolerably dull'. In his memoirs, Noel Carrington recalls his attendance at DIA debates in the mid-twenties, where the phrase 'meaningless ornament' was used as a regular anathema, he pointed out "that since many in the Society were practicing designers of textiles, or in similar trades, an escape clause had been found which evaded the charge of heresy. Ornament was permissible if 'appropriate'." He offered an example of typical obfuscation on the part of the DIA when 'a lady who rose at the end of a debate to demand of a speaker what he meant by 'meaningless', had her flowered dress a meaning other than that she liked it herself and hoped others did too?'<sup>44</sup> However it did illustrate a suspicion of decoration in the design reform movement during the early interwar years, which paradoxically relaxed during the Thirties when the International Style established a presence in Britain. In later publications, the DIA regularly surveyed modern textiles and among the Association's archive is a collection of glass lantern slides for a touring lecture programme, which include six furnishing fabric examples by Old



Bleach Linen as exemplars of 'good design'; five of which were designed by in-house designer, Felix Gotto and a printed linen, 'Granard' by free-lance designer Barry Costin Nian.<sup>45</sup>



Fig. 2.5 Old Bleach Linen Furnishing Fabrics in the DIA's glass lantern slide collection. Left: 'Auburn' and 'Gola'; Middle: 'Gweedore' and 'Waterford'; Right: 'Granard' and 'Liscannor'. The slides are undated but the fabrics were most likely produced c. 1936. Source: DIA Archive, AAD/1978/3, VAM.

## 2.6 Art and Industry in Belfast

In Belfast, a consciousness of art and industry was felt more through relatively small artistic gatherings than manufacturing. Guy Woodward has suggested artists and writers worked outside of the political untidiness of 'unionist hegemony and the anti-partitionist and isolationist nationalist rhetoric prevalent at the time'.<sup>46</sup> In the land of Saints and Scholars, it seemed the artistic tradition attended only to ethereal themes as mythology and legend, the (inevitably rugged and or romanticised) landscape or Society paintings by Academicians; many contemporary commentators and later historians agree a lack of cultural infrastructure made the link between art and industry even more testing than in Britain. John Hewitt bemoaned the lack of artistic and literary heritage in Ulster that while 'tremendous energy, skill and integrity' was evident; the province was 'deficient in creative genius'.<sup>47</sup> I examine this charge in more detail in Chapter 4. However, there were indications of awareness particularly through a cross pollination of practices; many painters also wrote: George McCann was a sculptor, illustrator and prolific writer; Herbert and May Lilley were handkerchief designers who also painted; the artist Colin Middleton originally trained and worked as a damask designer in the family linen firm. Arguably these links were by economic necessity, Gerard Dillon was a house painter and decorator who could only call himself 'an artist' upon moving to London. It was in the arts societies and clubs that cross interests were served.

By the 1920s, the Belfast Art Society<sup>48</sup> held regular meetings, the new secretary to the Society, Mr. M.R. Witham gave a paper on "Art and Commerce" in which he announced progress in industrial art, 'there is now no reason why the once detested machine-made article should not be a thing of beauty and a joy forever' to which the designer 'Mr. Tom Drummond observed that whereas on the continent the designer was the chief cog in the wheel, in the North of Ireland he was regarded as a sort of nuisance the manufacturer could not do without.'<sup>49</sup> The chairman, Mr. Harry Douglas further added to the debate by commenting the low status of the designer 'that without reward the working man of the day...had no interest except to turn out his work as quickly and easily as possible. It seems to me that commercialism is killing art.'<sup>50</sup> Later lectures, in 1925-1926 show an active interest in the synthesis of art and industry with topics such as "Josiah Wedgwood: The Artistic Potter" by Charles E. White and "Art and Industry before History" by the curator of the Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, Arthur Deane. These challenges facing the local creative community were frequently articulated through lectures and meetings and reflect a frustration with hegemonic prudence and yet their annual exhibitions tended toward the conservative with 'limited evidence of modernist theory or experimentation...with oil painting dominating artistic activity'.<sup>51</sup> However Society activities included sketching excursions, one notable visit to John Shaw Brown's linen mill in Ardoyne to capture industry as art and members' nights were tasked with making their own interpretation of a 'Cubist Portrait' (1928) and a 'Cubist Drawing' (1931).

The Ulster Arts Club established in 1902 as a less formal alternative to the Academy with a small but flourishing membership of more than two hundred by the 1930s. It comprised amateur painters, sculptors and designers and made myriad efforts to reach across disciplines and bodies, for example establishing a joint art committee with the Society of Ulster Architects and the Ulster Academy of Arts. Patrick Shea's compact and affectionate history of the club recounts fulfillment of the club's original aims for a lively artistic community in Ulster capable of great pliancy across the literary and visual arts, proven by the lecture series which offered one on 'Printed Fabrics' by Jean Prang and international in scope, 'Decorative Art at the Turin Exhibition' by H.C. Morrow and made the accommodation available to theatre groups, not least The National Theatre.<sup>52</sup> Among the club's main achievements Shea cites promoting 'modern' art, contributing to the establishment of a municipal museum and supporting those who made spirited assaults on the lack of public support for the arts, who, like S. Shannon Millin often publicly criticized the Belfast Corporation's indifference to a rich cultural identity for what was then understood as a commercial city rather than an artistic one (like Dublin).

## 2.7 Arts Criticism and the 'Validity' of the Local

If the Belfast Art Society thought they were being modern in the Thirties, the poet and critic John Hewitt felt somewhat differently. His review of their 1931 annual exhibition was unfavourable, where he 'belaboured the low quality of the exhibits, insisting on how much out of touch the artists were with modern trends...' <sup>53</sup> he did not return to reviewing the Society's exhibition again until 1934 and reiterated his views on the 'weakness of the selection and the general flabbiness of local written comment.' <sup>54</sup> According to Ferguson and White in the edited autobiography of Hewitt, his criticism of the low standards of the members' work nearly got him sacked from his job at the City Art Gallery and Museum. It took the curation of the 'Ulster Unit' Exhibition in 1934 in which he wrote the forward to the catalogue, arguing that [historically] Ulster artists were 'mostly ignorant and uncritical, out of touch with contemporary tendencies and absolutely without knowledge of the best work of the past forty years.' However, this grouping of seventeen exhibitors 'do not accept the mere imitation of appearance as being adequate motive for their activity. They are conscious of an order and an existence transcending visual phenomena...they take as their problem the abstraction of some portion of that order from the complicated bundle of their physical and sensory experiences.' Many in this band of artists had either trained in London at the Royal College of Art or The Slade and returned home to stolid audiences. S.B. Kennedy pointed out, 'Ironically in looking only to London for their inspiration, these Ulster painters were intellectually more adventurous than many of their Southern contemporaries who looked directly to France.' <sup>55</sup> It must have come as a blow to learn only prints and some pottery by Jean MacGreggor (McGregor) sold. <sup>56</sup> It was not to be repeated.

In many ways Hewitt found himself between a rock and a hard place, the former was a physical Province of relative artistic isolation and resultant insularity while the latter was a metaphysical yearning to embrace the zeitgeist with continental overtones. <sup>57</sup> His energy and connoisseurship, certainly in the interwar years was not sufficiently influential enough to make radical changes in local institutional attitudes to modernity or the unfamiliar; the Municipal Museum and Art Gallery has refused to host the Ulster Unit exhibition and it resorted to renting a hall down town which reflected at best indifference to local, progressive artistic endeavours and at worst xenophobia. In his memoir, Hewitt recounted a tale where the Belfast Lord Mayor, Sir Crawford McCullagh snorted derision at the (much anticipated and critically admired) Chinese Art Exhibition at Burlington House, London, in 1935-36, boasting in a vernacular tone, 'There's nothin' in there I'd give houseroom to.' <sup>58</sup> It was unclear whether the Lord Mayor had stepped through the doors of that hallowed institution.



## 2.8 Modernity and The Museum

Some progress was evident by the following year with the Unit One exhibition held at the City Museum and Art Gallery from 9<sup>th</sup> March to 6<sup>th</sup> April 1935.<sup>59</sup> Here, an ensemble of 'moderns' presented what must have been to Ulster, the 'shock of the new', abstraction to a point where even Hewitt described Ben Nicolson's abstract constructions as 'lavatory seats'. Paul Nash (who in the following year designed a printed linen, 'Fugue', for Old Bleach), Henry Moore, Barbara Hepworth and the architects Colin Lucas and Wells Coates represented another world, one that accentuated the cultural gap between the vitality of the metropolitan and the indolence of the provincial. He recalled how the exhibition 'had a quick impact on our local artists. For the more progressive it demonstrated more clearly than ever before how far out of step with the time's drift elsewhere was the work venerated and practiced by their exhibiting contemporaries.'<sup>60</sup> Inevitably, it drew mixed reviews in the local press but none were scornful (or analytical for that matter); *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post's* report conveyed relief that 'There is nothing flamboyant. Clearly defined harmony exists everywhere – coolness and meagreness are the outstanding characteristics. There is vividness without crudity.' The review then awarded broadly positive adjectives to each artist's work; Paul Nash's painting were 'lovely', Tristram Hillier's art was 'intensely pleasing', the sculptures by Henry Moore and Barbara Hepworth were 'expressive' and 'rhythmic' while the photographs of Colin Lucas's and Wells Coates's architecture and interior furnishings were deemed 'distinctive' and 'as attractive as it is sensible.'<sup>61</sup> Some visitors to the exhibition felt impelled to defend it, in a letter to the editor, an 'Amateur Critic' while describing it as "strange higgledy-piggledy studies...outlandish and grotesque...unfathomable...cubist and modernistic" finally judged it as "very original and very delightful."<sup>62</sup> If anything these responses suggest a readiness to accept a modern interpretation of contemporary life...at least within the confines of the museum or gallery.

Nonetheless the museum and gallery itself was not safe from vigorous criticism from the highest sources. Later that year, the visionary Frank Pick, founding member of the DIA, Chairman of the Council of Art and Industry and Chief Executive of London Passenger Transport Board at the Museums Association Conference held at the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery expressed a number of forthright and probably bruising observations in his paper, 'The Form and Purpose of a Local Museum'.<sup>63</sup> He was incredulous that a city built on such industrial pedigree as linen and shipbuilding had no singular acknowledgement of either in the institution, he suggested special rooms be devoted to these industries and their evolution. John Hewitt as its representative (and apologist) replied that it was not their role to act as propagandists for the linen industry, 'they could not give Belfast people the false idea that the only thing in the world was linen. They must preserve a variety of ideas, and in arranging their exhibits build up a coherent world picture. It would not be fair to develop a parochial view.'<sup>64</sup> Pick's rejoinder drew a room full of

laughter, 'what is the value of one case of Chinese pots? There was one upstairs, and they were not very good to start with. They should not fully represent the output of China.' Warming to his theme and no doubt, the tacit support shown (by mirth and applause) in the room, he questioned flat cases of birds' eggs which, 'encouraged all the little beggars round there to go out collecting birds' eggs' and cycles on tops of show cases, where no attempt was made to show the development and history of the cycle or even a modern cycle to indicate what it had developed into. He upbraided the *display* of linen, he conceded that while there were a number of good specimens; they were made to look like 'serviettes in glass cases, as an example of what the linen industry was' (laughter). He argued that as Belfast was the centre of the linen industry, it had a *duty* to have a linen room to show where linen came from and how it was made. Shipbuilding too should be similarly represented with a Harland and Wolff room. Pick's criticisms were not solely reserved for the Belfast Museum, he also remarked on York Museum where a whole room was devoted to 'every bird that had ever been found in Yorkshire was stuffed and had a place in a glass case (more laughter). His final point, based on the museum as storehouse, urged for 'a storehouse for use...the museum should fall into three parts - galleries for display, storerooms for reference, workrooms and studios and studios for research and employment', he then used the DIA's mobile exhibitions as exemplars where collections are put in to (for good educational purposes) 'handy travelling cases and sent the round of the schools'.<sup>65</sup> While it seems Pick's paper was delivered and received in great humour, his message was deadly earnest, he believed good design defined how we could shape the material world for the common good, making life easier and better (having visited Germany in 1930 he was convinced that rationalism and progress were dual imperatives). He was a pragmatist, unlike so many design reformers of the machine age. Although not a designer, his bird's eye view and attention to detail, whilst seemingly opposing facilities, allowed in him a *modus operandi* to unite governance, operations and aesthetics to sublime and purposeful effect. His legacy of the reformation of the London Passenger Transport Board continues to be much admired.

Unbeknownst to Pick, the museum's curator, Arthur Deane had written to the Ministry of Commerce in March of the previous year, 1934, requesting that an exhibition of British Industrial Art be arranged under the auspices of the Ministry.<sup>66</sup> He referred to the (critically acclaimed) 'British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home' Exhibition at Dorland Hall in London, which had been 'divided into two portions for the purposes of circulating in the provinces' and supplied both the address of the DIA secretary and a DIA catalogue from a Manchester exhibition to 'give some idea of scope and function of the exhibition.' A meeting was quickly arranged and when it became clear that while the Museum would materially host the exhibition, the Ministry would be expected to sponsor it financially. G.H.E. Parr, Assistant Secretary, doubted whether the Ministry would 'obtain funds for financing an exhibition of this kind, which

would be devoted simply to educating the public sense of beauty.' but expressed moral support nonetheless. Deane anticipated local criticism in showing the products and designs of manufacturers and artists of Great Britain. Parr disagreed and in the department minutes expressed that it seemed 'no reason for not trying to educate the public taste'. By the end of April, Deane wrote again to the Minister confirming the Libraries, Museums and Art Committee had decided not to hold the exhibition 'in our Gallery'. Parr in reply, conveyed his disappointment as 'The Ministry feels that such exhibits should have an important general educative effect'. The matter did not quite end there. Parr requested (doggedly) in the minute sheets that this file be brought forward 'when we get Mr. Deane in the witness chair. I should like to question him about the failure of this exhibition to materialize.' In the (NI) Industrial Art Committee's 'Digest of Evidence', on the matter of 'Exhibitions and Museums' it reported that Mr. Deane had defended the decision not to host the Industrial Art exhibition, 'The Museum caters for loan exhibitions. He disapproved of exhibits being labelled with prices. For this reason, the Dorland House Exhibition was refused by the Museum Committee.' Parr's frustration is again apparent in the final entry in the minute sheets where Deane had stipulated the original fear that 'it would create competition for our local traders and manufacturers! I pressed him as to whether there was any further and better reason, but he replied that the only reason was the one which he had given. but the image conjured up is that of an ostrich with its head deep in the sand'.<sup>67</sup>

These divergent justifications for *not* pursuing the hosting of the Industrial Art exhibition perhaps amplify a lack of progressive thinking about the role of museums and the importance of modernity and being modern in Belfast at least; while giving evidence to the Committee, Deane 'stressed the importance of artistic articles of the past as well as modern exhibits provided by manufacturers' however admitted modern work had not yet been purchased by the Museum, nor did Industrial Art appear to come within the purview of the existing Art Sub Committee which only concerned itself with pictures.<sup>68</sup> After all, the DIA exhibitions were lent without cost other than packing, carriage and insurance, so the financial burden was negligible. It might also suggest a lack of curatorial confidence and expertise in those decisions around selection; in his evidence, he further revealed 'there is no adviser for the purchase of modern manufactured articles or modern art'. Its policy may well have been influenced by the Victoria & Albert Museum's (henceforth V&A) fifty-year rule, which referred to a practice where objects under fifty years old were considered too immature, and presumably without merit, for collection.<sup>69</sup> Certainly it was not a unique position to Ulster, in 1914, Sir Cecil Harcourt Smith, as Director of the V&A, in cautionary tones, had expressed the challenges a national institution faced when involved with certain manufacturers and the job of appraising objects that would not result in a 'crypt...of horrors of all kind'.<sup>70</sup>

Inevitably, Deane was questioned about the Dorland Hall Exhibition, first by the Chairman and more directly by panellist Lady Mabel Annesley who asked, 'do you think that regular Industrial Art exhibitions with a bias toward the products of our own industries should be held in Belfast, and if so on what basis should they be organised?' Deane offered no protest but took exception to what he called the middleman, 'I strongly resent your labelling up specimens with prices,' citing that it would not be fair to local ratepayers. His response aroused dissent between panelist and textile designer R.J. Woods and the Chairman, Sir Roland Nugent, the former who called the exhibition 'commercial propoganda' [sic] and the latter proclaimed it was 'a bit more than that...it was an admirable thing. If our people cannot beat it, they ought to see the stuff they cannot beat.' No one seemed to know Old Bleach was represented at Dorland Hall (see Chapter 5 for further discussion).

Deane's evidence at the Industrial Art Committee (NI) is revealing in a number of ways about how the Industrial Art Movement failed to gain traction in Northern Ireland. In his opening statement to the panel, he proffered wide ranging views on what the manufacturer should do, what the art schools should do, how the salesman was integral to design reform and why the museum's business was 'to help the rising industrial movement by showing articles of the past in order to stimulate the artists and craftsmen of today to the production of original work'. In fact, more of his 'evidence' is focused on what other sectors could be doing than strictly applying *his* curatorial knowledge and experience to the issues at hand. He proposed that in order to educate the public on design standards an interdependent chain must be in place from an object's inception to its end use, inexplicably, he especially singled out the salesman, 'you must win his confidence' he advised the panel 'because at this time he is a very nervous individual and only wants to acquire what he considers saleable by pandering to the existing public taste.'<sup>71</sup> With no obvious expertise or insight in this area of sales, it is unclear why Deane would have felt it necessary to offer such unsolicited opinion. On more familiar ground, the role of the museum in relation to Industrial Art, his responses to the panel's questions are often confusing, ambiguous or defer to other sectors for solution. When asked about the awareness and availability of expertise in *present day* manufacturers in textiles, he replied with, 'I personally would not think of buying a piece of old textiles without first submitting it to the Victoria & Albert Museum', the question was put to him again emphasizing 'modern textiles' to which he claims, 'no, I do not think so'. Evidently Norman Fitzroy Webb, a member of the panel and Head of the Design Studio at Old Bleach was not present on this occasion, who may well have reminded Deane of the expertise within his own family firm. It does highlight perhaps how little awareness and knowledge Museum staff possessed of *local* industry, people and progress and indicates these worlds were not (yet) intersecting. The *timing* of Deane's letter requesting support for an exhibition of Industrial Art to the Ministry of Commerce in March 1934, could

be read as a hasty rearguard action to his forthcoming attendance at the Industrial Art Committee some weeks later in June 1934. Had an exhibition been in the Museum's pipeline, Deane could have offered a stronger case for comparability with English modern design reform. Instead he was forced to concede, 'we have not done a great deal in the way of Industrial Art, but we are doing something in the way of Victorian Art.' Curatorially, it seemed he was more comfortable when leaving the current century.

Deane did make some reasonable suggestions that could promote and consolidate the case for well-designed contemporary goods in the museum; he believed the textile trade of Northern Ireland could provide gifts of 'samples about two yards in length of the seasonable goods with the understanding that they would not be exhibited until a suitable interval had elapsed, 'the textile trade, I feel, would have a justifiable objection to the exposition of the seasonable goods when new, for fear of imitation.'<sup>72</sup> This practice did occur in English Institutions but often with the additional challenges of storage, selection and nervous manufacturers concerned about plagiarism. Jane Frazer and Liz Paul, in their essay on Manchester's Industrial Art Collection, also noted the local industries' competitive vein and in order to fulfill adequate trade representation, textile manufacturers beyond the city were approached. Old Bleach donated generously and their sizeable contribution from the 1930s is now held in The Whitworth Gallery's Archive. More recently the Manchester Art Gallery in 2016 showcased this important interwar collection in *House Proud: an Exhibition of Glass, Metalwork and Furniture Inspired by the Gallery's Pioneering Industrial Art Collection* which featured one of Old Bleach's best known furnishing fabrics, 'Aircraft', designed by Marion Dorn for Old Bleach in 1937, (seen here in Fig. 2.6).



Fig. 2.6 Left: Old Bleach's textiles in the Manchester City Art Gallery including from left to right: 'Fermoy', 'Strangford', 'Aircraft', 'York', 'Tufted Fringe' (name unknown), 'Wexford', 1938, Source: Whitworth Gallery Archive; Right: 'Aircraft' designed by Marion Dorn for Old Bleach 1937, alongside 'Vertical' designed by Ben Nicolson for Edinburgh Weavers, 1937, *House Proud* Exhibition, Manchester Art Gallery, 2016 (both fabrics are held in the Whitworth Gallery's Archive). Source: Author's Photograph.

Undoubtedly, had a local DIA Belfast branch formed, that expertise would have been available and proactive. An exemplary arrangement existed in the Manchester branch, which comprised of critical staff from the Manchester City Art Gallery such as Lawrence Haward and Frederick Todd who as members of the DIA, developed a close and enduring relationship between the two institutions.<sup>73</sup> As early as 1917, Haward had offered the use of the Gallery to the DIA for talks and small exhibitions, he was resolute that 'Art Museums should in fact make it a feature both of their exhibitions and of their various forms of cultural propaganda to include in their survey good designs in all things that confront us in our daily work...Art, like charity, should begin at home.'<sup>74</sup> It seemed an opportunity had immutably slipped away; no further DIA or other national Industrial Art exhibitions came to Northern Ireland.

## **2.9 The 'Good', the 'Bad' and the 'Ulster'**

One of the strategies the DIA held dear was the practice of showing contrasting examples of 'good design' and 'bad design'. This was not without contention as it established a dichotomy where all design belonged in one camp or the other. In addition, the premise relied on the application of criteria that few would entirely agree upon. There were a number of indisputable standards that artefacts should strive for and achieve: 'fitness for purpose', 'sound workmanship' 'respect for material' and 'meaningless ornament'. However, the debate often buckled under a question of taste, which emanated from the peculiarly British (middle class) views between the 'traditionalists' and the 'avant-garde'. Once an object was curated *into* the liminal setting of the museum it took on ambiguous qualities; the artefact no longer fulfilled the good design criteria of 'fitness for purpose' (sealed in a glass display case it was *unused*) so did this then make it 'bad design'? Arthur Deane, curator of the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery refuted the value of showing 'bad design' in the context of a museum,

I do not think it is a good policy to put on exhibition examples of badly designed goods as a warning of what not to buy. Nothing should be placed before the public but what is praiseworthy. The tendency is for people to learn to appreciate what a museum approves of, and a warning about undesirable examples may not have the effect intended.<sup>75</sup>

Deane's meritocratic position was still common at a time where the museum espoused and indeed defended its role as connoisseur and tastemaker, where approbation was a condition of selection, yet as we have seen, not immune to (Pick's) shrewd observations about the relevance and specificity of its collections and the pedagogic role of the museum. Arguably, this waning position looked at best, traditional and conventional and at worst, snobbish and out of touch. As early as 1915, Harry Peach had advocated the benefits of making distinctions between objects in museums, 'Comparison of some average or bad modern work with the fine things both old and new surely lead people to a better appreciation of the fine work of their own time...comparison is very valuable for driving home a lesson...do not be afraid to point out

what is right and what is wrong.<sup>76</sup> The DIA had also persuaded a number of department stores across England to hold in-house exhibitions with only articles available to purchase, few retailers were going to concede selling poorly designed merchandise so the task of selection was sensitive, but one carried out exclusively by DIA members. If museum visitors and consumers could be persuaded, or *educated* as reformers preferred to regard it, to apply a new set of criteria in relation to 'everyday things', it held the mutual promise of self-improvement and doing one's bit for the nation. A programme of buying local was initiated by the Ulster Industries Development Association (UIDA) in the thirties and would have been an apposite collaborator with the DIA, but the *design* of Ulster goods was never a concern, the Association was 'formed to push Ulster goods' which 'placed in the forefront the principle of buying British, not only on the ground of high patriotism, but also in a genuine endeavor to encourage empire prosperity'.<sup>77</sup> It mattered not if they were of the best design or the poorest. Nor were they judicious about which products that would best reflect and promote the Province. Campaigns were built around the social contribution one could make to the Province, a neat jingoistic device employed back in 1914 in Kitchener's 'Your Country Needs YOU' by Alfred Leete. In emotive terms, the public was urged to consume for the greater good, thus ensuring cherubic faced children would one day have work (indeed a long view) and keep labour exchange queues short. The rhetoric used offered no detail or substance but intimated the economic threat of imported goods (via six didactic slogans), even consciously employing Elgar's quintessential English hymn (by then thirty years old, anthemic and populist) to suggest an imagined parity across this mighty 'land of hope and glory'.

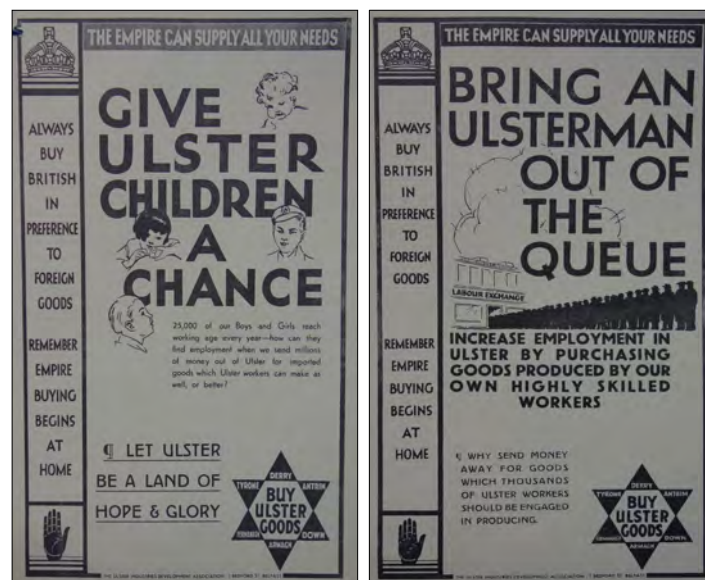


Fig. 2.7 Ulster Industries Development Association's campaigns centred on two tenets: 'Empire buying begins at home' (buy) and 'to push Ulster Goods' (sell), 1932. Source: PRONI: COM62/1/271.

As another missed opportunity for the design lobby, it does illustrate a preoccupation with and arguably anxiety about identity in post partition Northern Ireland. The Linen Industry was largely sold as 'Irish' in provenance and renowned for embodying values for being traditional, high quality and reliable; pliable values that could have been shaped to fit design reform's agenda. But UIDA's agenda was fundamentally Unionist and no signifiers of Irish-ness could ever cross palms with the red hand of Ulster.

## **2.10 Design Reform and the Role of Government**

If support for design reform was lax in Northern Ireland, the movement in England did not enjoy fulsome patronage from all industry quarters. As discussed, the DIA was a private body of influential and farsighted membership who relied on subscriptions and private donations but a number of organisations with Government interventions sprang up contemporaneously and they struggled with, among other logistical difficulties, insufficient funding. The British Institute of Industrial Art (BIIA), established in 1918, was the first body with a mandate from the state to promote the modernity of the nation via modern design, but by its third exhibition and year, its funding was slashed by nearly eighty percent.<sup>78</sup> After this, the Institute relied heavily on financial backing from industry, notably the textile sector with contributions from Tootal Broadhurst Lee Co. Ltd, Warner & Sons, William Foxton, British Dyestuffs Corporation Ltd and several Spinners' Associations. In addition, The BIIA had the support of the V&A, where a number of popular exhibitions took place in the North Court and there were solid links with the DIA, in prominent members like Frank Pick and William Lethaby who became BIIA governors. Like the DIA, travelling exhibitions were successful, supported by impressive visitor numbers, for example the Bradford exhibition attracted over 64,000 people in 1922 and 16,000 attended the pottery exhibition at the BIIA Collection in the V&A. Those numbers were never really achievable in Northern Ireland and while linen manufacturers were fully paid up members of a raft of associations germane to the textile industry, from flax growing through to merchanting, design reform appeared to be peripheral to the industry's myriad anxieties. The Northern Ireland Government took a laissez-faire attitude to Industrial Art throughout the 1920s and developed a slightly more strategic approach during the Thirties after The Gorrell Report was published in 1932. In 1933, a committee to investigate the role of design in manufacture in Northern Ireland was established with The Report of the Committee on Industrial Art (NI) finally published in September 1935, and will be the subject of the next chapter.

These Government supported bodies benefitted from well-connected, influential leadership, Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, was Permanent Secretary of the Board of Trade, ex-Fabian economist and apparently brilliant policy maker whose motivation that Britain must compete equally on the international market propelled his advocacy of improving design standards and he pushed



hard for appropriate vehicles in *promoting* modern design such as exhibitions. His interests lay, less in the training of designers, and more in improving the *market* for well-designed British products and it was this economic drive that was a salient feature of his chairmanship of the BIIA alongside the dual Nationalistic ambition that featured in all Government backed design reform of this period. Llewellyn Smith had published *The Economic Laws of Art Production: An Essay Towards the Construction of a Missing Chapter of Economics*, in 1924, where he made a strenuous (and then unpopular) case for standardization in industrial art. He participated in the Gorrell Committee for Art and Industry, and after the BIIA was liquated in 1933, he was equally involved with its successor, the Council for Art and Industry (CAI), formed in 1934. Further to this, he was instrumental in the drafting of a register of industrial art designers, which later in 1937, evolved into the 'National Register of Industrial Art Designers'.

This curriculum vitae earned him an illustrious speaking career in his retirement. In early 1935, he gave a series of lectures on 'Art and Industry' that took place in Queen's University, Belfast. Invited by the Vice Chancellor, F.W. Ogilvie, to speak on the importance of Industrial Art in the machine age, these four lectures, continued to proselytize on the economic and national necessity of good design. He declared, "the present excessive dependence of great branches of United Kingdom industry on artistic nourishment from foreign sources was very dangerous and made it difficult to build up a really national standard of industrial art."<sup>79</sup> The second lecture covered in more detail the 'unhealthy' dependence on imported designs that had resulted in a catastrophic divorce between productive industry and creative design, while the third lecture considered the source of the problem in 'art education in its widest sense i.e. as embracing the education of the middlemen and the purchasing public in the appreciation of beautiful things as well as the training of creative artists.' These free public lectures, as part of the University's Teaching Extension programme were advertised in the local press, held in The Great Hall and enjoyed a reputation for being well attended. The Vice Chancellor presided over Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith's lectures so these would have been considerably prestigious events although no records of attendees were taken. The guest lecturer was (temporarily) appointed as 'Lecturer in Fine Art', gave four lectures and paid a fee of £100, which was to include cost of publication of the lectures. The series ran most years, from 1927, encompassing the literary and visual arts; music, poetry, sculpture and painting. Another prominent Industrial Art figure was secured for the 1938/1939 Session, in the writer and editor of *Design of Today*, Anthony Bertram, who had just published 'Design', who in that book, was largely positive about 'the rich variety of good patterned textiles' but elliptical in his coverage at a mere fourteen lines. His Belfast lectures however were based on Contemporary Art, a subject decided by Senate and suggestions for a most appropriate expert came from the Standing Committee of Senate.<sup>80</sup> Whether Bertram was really the right 'expert' in *current* art production is irrelevant, he was

capable (enough) on speaking authoritatively on the key advances in art over the Interwar period although charmingly confessed he was not all that clear on Surrealism; 'the more he saw of it, the less he knew about it and while he felt too old for this development in art, he was encouraged by many Surrealists who said that he was in exactly the state they wished him to be.'<sup>81</sup>

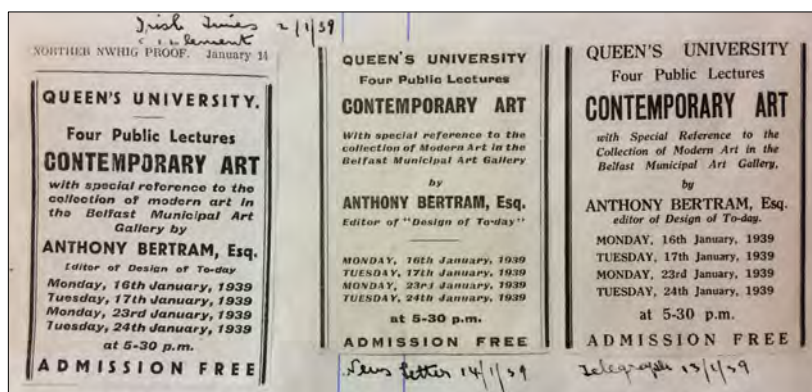


Fig. 2.8 Advertisements in a variety of local press of four public lectures by Anthony Bertram, 'Lecturer in Fine Arts' for 1938/39 Session, Queen's University Belfast. Source: University Newspaper Cuttings Books, Special Collections and Archive, QUB.

## Summary

Throughout this chapter, I have endeavored to locate the British Industrial Art Movement in relation to both its own variable progress across Britain and more specifically its impression on and in Northern Ireland. Examining this reception to design reform helps us deepen our knowledge and understanding of how and why the message of and lessons in good design were deterred both in a general social and cultural context and in the industrial sectors. I have shown pertinent examples of this resistance at both institutional and individual level despite several initial efforts. These examples indicate an uneasy miscellany of parochialism and snobbishness that resulted in a distinct lack of design culture but still produced pockets of progressive design work in a number of manufacturers. As early as 1917, Belfast hosted a DIA exhibition to local critical success and it remains unclear as to why this embryonic response to design reform did not gather sufficient momentum to spearhead change within the Institute or visiting industry figures. Certainly, a branch of the DIA or even a local incarnation would have made some inroads to encourage public interest in Industrial Art either through the museum and art gallery or commercial channels. As shown, the Belfast Museum and Art Gallery had no tangible interest in contemporary design despite Arthur Deane's improbable ambition for it to be 'a miniature Victoria and Albert Museum.'<sup>82</sup> Ironically, Old Bleach had sold and donated a collection of their very best printed and woven linens from their Furnishing Fabrics range to the V&A's Circulation Department in the 1930s which could have been loaned to the Belfast Museum, had it wanted it. The collection today remains in the V&A archive at the Clothworkers' Centre, while the

current Ulster Museum hold no examples of Old Bleach's modern design work, only a meagre few examples of white damask and household linen, even then not on display and not easily accessed. Frank Pick's incredulity that a linen room did not exist then is still felt today.

There is no doubt Northern Irish Industry leaders like William Hubert Webb from Old Bleach did not invest fully in 'Design Reform' in an explicit or formally affiliated manner but instead devoted their energies to more immediate and fundamental issues of securing national flax supply and investing in new ways to combat the commercial threats from new fibres and new fabrics. What has emerged, as possible explanation of resistance to external developments was an atavistic protectionism from imagined (cultural?) harm to an already beleaguered Province, but a largely rural one at that, so the geography of modernity resided in the city. Of course, there were (relatively bold) exceptions and they were treated as such. The artistic and cultural pulse of Northern Ireland did beat softly but, if as the émigré architect Berthold Lubetkin had lamented that 'Britain was fifty years behind [Continental Europe] as though locked in a deep provincial sleep', then Ulster was closer to Catatonia.

Quasi-official bodies like the Belfast Chamber of Commerce and Government Ministries point to a prudent approach to modernizing initiatives in a post partition era but one that was required to proclaim allegiance to crown and nationhood and as Paul Greenhalgh has pointed out, 'the British Government, when it was concerned with design at all, tended to attach it rather crudely to its agencies involved with selling or with propaganda.'<sup>83</sup> In this respect Northern Ireland was no different. In the next chapter I examine what should have been a pivotal point in time to raise standards in the design of goods for the Northern Irish industries; what can be thought of as the Ulster version of the 1932 Gorrell Report: "Report of the Committee on Industrial Art (NI)" published in 1935 undertook an incisive investigation into the provision of art education across the Province along with the role of museums and the status of designers. The report focused on the textile and printing trades in 'regard to the increasing importance of artistic design as a factor in industry, to recommend such steps as may appear desirable to correlate more closely the work of the art schools with industrial requirements.' It made for interesting reading and the creation in 1936 of the Art Advisory Council, a titular body that would 'serve as a focus for the artistic life of the Province.' It was almost certainly, the first time since its industrial heyday, that Ulster had taken stock of *all* of its creative assets, as a Province it was not skilled in realizing its creative past and potential and Chapter 3 considers the Report's impact and legacy.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the research and discourse of design reform treats design in the most holistic sense and tends not to isolate single practices or industries.

<sup>2</sup> Foreword to the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, 1945.

<sup>3</sup> In the late 1980s and 1990s, a number of important anthologies were published which gave rise to new interpretations of design, which had hitherto been marginalized, notably *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* edited by Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham (1989); *The Gendered Object* edited by Pat Kirkham (1992); *Women Designing: Redefining Design in Britain Between the Wars* edited by Jill Seddon and Suzette Worden, (1994); and later *Chic Thrills: a Fashion Reader* edited by Juliet Ash and Elizabeth Wilson (1996).

<sup>4</sup> Hunt (AR, vol. LXXXII, 1937, p.295) quoted in Boydell, C. "Textiles in the Modern Home" in *Disentangling Textiles: Techniques for the study of designed objects*, edited by Mary Schoeser and Christine Boydell, Middlesex, Middlesex University Press, pp.81-94.

<sup>5</sup> Hewitt's papers are held in PRONI: D3838, included are his diaries and notebooks that reflect a mind of perpetual enquiry and sapient observation.

<sup>6</sup> Manufacturers were notoriously suspicious of their designs being plagiarized, according to Raymond Plummer the lack of industry support for a DIA exhibition of current textile design in Manchester in 1916 was thought to have been based on the putative threat of copying.

<sup>7</sup> K. Bean, "Absorbing and Resisting Modernity in Northern Ireland" was the preface essay in the programme for a mini festival of architecture within the Belfast Festival in 2014.

[https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/bc\\_absorbingmodernity\\_publication\\_07\\_single\\_2.pdf](https://nireland.britishcouncil.org/sites/default/files/bc_absorbingmodernity_publication_07_single_2.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> See Andrew Cowser's book *Bendhu and its Builders* (2009) on this deeply personal architectural folly.

<sup>9</sup> This oft quoted sentiment from Pevsner perhaps demonstrates how narrowly defined his *a priori* judgments (from art connoisseurship in Germany before arriving in Britain in 1930) were on surveying and critiquing industrially produced goods. Inevitably, it attracted cries of elitism and challenged the selection of objects to serve the thesis.

<sup>10</sup> F.J. Donald, Lecture on Furnishing Fabrics given to the Red Rose Guild and the Design and Industries Association, Manchester, 27 February 1935 in *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, 1937, p.12.

<sup>11</sup> V. Margolin, *The Politics of the Artificial*, 2002, p.220.

<sup>12</sup> S. Games, *Pevsner: The Complete Broadcast Talks*, 2014.

<sup>13</sup> J. Heskett, 'Select Bibliography', *Industrial Design*, 1980, pp. 209-212.

<sup>14</sup> Thistlewood in *Prospects: The Quarterly Review of Comparative Education*, vol.24, no.1/2, 1994, pp.375-90.

<sup>15</sup> Read, *Art and Industry*, p.123, 1934.

<sup>16</sup> Four of the eight plates of textiles date from the sixth to the Nineteenth Century and include a woven Coptic tapestry fragment from 6<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> Century; 10<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> Century byzantine silk tissue fragment; 17<sup>th</sup> Century Venetian point lace; 19<sup>th</sup> Century Javanese Batik loin cloth (VAM). The Twentieth century examples were contemporary: the fifth plate featured samples of woven wool by schoolchildren, with the remaining three discussed in the main text.

<sup>17</sup> Read, p.124. For further examination of design advice see Boydell in Schoeser and Boydell, 2002 and Grace Lees-Maffei (ed.), Special Issue, Domestic Design Advice, *Journal of Design History*, Vol.16, Issue1, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Lange was appointed Professor of the State Art School for the Textile Industry, 1925 but later stripped of his professorship by the National Socialists in 1933. His artwork was shown in the Degenerative Art Exhibition, Berlin, 1938. Although considered a 'radical' there is little known of his work other than in the context of German Expressionism, 1910s-1920s.

<sup>19</sup> Deliberately named so as to distance itself from the more familiar term 'Industrial Art' in order to emphasize the emerging discrete profession of design and reassure pragmatic manufacturers. In the inaugural pamphlet of 1915, W.R. Lethaby, perhaps advisedly, avoided using the word 'art', claiming, "'design' is not an agony of contortion but an effort to arrive at what will be obviously fit and true."

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum that began the DIA to Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith, Board of Trade, November 1914, reprinted in Plummer, Appendix I.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Both men were born into textile dynasties; Morton's grandfather, Alexander Morton (1844-1923) was born into a weaving family in Darvel, Strathclyde and established a distinguished Arts and Crafts firm by the 1870s. See Jocelyn Morton's *Three Generations in a Family Textile Firm*, 1971. Warner's grandfather, William Warner, was a scarlet dyer in Spitalfields, London, in the late sixteenth century, his son, Benjamin Warner, founded a silk manufacturing business initially in Spitalfields in 1870 then moving to Braintree, Essex by 1895. Frank Warner joined the family firm in 1891. The Warner Textile Archive is located in Braintree. See Frank Warner's *The Silk Industry of the United Kingdom. Its Origins and Development*, 1923.

<sup>23</sup> W. Foxton Ltd, established in London, 1903, manufactured high quality, well designed fabrics, some of which were commissioned from innovators and often accomplished in a number of creative areas such as Minnie McLeish (textile designer), Constance Irving (artist), Claude Lovat Fraser (artist and theatre designer among other things) and F.F. Gregory Brown (graphic designer), Dorothy Hutton (lithographer and letterer) and C.F.A Voysey (architect).

<sup>24</sup> This British interpretation of continental modernism is addressed in a number of sources: Cheryl Buckley, Chapter Three, "'Going Modern but Staying British': Design and Modernisms, 1930-1950", *Designing Modern Britain*, 2007, pp.83-123; James Peto and Donna Loveday, eds., *Modern Britain, 1929-1939*, exh. cat. Design Museum, London, 1999; *British Design*, Units 19-20, History of Architecture and Design 1890-1939, Open University, 1975.

<sup>25</sup> The Printing exhibition was also scheduled to travel to Durban, Cape Town and Johannesburg as part of the Association's ambition to include the Empire.

<sup>26</sup> PRONI: BCT/6/14/3

<sup>27</sup> The Senefelder Club was established in 1909 'for the encouragement of artistic lithography' and soon became recognized as the Lithographic Art Society in Great Britain.

<sup>28</sup> The Dublin and Edinburgh catalogues were sent to J. Earls, Belfast Municipal Technical Institute by Harry Peach, founder member and honorary secretary, Design and Industries Association Printing Exhibitions Sub-Committee. PRONI: BCT/6/14/3.

<sup>29</sup> For more information on McLeish see Keren Protheroe's doctoral thesis 'Blotch and Bloom: the Printed Floral and Modernity in the Textile Designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1929', Kingston University, 2012.

<sup>30</sup> PRONI: BCT/6/14/3

<sup>31</sup> PRONI: BCT/6/14/3

<sup>32</sup> Op. Cit., Plummer, p.9.

<sup>33</sup> In the weeks prior to the printing exhibition, 8,195 visited the Annual Exhibition of work by students, reflecting a broader appeal in content and most likely many school groups were in attendance.

<sup>34</sup> Chapter Three, 'The World of Textiles', *Industrial Design in Britain*, 1976, pp.44-51.

<sup>35</sup> Simon was also a Liberal MP and wrote a polemic for progressive regional town planning in his book *Manchester Made Over*, 1936.

<sup>36</sup> Sixsmith was managing director of Bentinck Mills, Farnsworth, held a number of board positions relating to working conditions and industrial relations and membership of a variety of bodies concerned with standards of design and quality in manufacturing including the DIA.

<sup>37</sup> Op. Cit., Plummer, p.57.

<sup>38</sup> See Fiona MacCarthy's *William Morris: A Life for Our Time*, London, Faber and Faber, 1994 who agrees with the broad consensus that Morris's practice did not bear out his theories and yet his contribution to addressing and raising design standards is unquestionable, so much so that his legacy arguably thwarted design progress in the Twentieth Century.

<sup>39</sup> A thinly veiled acknowledgement of Morris's famous counsel, "have nothing in your house that you do not know to be useful or believe to be beautiful".

<sup>40</sup> McLeish in Noel Carrington, *Industrial Design in Britain*, p.98, in Holder, J. "'Design in Everyday Things': Promoting Modernism in Britain, 1912-1944", pp.123-143.

<sup>41</sup> Plummer, R. *Nothing Need Be Ugly: the First 70 years of the Design and Industries Association*, London, DIA, 1985.

<sup>42</sup> Pevsner's *Pioneers of the Modern Movement: from William Morris to Walter Gropius*, 1936, has attracted comment from historians for his apparent bias toward German art and his decision to terminate Britain's pioneering efforts in the late Nineteenth century with the Arts & Crafts Movement.

<sup>43</sup> Behrens had been design advisor at Allgemeine Elektrizitäts Gesellschaft since 1907, quickly establishing a coherent and much admired corporate identity. As a new industry, it readily espoused the synthesis of art and industry.

<sup>44</sup> Carrington, N. *Industrial Design in Britain*, London, Allan & Unwin, p.68.

<sup>45</sup> Thirty-three slides containing mainly British textile examples (three are of French origin) including printed and woven fabrics from Sundour (4), Edinburgh Weavers (8), Foxton (6), Old Bleach (6), Tootal (1), Allan Walton (1), Utility cloth (4) and rugs by Edinburgh Weavers (1), Gordon Russell (1) and a German example of geometrical design.

<sup>46</sup> Woodward, G. *Culture, Northern Ireland and the Second World War*, Oxford University Press, 2015, p.15.

<sup>47</sup> John Hewitt in *The Bitter Gourd: Some Problems of the Ulster Writer*, Lagan 3, 1945, pp.93-105.

<sup>48</sup> Minute book of the Belfast Art Society papers, PRONI: D3422/AB/2. Originated as a sketching club in 1879, it became known in 1885 as the 'Belfast Art Society' until that moniker changed to 'Ulster Academy of Arts' by 1930 with a 'Royal' prefix added in 1950.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> See Emma McVeigh's survey which offers a much fuller history of artistic activity in Ulster, "Regionalism, Modernism and Identity: Sculpture in Northern Ireland, 1921-51", unpublished PhD, Ulster University, 2012.

<sup>52</sup> Shea, P. *A History of the Ulster Arts Club*, 1971.

<sup>53</sup> Jack B. Yeats stopped submitting work to the annual exhibition on the grounds that his paintings never sold, suggesting that Belfast art buyers maintained conservative taste.

<sup>54</sup> Hewitt in Chapter Fifteen, 'The Art Critic' of his edited autobiography, *A North Light: Twenty-Five Years in a Municipal Art Gallery*, Frank Ferguson and Kathryn White, Four Courts Press, 2013, p.84.

<sup>55</sup> S. B. Kennedy, *Irish Art and Modernism, 1880-1950*, p.77.

<sup>56</sup> Total sales from the exhibition came to £19.12.6, with MacGreggor outselling her fellow artists by some way at £7.17.6. PRONI: D3838/2/1A/1. Jean MacGreggor (often appears as McGregor) designed two of Old Bleach's best-known printed linen furnishing fabrics, 'Penguin' and 'Winnie The Pooh', discussed in Chapter Six.

<sup>57</sup> Later in the war and post war years he supported a concept of regionalism after reading Lewis Mumford's *Culture of Cities* (1942).

<sup>58</sup> Op. Cit. Hewitt, Chapter Seventeen, 'The Taste of Mayors', 2013, pp. 95-104.

<sup>59</sup> The Unit One exhibition catalogue is available in the McClay Library, Queen's University, Belfast, (pamphlets: p N1200 BELF).

<sup>60</sup> Op. Cit. Hewitt, Chapter Fourteen, 'Ulster Unit', 2013, pp.77-78.

<sup>61</sup> Exhibition Review, *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 9<sup>th</sup> March, 1935.

<sup>62</sup> Letter to Editor, *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 14<sup>th</sup> March, 1935.

<sup>63</sup> "Belfast's Museum's Critic: Some Frank opinions expressed at Congress", *The Belfast Telegraph*, 6<sup>th</sup> July 1935.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> One of the key initiatives for the design reform movement was design education from an early age and was enshrined in all design reform constitutions and Governmental reports.

<sup>66</sup> PRONI: COM62/1/413.

<sup>67</sup> Final entry by G.H.E Parr in the minute sheets of Ministry File, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1935, PRONI COM62/1/413.

<sup>68</sup> Industrial Art Committee (NI), Digest of Evidence: The Importance of Design in Modern Industry and the Advance of Public Taste. This digest is rich in detail and nuance if compared with the rather dry published Report of the Committee. PRONI: COM 26/1/17.

<sup>69</sup> The fifty-year rule did not include the 'Circulation' department (1909-1977), which was committed to collecting contemporary design 'redolent of modernity', many of the Museum's holdings of Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics, currently housed with the Clothworkers' Centre, came from the Circulation department, with their 'CIRC' labels still attached.

<sup>70</sup> Suga, "'Purgatory of Taste' or Projector of Industrial Britain? The British Institute of Industrial Art", p. 169.

<sup>71</sup> Arthur Deane, Curator at the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery, Evidence given at the Industrial Art Committee (NI), 25, June 1934. PRONI: COM26/1/10 and COM26/1/11.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> See Jane Fraser and Liz Paul's essay on the Manchester City Art Gallery's Industrial Art Collection in 'Art, Industry and Everyday Things: Manchester City Art gallery and Industrial Art between the Wars', *Journal of the Decorative Art Society*, Vol. 22, 1998, pp.43-57.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Arthur Deane, "The Uses of Museums and Art Galleries, with some reference to early Museum efforts in Northern Ireland." Presidential address of the Belfast Natural History and Philosophical Society, published in the proceedings and report, Second Series, Vol. 3, Part 4, 128th Session, 1948 - 1949.

<sup>76</sup> Harry Peach's paper on 'Museums and the Design and Industries Association' at the London Conference of the Museums Association of London, 1915 was later syndicated in a number of publications such as *The American Magazine of Art*, March 1916.

<sup>77</sup> Support for UIDA came from a small Government grant and contributions, activities included 'shopping weeks' where prizes were awarded for the display of Ulster and Empire goods to help the public 'focus their mind' on shopping appropriately. 'Memorandum on Helping the Empire', May 1932, PRONI: COM62/1/271.

<sup>78</sup> Initial Governmental support came under the auspices of the Board of Trade and Education.

<sup>79</sup> *The Northern Whig and Belfast Post*, 23 February 1935.

<sup>80</sup> I am indebted to Ursula Mitchel, University Archivist at Queen's University Belfast for helping me seek out this information.

<sup>81</sup> *The Newsletter*, 25<sup>th</sup> January 1939; Newspaper Cuttings Books, Special Collections and Archive, QUB.

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<sup>82</sup> Deane's evidence given at the Committee on Industrial Art (NI), 1934.

<sup>83</sup> Greenhalgh, P. "The English Compromise: Modern Design and National Consciousness 1870-1940", *Designing Modernity*, p.125.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Official Design Reform in Northern Ireland

Despite the pioneering work of design reform bodies like the Design and Industries Association, the Royal Society of Artists, Society of Industrial Artists, the British Institute of Industrial Artists and the Federation of British Industries, the first official document from the Government (Board of Trade) did not emerge until the publication of the report by the Committee on Art and Industry in 1932. It was the first sign that the Establishment were willing to seriously consider the (largely economic) implications of the importance of design. Under the chairmanship of Lord Gorrell, the committee had sensibly limited the scope of their investigation to the question of industrial art exhibitions, although acknowledged the broader sweep of attendant issues such as the reform of art education and the raising of design standards of manufactured goods. Its terms of reference were 'to investigate and advise with regard to a permanent exhibition (in London) and travelling exhibitions of good manufacture – at both home and abroad, the constitution of a central body to co-ordinate such activities and amount and sources of expenditure.'<sup>1</sup> Its findings were broadly welcomed but still attracted criticism.

Herbert Read excoriated the report's inconsistencies, particularly objecting to the call for 'artistic advice...to seek the advice of the best artists of the day', which he felt continued to marginalise the creative role as something merely *advisory*, where 'the manufacturer can...import into his industry should he think fit- if he thinks the 'goods' will fetch a higher price if they have the artist's certificate attached to them.'<sup>2</sup> He lambasted the historicism used; on this sentence, 'the best living art of each period would thus be used, as in the past, to beautify to nation's industrial products of all kinds' he despaired, 'it would be difficult to match the ineptitude of this last sentence in the darkest confusion of the Victorian period; it expresses the central fallacy against which this book [*Art and Industry*] has been written' but match it he did with a further example where he accused the authors of supporting the 'present half-hearted and abortive system'.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, *The Gorrell Report*, as it became commonly known, was effecting, not least as it spawned the Council for Art and Industry (CAI) in late 1933.<sup>4</sup> Design historians generally agree that this was the single most influential outcome by a reforming body. Chaired by Frank Pick, by 1936, it defined three main areas for activity: the education of the consumer in design appreciation, design training throughout industry and commerce and the encouragement of good design in relation to manufacture. While this English Council took formation, a Scottish Committee was established along the same lines. It also inspired the Ulster iteration, the Art Advisory Council, discussed toward the end of this chapter.

In Northern Ireland, although these developments were reported in the local press and industry publications like the *Linen Trade Circular*<sup>5</sup> and *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal*<sup>6</sup>, no such comparable *official* responses had yet to happen. However, in July 1933, the Minister of Education, the Right



Honourable the Viscount Charlemont and the Minister of Commerce, the Right Honourable J. Milne Barbour appointed a *Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland* to:

examine and report upon the present position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, especially in connection with the textile and printing trades, and, having regard to the increasing importance of artistic design as a factor to industry, to recommend such steps as may appear desirable to correlate more closely the work of art schools with industrial requirements.<sup>7</sup>

At approximately two years behind the English Committee, it set to work quickly with a survey of current provision of artistic training and facilities in the Province's technical schools in preparation of the first Committee meeting. This survey entitled 'Memorandum on the Current Provision of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland', the Committee of Inquiry (NI) and its resultant Art Advisory Council as formal efforts to improve the standards in design in Northern Ireland is the subject of this chapter. Evaluating the primary material offers us invaluable insight into the challenges design reform faced at provincial level and interrogates whether Northern Ireland was significantly impoverished for design and designers in a national context.<sup>8</sup> The volume of evidence has necessitated organising the material across two chapters creating a number of overlapping themes and issues, this chapter will deal principally with the Inquiry's consideration of art education and the Northern Irish Schools' training of student designers while Chapter 4 will examine the role Industry played in the training and support of designers which helps in our understanding of the triangulation between the manufacturer, the designer and the commercial demands of the market. The evidence under consideration in this chapter is limited to textile design and the textile industry, eschewing the attention paid by the Committee on the printing trade. Furthermore, I assess the approach, methods and outcomes of the Committee and evaluate their contribution in supporting design reform in the Province and to the National Industrial Art Movement. The close reading of such primary material deepens our understanding of the provincial attitudes towards design and the ambition of local government for industry to modernise and in turn, help further explain the Ulster design culture in which Old Bleach manufactured.

### **3.1 The Ministry of Education's 1933 Memorandum**

The Ministry of Education made the first move towards investigating the role of art and industry in August of 1933, Permanent Secretary A. N. Bonaparte Wyse undertook an initial audit of the existing facilities, machinery and art training available throughout the Province's technical schools in preparation for the first meeting of the Industrial Art Committee. He wrote to each principal requesting their completion of a short pro forma outlining the coordination of art studies with requirements of local industry and any inducements to students to take up training in art as applied to industry and inviting any additional information via an accompanying letter, many of whom did reply in writing with an expanded response which attempted to justify the lack of industrial art training. Nonetheless it also indicated a willingness to engage in the discourse and potentially, the practice of Industrial Art at a local level. The Principal of the Technical Institute in Lurgan, Mr. H.D. Armstrong stated, 'The Art Master does his utmost to keep in touch with local requirements and has trained a number of student as designers, but it is found that

manufacturers are very reluctant to give encouragement to local talent. They seem to prefer designs from foreign countries.<sup>9</sup> This common practice of employing foreign designs was considered one of the greatest threats to the British economy and a key reform step in dissuading British manufacturers in the propping up of the foreign design economy. Principal, Joseph Rafferty from the Technical School in Dungannon highlighted another common issue, 'People in general...scarcely realise the importance of Art; a knowledge of it is still regarded as an "accomplishment" which only a few specially gifted people would trouble to acquire. Its importance in manufacture and marketing is scarcely realised.'<sup>10</sup> He augmented Armstrong's opinion but offered another reason why there was an absence of artistic training, in that 'textile manufacturers (and local printers) have not asked for instruction in art for their employees, due to the fact that the men in charge of such undertakings do not fully realise the importance of turning out artistic work in these days of keen selling competition.'<sup>11</sup> But both appeared to agree there was no clear demand from local employers for art instruction for their apprentices and had there been, the Regional Education Committee 'would try to go a long way to meet that demand.'<sup>12</sup> Only Thomas Clearkin's reply offered some confirmation that industrial design training was taking place in the Larne Technical School, he relayed a long tradition of art classes with special attention given to industrial designing for linen weaving in the school since 1903 but 'in late years they find it very difficult to find constant employment.'<sup>13</sup> Curiously, he appended two pages of the 1915-16 school prospectus which showed the student work of a 'damask napkin designed and woven' by John Brownlees and a 'design for curtaining in stencilling' by Jean Watson. What these outdated examples (by then eighteen years old) were meant to illustrate was unclear but the response suggested an industry in some difficulty.

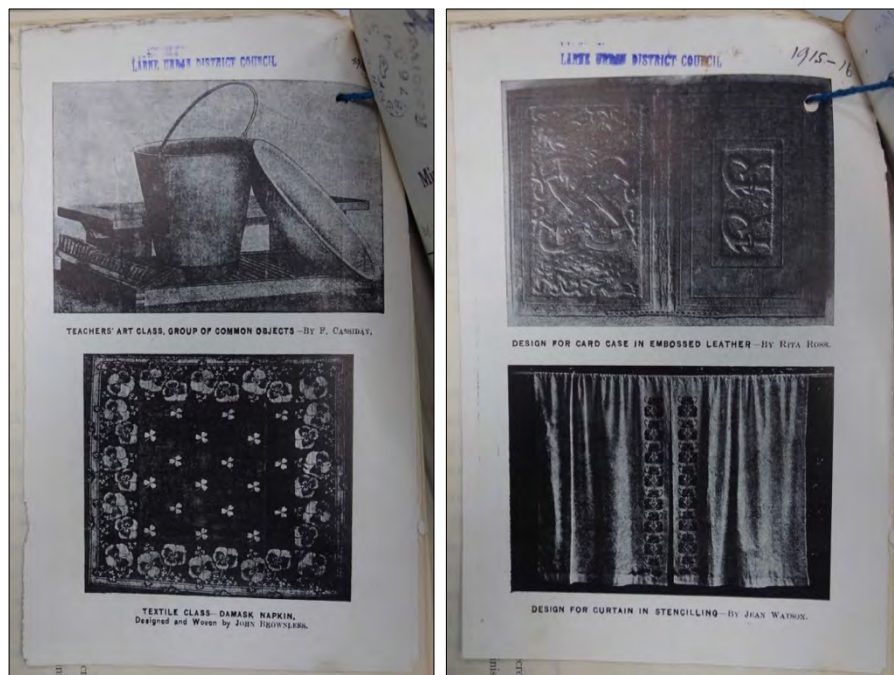


Fig. 3.1 Pages from Larne Technical School Prospectus, 1915-16, included in Principal Thomas Clearkin's Response to the Ministry of Education's Inquiry (1933) into existing art training in Northern Ireland in preparation for the Committee of Inquiry (1933). Source: PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

Perhaps the most revealing response came from John McCoubrey, Principal of Antrim Technical School, who cited no local requirement for industrial art training was provided as:

The Old Bleach Linen Co. Ltd of Randalstown, is the main firm in the textile industry in this area, and I understand the designers employed by this firm are highly skilled and have received long training at the Royal College of Art, London or similar College of Art. Sometime ago I was informed by a Director of the Company that there would be no benefit derived by the Company or its employees if classes in Industrial Design were to be established in Randalstown Technical School, as the number of designers employed is small, and they must have a first class training in a College of Art. Most of the so-called Designers in the textile factories are mainly engaged in copying designs prepared by the artists.<sup>14</sup>

The head of the Design Department at Old Bleach, Norman Fitzroy Webb had indeed been trained at the Royal College of Art and joined by his nephew, Felix C. Gotto in 1931, fresh from The Slade School of Art in London. Old Bleach had long prided itself on quality in all its areas of manufacture and insistent on the best training available. Both designers were family members of the firm, privately educated in England and it would naturally follow that they would attend the best art training in preparation to enter the family business. It is lamentable they apparently saw no value in a local pool of potential employees arriving with some compatible artistic training in readiness for the trade. More likely explanations might have included the avoidance in the 're-training' of habits that may not have aligned with the company's *modus operandi* or the prevailing middle class attitude that only an Anglo-Irish training could yield an appropriate design sensibility for the preferred market.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, in being trained in London brought an exposure to inspiration and knowledge of fashionable trends that might not hitherto be found in North Antrim. I return to this point later in this chapter during the discussion on the Industrial Art Committee (NI). This testimony also pointed out the nature of the designer's everyday work in the factory, where 'copying' was the perceived prevalent activity in the design department.

The Survey also encompassed the scope of artistic training provision in the Belfast Municipal College of Technology and the School of Art subsumed within that, the provision of the remaining technical schools across the Province detailing the subject and focus of classes with up to date enrolment figures from 1932 and 1933. In addition, modes of promotion (art exhibitions) and inducements (textile design competitions, trade and technical scholarships) of student work was identified, along with any evidence of industry support – which was troublingly limited. While it was considered School facilities were 'adequate', the work done in the schools, apart from the Municipal College of Technology, was found to be 'limited in scope'. Whereas, the College of Art was reported as 'organised and equipped of the highest grade' with an admired "further object of the College to effect a closer relationship between the Arts, Crafts and Manufactures of the City of Belfast and the surrounding districts, and to further modern development in design, workmanship and production in the application of Art to Industry."<sup>16</sup> A detailed tabulation of each year of study on each course provided a clear picture of art education across Northern Ireland. The enrolment numbers for every course was included and made some case for the necessity of industrial art

training; a steady rise in numbers of enrolled students was recorded from 1922 (1115) to 1927 (1939), but a curious dip and rise pattern ensued from 1928 through to 1932 with no accompanying interpretation of the data (but was probably related to the impact of the economic depression). Healthy examinations results were also specified and added further ballast to the system, in 1932, nine hundred and eighty students sat Art examinations with six hundred and sixty-six students achieving in the pass/pass with distinction categories and a slight drop in numbers in 1933 of eight hundred and seventeen candidates sitting exams with five hundred and thirty-nine attaining pass or pass with distinction. Categories with an industrial bent included Industrial Design, Modelled Industrial Design, Linen Weaving (with some instruction in design), Textile Design & Practical Weaving, Textile Pattern Design, Commercial Art, Damask Design, Dress Design and History & Styles of Printed Textiles. Student numbers for 'Linen Weaving (including some instruction in design)' were small, for example only nine were enrolled in Banbridge Technical School yet courses such as 'White Embroidery' and 'Coloured Embroidery' in Larne Technical School attracted sixty-one and sixty-five students respectively, these may well have been less technical and more pastoral in their instruction.

Closer scrutiny was paid to the Belfast School of Art, as a department within the Municipal College of Technology it enjoyed some autonomy and was noted in the memorandum for its more specialised and highly developed instruction. While there was no discrete School of Textile Design, instruction was given in Damask Design, Design for Printed Fabrics, History & Styles of Ornament-Printed Fabrics, and Design for White and Coloured Embroidery. Up to six hundred students were enrolled in art subjects in either part-time or full-time capacity, although the figure for 1931-32 had dropped to five hundred due to the sharp depression of the early thirties. The textile classes were satisfactorily subscribed with nineteen first year students in the day class in Pattern Design and not surprisingly, higher numbers in the evening classes, as most students had to fit in part time study (often required by employers) around full time employment. All students across the Technical Schools worked to the syllabuses set by the Ministry of Education although it was stated, 'The Ministry is at present considering the question of changing the present system of Art Examinations.'<sup>17</sup> No further detail on these proposed changes was supplied in this memorandum.

### **3.2 Inducements**

The memorandum also considered the role of inducements to students. These only included local awards and scholarships despite students in Ulster being eligible for National competitions such as the Royal Society of Arts prizes (and will be examined in the next chapter). Two Art exhibitions were highlighted, the 'Sorella Art Local Exhibition' and the 'Dunville Art Exhibition', both gifts of the Sorella Trust dating back to the nineteenth century, established by the Dunville family of whisky distillers.<sup>18</sup> The 'Sorella' exhibition was offered annually to day or evening students enrolled at the Belfast College of Art, tenable for one year with a value of £50 and based on their fourth year examinations together with the results in two other complementary subjects. The report noted that the trustees communicated that no further

grants would be made after 1933, no reason was given and the Sorella Trust continued to patronise education well into the late twentieth century with scholarships in medical biology at Queen's University Belfast. The 'Dunville Art Exhibition' was awarded to students in full-time employment but attending evening classes. Again, it was tenable for one year and its value was £40 (plus remission in college fees). The award was made on alternate years on the results of third examinations with two complementary subjects. Successful candidates of both awards were required to follow an advanced course of study based on the subjects taken in competition for the exhibition.

Textile design competitions were also held in 1929 and 1930 but the entries were small in number and consequently not held after 1930.<sup>19</sup> In 1929 two of the leading umbrella organisations in the Linen Trade, the Irish Linen Merchants Association and the Handkerchief and Embroidery Association in collaboration with the Ministry of Education initiated a number of prize competitions for textile designs, 'the object of these competitions was the encouragement of originality and freshness in embroidery and damask design amongst students of art in technical schools, schools of art and kindred institutions in Northern Ireland and the bringing of students into touch with manufacturers of embroidered and damask goods.'<sup>20</sup> Four categories of textile design were available and competitors could apply to all categories. The four categories stipulated 'the best and original': (a) set of six handkerchief designs, each set consisting of one basic design with five modifications; (b) design for three different articles of embroidered household linen; (c) design for suitable damask cloth and (d) design suitable for damask towels. Prizes were of monetary value, 1<sup>st</sup> prize £7.7.0, 2<sup>nd</sup> prize £3.3.0 and 3<sup>rd</sup> prize £2.2.0, but were insufficient to lure many entries; three in class (a), fourteen in class (b), twelve in class (c) and only two in class (d), while many showed originality and ability there was a lack of knowledge of technical requirements, a criticism regularly levelled by manufacturers at student work in the colleges. Despite this censure, manufacturers only occasionally stepped in to make substantive practical contribution to the college curriculum or ensured their positions on education committees where policy could be influenced, preferring to train apprentices in the specificity of their own factory. However, there were a few instances where a local mill's designer did teach part-time in the local Technical School. In the initial pro forma, the Principal from Strabane, reported that their art teacher and designer at Gallagher's factory, Mr. Peter McGirr, 'conducts his art courses with the object of training the students in industrial art.'<sup>21</sup> In light of the lack of knowledge on the requirements of the industry, three lectures were arranged by the Irish Linen Merchants' Association and given in the Municipal College reportedly 'attended by a large number of teachers and students.'<sup>22</sup> A reactionary effort that perhaps signalled a greater need and willingness for art and industry to coalesce. The memorandum played up these sporadic examples of industry figures involved in art education, 'the technical schools are managed by committees to which local employers are very often appointed. There is thus in existence a medium through which the teaching in the schools can be kept in touch with the requirements of local industries.'<sup>23</sup> The competition expanded slightly the following year to allow an additional two categories, in design for a cushion cover and printed handkerchiefs, the latter attracted over forty entries but again

the judges felt the designs submitted were 'not wholly satisfactory due to the failure of the competitors to understand fully the requirements of industry.'<sup>24</sup>

The Ministry of Education offered a number of Trade and Technological Scholarships on an annual basis, the former tended to be for students engaged in the decorators and painters trade, in 1933 they numbered sixty. The technological scholarships were limited in number and quite prestigious. Successful candidates would train at approved universities or educational institutions with the understanding they would return to Northern Ireland to teach, five scholarships in art had already enabled the recipients to study at the Royal College of Art, London. It was acknowledged in the memorandum these were not directly related to industry but could potentially improve the quality of art teaching and ergo, art training in the Province. This was a point made by a number of the Principals, the aforementioned Mr. Joseph Rafferty from Dungannon Technical School, cited a valuable 'Teachers' Class' conducted in the Session 1932-33 with an inaugural address by the Ministry of Education's Art Inspector, Mr. J.F. Hunter.<sup>25</sup> He commented on how well it was attended and stated 'the Committee in providing Courses for Teachers indirectly helps raise the standard of the teaching of drawing in the Elementary Schools in the Dungannon Regional area.'<sup>26</sup> He went on to compliment the improvement in art education in the Primary Schools (he was well positioned as Examination Superintendent) but singled out 'the subsequent training that is at fault' in Secondary Schools. Other inducements included (half of) the C.J. Brown Scholarship of £20 per annum had been awarded by the Larne Technical Instruction Committee to help a student of the Larne Technical School to study at the Belfast School of Art and some Education Authorities were able to make discretionary awards to students of limited means to follow training in art. Newry would offer students free places in the following academic session on the condition they make a certain percentage of the possible attendance hours. The Memorandum was no mere scoping exercise as its findings were incorporated into the published Report into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland.<sup>27</sup>

### **3.3 Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland.**

By the time of the Committee's first meeting in September 1933, a vast amount of data, in written evidence and memoranda had been collated into the Memorandum along with the indirect but complementary material from England on the scope of the problem. It was the Committee's task then to orchestrate further meetings, examine relevant witnesses and compile additional data that would ultimately offer a series of lucid conclusions and recommendations. The Committee's remit was distinct from the Gorrell Report in a number of ways: it had to establish the local current position of Industrial Art (the scope of the problem) and suggests ways in which the art schools and industrial needs were met, it also concerned itself with only two trades, the most economically important Textile (Linen) Industry and the Printing Trade. The Gorrell Report contextualised the general problems in historical terms, reaching back into the Industrial Revolution and later the role played by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement before it assessed the more recent responses to design reform. It also took a wider

examination of industrial art and not specific industries, claiming all manufacturing trades urgently required an overhaul in the fundamentals of design. Sensibly, the Northern Irish Committee was self-limiting and in doing so could deliver foundational results that could be applied to other smaller local (and possibly newer) industries. Its rationale for doing this was twofold; only creative 'industries giving substantial employment and playing a significant part in the general economy of the Province' were contemplated.<sup>28</sup>

The fourteen-strong Committee comprised official representatives from the commissioning Ministries of Education and Commerce, Mr. E.W. Scales from the former and Mr. J. A. Alderson from the latter, they were joined by Permanent Secretary to Commerce, Mr. G.H.E. Parr and Permanent Secretary to Education, Mr. A. N. Bonaparte Wyse. A judicious choice was made in the chairmanship of Sir Roland T. Nugent, a civil servant from 1910 in the Foreign Office and two-time Director of the Federation of British Industries in 1916-17 and 1919-32. Education was represented by Major Rupert Stanley and the Schools Inspector, Mr. J. F. Hunter. On behalf of the visual arts Lady Mabel Annesley, an artist working in wood engraving, printmaking and watercolours was joined by Mr. J. Humbert Craig, a largely self-taught painter of principally landscapes and elected to the Royal Ulster Academy and Royal Hibernian Academy in 1928 and the sculptor Mr. Morris Harding. Only three representatives from (linen) manufacturing were on the Committee, Mr. Victor Clarendon, Director of Messrs. William Ewart & Sons Ltd, Mr. Herbert Strain of Messrs. William Strain & Sons Ltd and Mr. Norman Fitzroy Webb, Director and Head of the Design Department at Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, the latter also representing textile design along with Mr. R.J. Woods, the sole free-lance textile designer on the Committee. While not entirely balanced in composition, as there was no representation from the Printing Trade which was surprising given the Committee's special focus on two local industries yet three artists, two of which were categorically 'fine artists' with no direct relation to industry, were included. However, Morris Harding had undertaken many large-scale commemorative and public sculptural projects including Empire Exhibition work so would have been sensitive to producing for a public audience.

In all, twenty meetings were held by the Committee over a period of two years, fifteen witnesses examined, various memoranda and written evidence considered, visits to local educational and cultural institutions such as the Belfast College of Art and the Belfast Museum, one visit to Messrs. Harland and Wolff and a selection of the Colleges of Art in England (Birmingham, Burslem, Manchester and Salford). Additional evidence was forthcoming from the Board of Education, the Department of Overseas Trade, the Council for Art and Industry and the Federation of British Industries. A number of invited witnesses travelled from England including the respected textile printer Captain W. Turnbull who also held membership of the Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British Industries (FBI) and R.A. Dawson, Principal of Manchester School of Art (1919-1939) and one time Head Teacher at the Belfast School of Art, who had been instrumental in bringing the DIA Printing Exhibition to Belfast in 1917 discussed in Chapter Two. F.C. Stone, Board of Education Art Inspector for Lancashire and Cheshire and Charles

Tennyson, C.M.G., Chairman of the Industrial Art Committee of the FBI also gave evidence. These English witnesses were valuable contributors to the helping define the scope of the problem and bring great knowledge and experience to bear on the Ulster Committee's terms of reference. All four were actively involved in the Industrial Art Movement in England. Turnbull and Dawson were engaged with the Manchester design reform initiatives either through the DIA branch, the Manchester School of Art or the Manchester City Art gallery.<sup>29</sup> The first question asked of the English witnesses was 'to what extent has co-operation been carried through in the different localities in England?', thus the Committee was conceivably expecting regional, and therefore variable, responses to industrial art progress and how that might affect Northern Ireland's efforts in improving standards in art education and the status of design.

In addition to Captain Turnbull, the Textile Industry witnesses included local men, John Gilliland, Director of the Irish Linen Guild (ILG), John A. Lowry, Irish Linen Merchants' Association (ILMA) and manufacturer of linen dress goods and household linens, J. Maxwell, Handkerchief and Embroidery Association (HEA) and Major A. C. Herdman of Sion Mills and Chair of ILMA. All four men were well placed in having a thorough knowledge of the workings of the local textile industry; in particular, Gilliland was a handkerchief manufacturer and Director of the promotional arm of the industry, both at home and abroad. His tireless commitment was evident through his work at the ILG, a book of press cuttings full to bursting of Linen Guild promotional activity is held in the LIRA library in the Lisburn Museum and offers insight into the energy of his personality and involvement in the linen industry at a time of steep decline (several of his examples of promotion are considered in Chapter Five). Local witnesses from Education included the 'safe pair of hands' of Ivor Beaumont, Principal of the Belfast College of Art and in an unusual dual role of witness and Committee member, J.H. Hunter, Art Inspector to the Ministry of Education. Other witnesses came from the business sector, the Belfast Printing Trades Association, a Cabinet Maker, a representative from the Rural Development Council for Northern Ireland and as discussed in Chapter Two, Arthur Deane, Curator of Belfast Museum and Art Gallery.

### **3.4 The Scope of the Problem**

Having acknowledged the pioneering work of private bodies like the Design and Industries Association and the Federation of British Industries, the *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art* conceded the challenge of improving design standards was not one rapidly achieved but was unequivocal about its urgency,

It is a matter of the greatest importance that Northern Ireland, responsible for the management of her own affairs, separated geographically from Great Britain and accordingly, to some extent, outside the influences operating there, should take steps immediately, on lines of policy definitely established, for the co-ordination of all agencies tending to improve not only artistic standards in industry, but also the taste and the growth of artistic appreciation amongst the people as a whole.<sup>30</sup>



The Committee determined a range of subject areas and questions to put to witnesses including how to improve public taste and interest in design, manufacturing the mainspring of fashion changes, the demand for novelty and the industrialists' responses to these rapid changes where 'women are no longer prepared to pay for quality in an article which will outlast several changes of fashion. There is far more interest in current styles of design and less inclination to be guided by conventional standards, although the latter may continue to carry weight with a not inconsiderable proportion of the buying community.'<sup>31</sup> The witnesses from the Education sector were questioned on the syllabuses and how 'modern' the instruction, examples and literature were, how suited art training was for industry and the career destinations for graduates. One quite pronounced distinction from the Technical Schools' written evidence and that of the Belfast College of Art's testimony by Ivor Beaumont, was the former did *not* think industrial art training was a necessity (demanded by the manufacturers) while the latter felt 'it would bridge a lot of difficulties', in the margin of Beaumont's typed evidence, the Ministry of Commerce Secretary G.H.E. Parr had scribed "definite allocation for industrial art."

There was inevitably divergent opinion throughout the testimonies, some of which reveals the level of interest in industrial art which ranged from unawareness and scepticism through to great enthusiasm but unsupported by any activity. Few of the local witnesses were members of design reform bodies which may have signalled a naivety on their part, despite all having careers in or connected to the 'artistic trades'. At that time, those industries were not considered 'creative' nor aspirational, a lowly status was attached to them by low remuneration, John Gilliland was asked if he would recommend designing as a profession for a boy or girl to go in for? His response was singular and pragmatic, 'from the point of view of the money return, no.' A network of designers and architects akin to that in England did not exist in Northern Ireland, and it was only in the fine art fraternities (of which Annesley, Craig and Harding were part of), which were composed of educated middle class artists, that a forum for design ideas and issues could be explored and very few of them were exclusively 'designers'. It is clear from the evidence given to the Committee, the opportunity to articulate the position of and standards in design was most welcome. The immediate prognosis for design in the local textile trade however was not wholly buoyant, leading to a paradoxical conclusion that, 'whilst certain ends of the trade, particularly the fancy linen end present an increasing scope for design, the demand for designers in Northern Ireland is at the moment decreasing.'<sup>32</sup>

### **3.5 Industrial Art Education**

The Committee's original aim of examining the position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland was premised on the objective 'to correlate more closely the work of the art schools with industrial requirements.' The provision for art education was examined closely in a number of ways; the reconnoitre exercise undertaken in 1933 by the Ministry of Education, visits to local and national schools of art and the written and oral evidence given by the witnesses throughout 1934. The witnesses from education were evenly balanced between an English art inspector and the Northern Irish art inspector with local knowledge

alongside the principal of the Belfast School of Art with the principal of an English school of art (who also happened to be head teacher at the Belfast School up to 1919). Prior to 1923, 'ordinary certified' teachers taught art without any previous background in the arts. The witnesses concurred that good specialist art training for teachers should start early in elementary school and if real progress was to be made in the raising of general standards of taste, then it should be non-vocational at that level. Charles Tennyson cited Marion Richardson's pioneering work in art education at L.C.C where attempts were being made to develop the child's aesthetic sense by drawing, modelling and craft in a free, uninhibited way, although he conceded the results thus far were 'good but incomplete'.<sup>33</sup>

The model of Junior Art Departments attached to schools in England was much admired by the Committee, where the 'talented children' (aged 12- 16 years old) are absorbed from the primary schools, thus 'wastage is, as far as possible, eliminated.' Another initiative noted at Burslem School of Art, was a member of staff who acted as a 'helper and liaison officer' between the primary school staff and the Junior Art Department; who maintained a register of children with potential for the Junior Art Department and instructed and advised teachers (at night class) on syllabus and key skills. Industry figures also held opinion on and offered reasonable suggestions for improving art education. Captain Turnbull wholeheartedly agreed that improvement start from the bottom and work up through the educational system, 'In this way not only the designer but the customer and manufacturer would receive a sound basis of art training – the standard of demand and supply would improve.'<sup>34</sup> This Gestalt system was hardly new but the challenge for the Committee was to make such recommendations that were realisable in the co-ordination of art education, which effectively meant a demolition of existing delivery in Northern Ireland and instituting a completely new approach. The Junior Art Departments were seen as a crucial bridge between primary and post primary education, F.C. Stone described how they could be organised to supply the needs of the local staple industry and have access to Art School equipment for special lessons, effectively making it 'an apprenticeship course for children who would otherwise have gone straight from their primary schools into an artistic industry.'<sup>35</sup> He made the distinction that eighty per cent of the instruction was on art or craft subjects, with designing nearly always done in connection with a trade and not as some abstruse creative exercise. Major Stanley queried the high level of specialisation at that age but the Federation of British Industries strongly favoured the Junior Art Departments as they could accommodate both the embryonic designer progressing to art school and the draughtsman or craftsman who could pass directly in to industry. In this way, it was a model filter system whereby the student with the art teacher could begin to determine the direction of their training. In addition, it meant students arriving at art school or industry were better prepared with greater skills honed. F.C. Stone gave the example of every passing student at Stoke on Trent Junior Art Department was 'immediately absorbed into industry.'<sup>36</sup>

### 3.6 Resources and Research in Art Schools

The technical equipment in the art school was found to be wanting in Northern Ireland, with limited access to weaving looms, available only by prior arrangement with the College of Technology. Macclesfield was cited as the only example of textile design and weaving taking place *within* the Art School and viewed as a 'very satisfactory' model of collaboration. Hand loom equipment should be standard and best developed as in a research capacity. In defence of the studio crafts, F.C. Stone, Board of Education Art Inspector for Lancashire and Cheshire, believed a research unit connected with the College of Art, 'run as a small commercial concern along the lines of Mrs Mairret's establishment at Ditchling', would produce 'an influx of hand weavers into the industry.'<sup>37</sup> Clearly impressed by her work he added, 'Mrs Mariet [sic] has produced a perfectly unique collection of current fabrics definitely in the market today – gorgeous things...It is the most inspiring stuff of the sort done today.'<sup>38</sup> He also cited the success of a small hand loom industry run by ex-students of the Salford School of Art and members of the Committee also saw an example of student enterprise in textile block printing during one of their visits to the English schools. In the context of industrial application, The Committee on their Tour of British Industrial Art Schools in June 1934, documented a number of instances where art and industry merged, attributing many as exemplars of experimental research, where the Art Schools artistically adapt industrial material previously used for technical purposes and in Burslem, an enlightened manufacturer of electrical porcelain foresaw the limits of his product and approached the local art school for advice on adopting alternative uses for his plant and material, while the outcome was not stipulated, the principle of closer co-operation through research could bring limitless possibilities.<sup>39</sup>

R.A. Dawson too believed research offered the opportunity for first class students to experiment, in the instance of weaving, on hand looms 'in order to find out new possibilities, new developments untrammelled by thinking of what he is selling, or of what the market might like...in that way industry might constantly get fresh inspiration.'<sup>40</sup> The outcomes of which, along with other trial goods of sufficient quality produced in a 'retail experimental workshop' to sell through established retail stores. During the proposition of collaboration between the linen trade and the art school in the form of an 'Institute of Design', where the market would be closely followed for changes in [furniture] styles and trends in modern decoration, Major Herdman's assent also carried a caveat over its financial viability. In Manchester, the textile students had two frame looms, many kinds of table looms and equipment for the printing of fabrics, whereas Belfast possessed no frame looms nor miniature looms and according to Ivor Beaumont's testimony there was no regular system where students of textile design received instruction in the technical workshops of the College. Despite being housed within the same building and having much in common, there was little circulation of skills and knowledge. In contrast, the Committee admired a 'close and living link' evident between the School of Art and College of Technology in Salford, where 'regular interchange of students' between the two schools took place, the Principal maintained that the good

accord between the two precluded the necessity for a trade advisory committee – however it still excluded industry representation.

Dawson reasoned that with the appropriate equipment, students were afforded the opportunity for 'practical experimental work in connection with design' and added that in order to achieve full co-operation between technical and art schools, 'interchange of students was the best remedy' with hand production dealt with at the art school and mass production at the technical school.<sup>41</sup> The Committee generally agreed on the principle, put forth by F.C. Stone who used Burslem School of Art and Wedgwood as the exemplar in the union of art and industry, that a well-judged combination of technical instruction together with artistic instruction in art education was fundamental to increasing standards in design training. Norman Fitzroy Webb of Old Bleach agreed, 'I think that the Schools of Art are apt to be too much up in the air, and I think in some cases in industrial and textile areas it is probably the technique they lack. What you are saying suggests that this need not be so. At present, we rely on the Technical Schools for the practical work. Your suggestion that a certain amount of technical instruction should be given in schools of art appeals to me enormously, it would appear to be a much better arrangement.'<sup>42</sup>

### 3.7 Art Education and Modernity

The question of modernity in *where* and *how* it featured in contemporary industrial art education was a central question throughout the inquiry. Witnesses were explicitly asked to provide evidence of being modern within their teaching methods or employing modern teaching materials. It was noted (and clearly admired) in the Report of the Tour of British Industrial Art Schools that Salford as 'a feature of the school' owned a collection of modern textile designs, instituted at a cost of £50 and a maintenance cost of £10 per annum, 'We understand that the choice of new fabrics was made with the advice of experts such as Mrs Mairet, the C.P.A. [Calico Printers Association], Tootalls [sic] etc.'<sup>43</sup> The Calico Printers Association (comprised of forty six textile printing companies and thirteen merchants) and Tootal Broadhurst Lee (incidentally these two companies would later merge in the late 1960s) were leviathans of the Manchester textile landscape and well-disposed to local art educational institutions. The principal of the Belfast School of Art, Ivor Beaumont was asked by the panel if the Belfast School had comparable examples of modern textiles, he cited an impressive collection of William Morris fabrics and when challenged on whether these could be considered modern he replied (evasively), 'I consider them a good foundation for the students to keep in mind'.<sup>44</sup> Further probing revealed he had more modern fabrics than just Morris, 'yes, modern fabrics produced by many firms across the water, I might mention that these are all my private property...and shows that I take a great interest in the students and the work of the school.' It also suggested he took less of an interest in local firms and what they might offer local students. However, his testimony reveals his bias to the orthodoxy of the South Kensington System<sup>45</sup>, in response to a question on how 'absolutely up to date' lectures were, he stated, 'I showed some German specimens of architecture last week, I do not admire it, of course.' It was ambiguous whether this *obiter dictum* was borne out of

Beaumont's personal aesthetic taste, professional judgement, or even a sense of patriotism. One suspects the former as his subsequent answer pitches good *against* modern, 'I show these modern examples, and compare them with the good work – compare the modern work with the good work.' Inevitably, the panel queried this dichotomy and he acknowledged some modern work was good with a few choice if highly conservative examples of recent Art Deco and Classical style architecture.<sup>46</sup> In the first three pages of his evidence he used the problematic and subjective term *beauty* or *beautiful* on twelve occasions as both concept and adjective, 'the design must be attractive, inventive and simple, and should always add beauty to the object' revealing an Arts and Crafts position that saw design in aesthetic and decorative terms rather than strict functionality.<sup>47</sup> The panel continued the line of questioning in regard to modernity as to whether the School had examples of modern foreign designs, in particular of *linen* work but Beaumont indicated the modern designs were of cotton, crash and silk and English only, citing cost as the principle reason for not collecting foreign work. Thus, it appeared students at the College training for a career in linen could not draw on local nor linen exemplars for reference or inspiration, compounding a feeling that design of local origin had little or no aesthetic or commercial value.

The topic of loans was then raised and Beaumont disclosed the V&A's circulation collection was available and an exhibition of photographs of good design (including textiles, pottery, architectural work, interior decoration and furniture) was on its way to Belfast, organised in conjunction with the 'applied art industries association' (this was almost certainly the DIA) and he was asked to confirm if these were modern up to date examples, they apparently were. What Beaumont does not appear to know and Committee Member Norman Fitzroy Webb of Old Bleach (inexplicably) does not volunteer, was the inclusion of Old Bleach Linen furnishing fabrics formed part of the textile section of the V&A's Circulation Collection.<sup>48</sup> In the early days of Old Bleach's newly launched furnishing fabrics, the company had supplied fabrics on request in 1933 to the British Institute of Industrial Arts (BIIA), housed in the North Court Annexe of the V&A. The Museum then contacted Old Bleach's London office to purchase the same several examples of woven linen textiles of modern design, 'Sperrin' and 'Rhythm', both by Norman Fitzroy Webb, to add to the Circulation Collection, in a memorandum from the curator H. A. Kennedy to the Director, defended the selection, 'These two pieces of modern weaving were exhibited at Dorland House, and you approved the order for 30" of each. We shall be glad to have them in Circulation.'<sup>49</sup>



Fig. 3.2 Left: 'Sperrin', Right: 'Rhythm' both designed by Norman Fitzroy Webb, Old Bleach Linen Company, 1933. Source: Author's photographs, Clothworkers' Centre, Blythe House, V&A, London.

Throughout the 1930s and post war years, the Museum continued to purchase (and accept occasional gifts of) furnishing fabrics of modern design from Old Bleach.<sup>50</sup> It is curious Webb did not raise the subject of Old Bleach's position within design reform and particularly the very institutions Beaumont claimed contact with. Manufacturers were notoriously guarded about new patterns but it seems a great opportunity was squandered when Old Bleach by the mid-thirties were producing very fine modern design work, already lauded by the textile and design industries, design reform groups, associated press and by National institutions such as The Manchester City Museum and Gallery and the V&A, that the local School of Art seemed to know nothing of it and ergo, unable to exploit such design excellence on their doorstep.

The panel were dogged in their inquiry into how modern art teaching was evidenced by the schools in Northern Ireland especially if according to Art Inspector J.F. Hunter's summation that the standards in craft based disciplines was low. Hunter maintained, 'So far as developing a taste for modern design is concerned, these classes are not nearly so effective as they might be. Often this is due to teaching which may be definitely unsympathetic to contemporary development in art.'<sup>51</sup> He was emphatic that in order to promulgate good taste, art teachers needed a thoroughly modern training, preserve an open mind and keep up to date with modern artistic developments and lamented, 'such teachers are still uncommon.'<sup>52</sup> In many ways this was in opposition to Beaumont's position, where 'good' and 'modern' were schisms. Andrew Bonaparte Wyse commented on the semantic arrangement, 'I notice in this memorandum the word 'modern' might be rubbed out and made to read 'good', for Hunter a modern curriculum was the

only way students could be trained to produce modern outcomes. When challenged on using the terms 'modern' and 'good' design interchangeably and whether he considered 'that everything modern is necessarily good?', he rejected the suggestion, explaining that students must design for their present and future age. He illustrated his response with a textile design competition organised by local manufacturers several years before, where, in his opinion, the manufacturers 'chose the very worse patterns they could to make those awards' because they were familiar and old fashioned, despite 'very good artwork done at the Lurgan School...quite as good pattern as the manufacturers were purchasing from Paris at that time.'<sup>53</sup> This time the manufacturers were in the firing line, even when good design work from the technical schools was under the collective noses of local firms, they continued to buy patterns from Paris. The Principal of Lurgan Technical School, H.D. Armstrong noted in his reply to the 1933 survey (discussed on page two of this chapter) the manufacturers' preference for continental pattern suppliers. It also echoed the criticism that emanated from the Art Schools that the role of manufacturers was instrumental in the reform process, in a short editorial on 'Art and Industry' published in the *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal* in January 1932, it reported the sentiment of Mr. John C. Moody, Principal of Hornsey School of Art, who believed, 'the responsibility for any lack of co-operation between art schools and industry must rest with industry...It is useless for industry to compete with foreign producers unless it takes steps to meet its competitors on at least equal grounds.'<sup>54</sup> Mutual finger pointing was a defining feature throughout the design reform movement and Northern Ireland was no different. Norman Fitzroy Webb highlighted the peculiarity of the typical manufacturer vis à vis design,

...the difficulty there is if a manufacturer is going to take an interest in this himself he must be an artist and judge of industrial art. The alternative is to have their own artist. In that case obviously you would get the best person, but I am afraid you would not get such a man locally. Probably you would have to go to London or Paris. That is the only alternative unless the manufacturer is an artist himself.<sup>55</sup>

This line of inquiry moved the panel on from theoretical issues of the modern towards practical changes in art education but it did highlight attitudes to design where it was a commonly held view of manufacturers as a service commodity to be slipped in to the process of linen production rather than intrinsic to developing a collection, brand and reputation. The practice of buying in foreign designs suggested little faith in local art education and even less willingness to invest in its amelioration. Paradoxically, in buying from Paris or other continental design centres, the textile industry confirmed the necessity of design and possibly its associated prestige. Once its importance was acknowledged and defined, the status of the local designer could justifiably demand better remuneration and manufacturers knew it. In addition, it signalled a resistance to or simply an ignorance of the modern; as discussed in Chapter 2, the cultural heartbeat of Northern Ireland was arrhythmic. The role of the manufacturer in the training of designers is the focus of the next chapter in which these issues are developed.

### 3.8 Improving Industrial Art Education

J.F. Hunter's disapprobation of the recent pedagogy of art focussed largely on the extended time students spent on the copying of casts, arguing 'by the time he was permitted to design on his own account original ideas had evaporated. His mind was filled with historic ornament and with this equipment he became a teacher or a designer.'<sup>56</sup> With this in mind, the Ministry was preparing new regulations regarding the qualification of teachers to keep pace with the standard of modern taste in other countries. Hunter felt designers should be creators not imitators, 'we are still inclined to over-estimate the drill'.<sup>57</sup> He believed the student should draw from modern life not from casts and students should have an earlier introduction of contact with materials rather than simply designing on the flat. The Ministry was also instituting a new approach where only specialisms were examined rather than general examinations in a large number of subjects and students entering the School of Art would have already undertaken a number of examinations with very talented students being effectively fast tracked. These modernising strategies ignited a vigorous discussion by the panel over the fear that students would no longer be able to draw to the same exacting standard espoused by the South Kensington System. Norman Fitzroy Webb wanted 'people who can draw absolutely straight correct lines and who are neat. I do not think as a rule the School of Art seems to produce that...for myself, if I can get anyone in, so long as they can do that they can do anything else I want, but that is the fundamental thing I have not found. I rather attribute that to this copying of casts and classical ornaments.'<sup>58</sup> In a rare contribution to discussion, the artist J. Humbert Craig slyly observed 'but then you do not want a designer.' Webb was describing a draughtsman but insisted designers must be able to draw.

All agreed however that four years in college was too short and found consensus in an ideal model of four years in general art training, followed by one year in industry and finishing with possibly three years at a London School or at some accepted school on the continent. In the marginalia of the Ministry file, Permanent Secretary G.H.E. Parr has written 'too long a period for qualification', Major Stanley maintained no parent would tolerate such a lengthy schooling for such modest financial return and limited prospects. At Manchester, Dawson described the four-year course as adequate training but only if the student had had a very good secondary school training.<sup>59</sup> A year working in industry was considered a favourable and mutual enhancement to student and industry alike; Roland Nugent referenced the I.C.I. apprenticeship programme and Germany's enviable apprentice system although no textile exemplar was put forward. Throughout the inquiry, despite an ambition to recommend ways in which industrial art could make material and economic benefits to Northern Ireland, there is a notional incapacity to do so recorded in the Committee's minutes, 'we are in a rather different world here...' observed Nugent to which Hunter illustrated the startling (and somewhat contradictory) reality that 'practically all the good students go on for teaching' and went so far as to suggest 'the majority of the education here is with a view to preparing teachers rather than artists going into industry.' Hunter had observed no tendency to go into industrial design, students who had shown great aptitude towards it chose instead to practise as sculptors or



painters, which may have contributed to the rise in (fine) artists working across disciplines in a freelance capacity, although this was still relatively uncommon in Northern Ireland. Dawson and Woods agreed it was not always so, recalling a still strong industry with 'scores of designers' in the immediate post war years, but Woods made the analogy of then and now as 'the difference between Royal Avenue and Smithfield', a contrast of merchantry and it seemed, morals. Royal Avenue housed the affluent (ergo 'decent') department stores while Smithfield Market serviced those less fortunate to be born into or accrue privilege. For R.A. Dawson, the remedy was to give them better jobs in industry, while they shared a similar training to university students as soon as they entered industry 'they are offered the wages and status of working men and the surroundings of working men. They shove him into the corner of a weaving shed; he is nobody.'<sup>60</sup> The low status of designers was the *bête noire* of the design reform movement and is explored more fully in Chapter 4.

While constructive suggestions were made by the educationalists, such as shorter scholarships for travelling and better wages, the industrialists on the panel recognised that reform in industrial art education was necessary but issued the caveat that it needed to be responsive to the actual demand of industry itself, otherwise these two camps would continue to contradict each other. Further change in the London Schools was noted, where The Central School (L.C.C.) was gaining in reputation for superior and more realistic industrial training than the Royal College of Art<sup>61</sup>, indeed Dawson in his summary of evidence was critical of the RCA's aloofness towards provincial schools, 'The RCA is not in touch with nor coordinated with provincial schools as it ought to be and independently schools having been brought up on a system of competition rather than coordination'.<sup>62</sup> Morris Harding added how for the first time in its history, that most patrician of art institutions, The Royal Academy was 'opening its doors to industrial art for an exhibition.'<sup>63</sup> In relation to the forthcoming exhibition at Burlington House, Parr raised the development in which the demand for pictures was waning while the interest in artistic objects was increasing, presumably he meant *mass produced* goods. Awareness of these developments in the rising position of industrial art, in both its education and promulgation, would provide verification that it was no mere fad and it was hoped would galvanise Northern Ireland towards rebuilding a competitive economy. Dawson believed good art education should provide a 'laboratory' for the creative artist to experiment, in that he should not be dabbling in 'current fashions...but leading the fashion' that is all he should be doing and that it must be further supported by industry,

I came to the conclusion years ago that one of the reasons for the difference between art training and industry was that neither industry nor the School of Art had recognised that there are two types of people we are dealing with...the creative person and the person who is less creative and more executive, and our school is a double school at present.<sup>64</sup>

Proposals to separate students into distinct courses, from practising designers in training to those who would study salesmanship and the business of industrial art had been opposed by different departments in the University (of Manchester) and ultimately dropped and so a mongrel syllabus continued. The panel

were interested in the efficacy of an advisory committee and asked Dawson about the existence and nature of any at Manchester. There was indeed a Sub-Committee of the Education Committee and controlled by the School of Art *and* an Advisory Board (formed by the Sub-Committee). The Advisory Board was independent and with expert knowledge from industry (for example Captain Turnbull was chairman and School Committee member), composed of approximately twelve members and met three to four times a year; this way the School of Art was able to keep in touch with the industrial point of view. The panel were in favour of such a body at the Belfast School, Major Stanley asserted 'that is where we are wrong in Belfast, if we had more liaison between art and, say, woodwork, then we would get industrial art. If you take away art from textiles where are you going to be? There is little enough sympathy between the departments already' he also added 'if we had an advisory board we would get the sympathy of employers and employees.' While there was much to admire in an advisory board of industry figures Dawson warned of their waning commitment if their contribution was not taken up.<sup>65</sup> All witnesses were questioned about the capacity of advice and what form it should take, some were circumspect on how effective it would be or expressed concern over Gilbertian bureaucracy. Major Herdman was much in favour and volunteered to find members (presumably from the Linen Merchants Association) willing to become involved, while Major Stanley declared the Technical College already had an advisory committee of industrialists and remained unconvinced another was needed. However most understood the mutual benefits in bringing industry representation deeper into the education system. An advisory body, with the finer points of its operation, governance and executive powers to be decided much later, would feature as one of the Final Report's recommendations and discussed further on in this chapter.

The Committee was also interested in ways in which the art school and the technical schools could co-ordinate in a more genuinely cooperative spirit. Numerous continental and national textile exemplars were proffered by witnesses to prove it was logistically achievable although Charles Tennyson thought it particularly challenging in England due to the great power of the local authority where the Board of Education 'is rather chary of laying down rules.'<sup>66</sup>He added that the newly formed Council for Art & Industry (CAI) could not co-ordinate policy as it operated in an advisory capacity only, but that it did explicitly advise on mutual collaboration throughout the education system. The Art Inspector for Cheshire and Lancashire, F.C. Stone agreed proper cooperation could yield positive results, citing Salford School of Art as 'a very happy arrangement' with the Dyeing Department in the Technical School in producing high quality contemporary design.<sup>67</sup> However in Northern Ireland the artistic side took a subservient role to the technical and this paradigm defined both textile education and the linen industry,

Certainly in the linen industry we look to the technical end of the instruction as the leading instruction and the art is certainly very secondary...In Birmingham and Stoke art predominates in the form, design and colour of the product but here in the linen industry it is quite the other way about, a very large part of our production is plain, such as sheeting, cambrics, and all that stuff, and I think you will find it difficult to persuade the authorities that the Art Department should have control of the technical end.<sup>68</sup>

Norman Fitzroy Webb reiterated an earlier point about the lack of connection with the damask designers upstairs at the Belfast School of Art and downstairs with the Technical School, 'I don't believe a technical design for a textile trade can be evolved without that connection being made.'<sup>69</sup> Webb maintained as a practice it had to become embedded in college training thereby easing the acceptance of art as an imperative for industry; Major Stanley retorted the designs were tested on the downstairs looms. All agreed however that there was still too little practical *hand* loom work being undertaken at the Belfast School of Art, again Webb commented, 'the secret of getting the designs right and getting the connection between our School of Art and ultimately the trade lies somewhere in having the artists weaving their own designs by hand.'<sup>70</sup> J.F. Hunter, the Schools Art Inspector for Northern Ireland, conceded it should be entirely possible as a mere six students were doing damask designing in the school at present and therefore not creating a great burden (in student numbers) to the Technical School. This did raise a rather larger and more acute issue throughout the Inquiry of supply and demand.

### **3.9 Supply and Demand**

Such apparently modest numbers indicated a modest demand, Major Stanley viewed it as a niche area where 'the opening for textile designers is very small and I think the reason why there is no great liaison between the Technical School is the fact that there are not half a dozen artists in the School of Art.' He was not the only one who thought that way, Major Herdman and J. Maxwell from the Handkerchief and Embroidery Association felt the demand for designers was very limited, particularly at the heavy end of the trade, damask and towels, claiming the number of designs produced by the various houses each year was small. Because of that, they doubted if they had 'openings' for any students. Maxwell went one step further with a cautionary note 'it would be quite wrong to undertake any large schemes of training and preparation unless after the most careful thought and investigation'.<sup>71</sup> Because of or in spite of, Maxwell admitted in the last few years embroidery designs, principally for handkerchiefs, had been bought from New York. John Gilliland from the Irish Linen Guild too felt the current market had sufficient damask designers but was sanguine in his prediction that 'fresh blood would be needed at some future time'.<sup>72</sup> This of course affected the reluctance, felt by Major Stanley and the Belfast School of Art, to spend on up to date equipment and develop fuller links with industry. Ivor Beaumont confirmed the tenuous links with industry by stating they do not approach the College when they require designers and even then, students were discouraged going into the local linen trade as designers by the low remuneration and unenticing prospects.

Charles Tennyson recommended a central organisation that would secure and regulate the intake of trained designers to industry on a national scale, citing the Federation of British Industries' employment register while costly was worthwhile, he felt a provincial iteration could be very effective.<sup>73</sup> At Manchester, a register of design graduate students was held for both the College's records and to allow manufacturers

to select from appropriate candidates, there was no such catalogue at Belfast but it was thought to be a simple-to-implement and useful tool. Despite much admirable work at Manchester, Captain Turnbull who was fully engaged with improving standards of design in industry and served on myriad art and industry committees admitted 'our industrialists are training their apprentice designers themselves, and are probably doing it very badly.' He described a system where they are fully trained to a high level in the technical perspective but 'from the artistic point of view I think that the system probably leaves a good deal to be desired, and always will.'<sup>74</sup> He was definite that art education needed to be right through education, from an early age and was economic, 'if customers are educated and demand certain things they are going to get what they demand.' Educate everyone in matters of artistic taste and the market remains buoyant, in other words, create the demand and then the supply. It was an insight that perhaps made the Committee realise the task at hand was far greater than they had anticipated. It also heralded an emerging understanding in the democratisation of design, a pronounced shift in thinking about how well designed articles could improve the lives of many rather than comfort the fortunate few. This was a societal issue not simply in raising standards of taste but raising standards in living. Collections and Exhibitions were agreed to be the ideal vehicles as dual means to educating the public and 'affording visual inspiration to the designer.'<sup>75</sup> The exhibition as a crucial format for industrial art, although broached in Chapter 2 will be considered in Chapter 5: The Linen Web (b): Promoting Irish Linen.

### **3.10 Quality of Design Work in the Schools**

There was a general consensus among the panel and witnesses that good design came from good quality teaching, from elementary school, through secondary, to technical and art school yet many of the witnesses from education and industry commented on the low quality of student work. While it may have had redeeming features such as having been well executed (a technical accomplishment) it lacked originality, freshness, potential application and crucially, knowledge of the market it was destined for. John Gilliland noted, 'I have been round the Art School two or three times and have seen designs. They were well drawn, but not one of them could have been applied to any use or to any article they were selling.'<sup>76</sup> He suggested, without challenge, students were being taught to *draw* not *design*, a practice predicated on the belief that once a person had learned to draw they should be able to do anything that was required.<sup>77</sup> He believed the reason for this was the School of Art's veneration for tradition while the relation of craftsmanship to the industry was always changing, he offered an example of the modern trade, 'Every house here has to produce at least two distinct ranges of goods each year, and they have got to keep producing intermittent specialities of one kind or another. The School remains one thing whereas the industry is always changing and tending to become another.'<sup>78</sup> The implication here was a syllabus out of date, divorced from industry and not serving students adequately. While it was not the task of the Inquiry to offer remedial policy in art education, as the Chairman put it 'to dogmatise on the matter', the Committee was also beginning to understand a fundamental overhaul was necessary to achieve the double ambition of, parity across British art education and real economic competitiveness with foreign design.

Time and again witnesses spoke of the higher standard of foreign design, hence local manufacturers buying designs from abroad and acknowledging the design levels in Northern Ireland were too low; in that light, textile students did not stand a chance here when the very industry around them did not believe in them (the buying of foreign designs is discussed in the next chapter). A recurrent and admired model was one where the student was free to experiment, Salford School of Art was held up as the exemplar where 'they have realised that the problem of creating design is one of inspiration rather than of labour.'<sup>79</sup> Another opportunity for students to work freely was through competitions, Tennyson believed the Royal College of Art prize scheme judged by industrialists had 'succeeded in bringing the student a little bit nearer to industry.'<sup>80</sup> The RCA's competition was only available to their own students but The Royal Society of Arts Industrial Design Competition was a nationwide affair open to all, the *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal* reported the prize purse for 1932 totalled fourteen hundred pounds for designs of all kind, including for woven and printed textiles and noted the series of competitions, inaugurated since 1924,

have been the means for discovering and rewarding several promising designers, and they undoubtedly give the unknown man and woman with a talent a chance of coming to the front. They are of a thoroughly democratic character, the work of the daughter of a working-man receiving just the same treatment as that of the son of a peer.<sup>81</sup>

It further added, 'Amongst the students from Schools of Art who have gained awards in this year's competition we noted that Belfast is mentioned.'<sup>82</sup> If these inducements benefitted the students, the witnesses tended to agree the standard of design work was low and 'no firm in the industry received back very much in the way of suggestions.'<sup>83</sup>

On the subject of the optimal training scheme for students of textile design, Gilliland advocated Art School for six months at the age of fifteen then entering industry supplemented with part time study at the Art School. The debate over the appropriate ratio of *classroom* against *works* training encompassed numerous permutations (although none were agreed upon) but Norman Fitzroy Webb, perhaps harshly, accused the School of Art of thinking it was producing the complete article in a student upon graduation, 'the School of Art makes the mistake in supposing that a student who leaves after a course there is really of actual immediate use in industry. I think that is not so. It takes a grind of two years, or a year at any rate, before students are of any use, and I think, therefore, that students should feel that they are still, as it were, on an apprentice course when they do come into industry.'<sup>84</sup> Graduating students were under the impression they could command better wages but were not qualified to ask for it. Charles Tennyson from the F.B.I favoured the continental system where each year students spent eight months in the classroom and six months in the works with a progressive switch as they neared graduation. In this system namechecked by St. Gallen in Switzerland, Czecho-Slovakia and South Africa, the textile design student acquired the requisite technical knowledge of machinery, yarns, dyes, and cost of application (during the industrial period) and the artistic experience during the college months.<sup>85</sup>

In the face of a tradition based syllabus, witnesses offered a variety of ways in which student design work must stay relevant. Keeping in touch with modern developments was paramount, ways in which to achieve this included: visits to works, visits to exhibitions of modern design, leading industry figures giving lectures on design and the market (sales and advertising) at the College and industrial design placements, although the latter regularly met with resistance from mistrustful manufacturers who were concerned about preserving trade secrets and several witnesses noted the difficulty of placing art students over the relative ease of placing technical textile students. The Federation of British Industries' Industrial Art Committee had already commissioned a series of 'Instructional Notes', drawn up by industry people like Captain Turnbull, and distributed to the Schools, including Belfast.<sup>86</sup> These were intended to keep teachers and students abreast of national and international developing styles and tastes. Exhibitions could also fulfil that requirement, they had been a significant feature of The Gorrell Report of 1932, recommending a variety of travelling exhibitions and a permanent exhibition space in London most likely inspired by the regular and permanent exhibitions of industrial art seen on the continent held by the Svenska Slöjdföreningen in Sweden, the Abteilung für Gewerbekunst in Munich, the Grassi Museum, Leipzig and the Stuttgart Museum.

### **3.1.1 The Final Report of the Committee on Industrial Art**

Published in late 1935, the report condensed over two years of witness testimony, visits to local institutions (Belfast School of Art, Belfast Museum and Messrs. Harland and Wolff) and English Colleges of Art, and supplementary material provided by the Board of Education, the Department of Overseas Trade, the Council for Art and Industry and the Federation of British Industries. Its fifty pages comprised ten chapters covering the scope and limits of the inquiry, the conditions of industrial art within the linen and printing trades (with some reference to furniture and shipbuilding), existing facilities for art education and corresponding recommendations, the training of apprentice craftsmen, museums and two final chapters on conclusions and recommendations. Unusually, a 'Reservation' by Major Rupert Stanley was appended, who supported the main findings but could not agree to the proposal of a second Art School in Northern Ireland on the single reason that it was simply not necessary. Two appendices completed the report, the list of witnesses and the Memorandum to the Committee, prepared by the Ministry of Education.

The report accepted the role design now played in industry and that it had 'received tardier recognition in the United Kingdom than it has upon the Continent and in the United States of America.'<sup>87</sup> It was important it acknowledged the pioneering work of private bodies such as the Federation of British Industries and The Design and Industries Association and later reports of Government Committees and how valuable they had been in framing the terms of reference for the Inquiry. However, it made clear in the opening paragraphs that Northern Ireland was distinct from Great Britain and required not only its own policy in artistic matters but a strategic approach to artistic uplift across the province,

It is a matter of the greatest importance that Northern Ireland, responsible for the management of her own affairs, separated geographically from Great Britain and accordingly, to some extent, outside the influences operating there, should take steps immediately, on lines of policy definitely established, for the co-ordination of all agencies tending to improve not only artistic standards in industry, but also the taste and the growth of artistic appreciation among the people as a whole.<sup>88</sup>

Clearly the Committee was determined to implement wise counsel from a number of witnesses, many of whom were card carrying design reformers, who felt that only a comprehensive reform of art education from primary schools upwards would yield profound improvement in the cultural and material lives for the people of Ulster.

### **3.12 The Committee's Recommendations for Art Education**

Inspired by a *Report on Industry and Art Education on the Continent* presented to the Board of Education by two of the Board's Inspectors, the Committee advocated a regional centralised system that could effectively organise and manage schools to an agreed standard. The English Board of Education had recently initiated regional centralisation and it was felt Northern Ireland should follow this model. In support of this, a central Art Council was proposed to act in a similar role as the Council for Art and Industry in England but with perhaps a wider remit to elaborate 'a comprehensive scheme for the co-ordination and supervision of art education and artistic effort in the life of our people, whether they be directly engaged in industry.'<sup>89</sup> In order that the Council execute its scheme proficiently, it was suggested that an additional instrument to help 'mould and inspire art education throughout the Province' be created; the Ulster Art Institute would be largely advisory but also 'carry on advanced Art Education'. Expert staff and industry advisers would act as a governing body to a newly proposed Central Art School, one distinct from the Municipal College of Art.<sup>90</sup> The new School was hotly contested by several witnesses on the grounds that it was unnecessary (the most vociferous opponent being Major Rupert Stanley) but the Committee were resolved to establishing a college for the whole of the Province and one that provided advanced artistic training. Tellingly, given the purpose of the Industrial Art Committee, there was no specificity concerning a rigorous art curriculum for Industry although it did aim to offer complete training 'in which the element of design preponderates.'<sup>91</sup> Research was to occupy a central business of the new School where industry would materially benefit, 'it would be of great advantage to our textile manufacturers if experiments in new weaves and new treatments of colour could be undertaken in a Central School of Art upon handlooms which would form part of its normal the equipment, as they do in the Schools of Manchester, Salford, Birmingham and elsewhere' and offered the example of the textile school at Berlin, which was used solely for the training of designers and included 'a very liberal provision of looms of all kinds.'<sup>92</sup> This new School should ideally be housed in the new wing of the Belfast Museum, which they also recommended be raised to the status of a Provincial Museum, relinquishing its Municipal position in order to complete the Central Organisation. The three agencies of Art Council, Art Institute and Ulster Museum would together operate as a 'powerful instrument for the artistic regeneration of the

Province' and added the caveat that whatever system be adopted, results would not be immediate. It was hoped these constructive measures would warrant 'urgent consideration.'<sup>93</sup>

### **3.13 Art Advisory Council (est.1936)**

The first meeting of the newly formed 'Art Advisory Council' (AAC) was finally arranged for 30<sup>th</sup> April 1937. Lord Charlemont opened proceedings believing 'the most important function of the Council could perform would be to act as a centralising influence on all bodies concerned with art education.'<sup>94</sup> Its Constitution was largely similar to that of the Industrial Art Committee with a few changes; the architect and civil engineer John Seeds and the artist Sir John Lavery were invited and accepted to serve. The Minister felt Lavery's 'achievements have given lustre to the city of his birth' and it was tacitly hoped the Council would profit from his experience and prestige.<sup>95</sup> A further change omitted the textile designer R.J. Woods, not without contest, he wrote to the Ministry of Commerce expressing his concern that no textile designer was represented on the new Council, the official explanation stated Norman Fitzroy Webb of the Old Bleach Linen Company would ably represent textile design and manufacture on the Council.<sup>96</sup>

The Council began their work by considering the main recommendations of the Industrial Art Committee and which to tackle first. Perhaps somewhat overwhelmed by the Report's proposals, Andrew Bonaparte Wyse thought the Ministry of Education was too insufficiently staffed to cope with the problem and sought the premature advice of the Council on how to implement the recommendations. Considered to be the most pressing suggestion was that of 'Raising of the Art School from its present position as a subordinate department of the College of Technology' and the creation of a new Central Art School. These two issues alone were to dominate most of the Council's fourteen monthly meetings to December 1938. Arguments were volleyed between council members over the status and method of administration in the Belfast School of Art, some members believed a separate building would provide the School with a liberated identity, crucial to creative endeavour, whereas Ivor Beaumont held the contiguity of the two institutions was essential to students of industrial art. The quarrel continued for nearly a year and undoubtedly stymied the progress of the Council's work. Occasionally, a number of advisory tasks were tabled such as the planned Northern Ireland Stand at the Scottish Empire Exhibition in Glasgow 1938, and a discussion influenced by the Royal Fine Art Commission's advice on artistic matters relating to public areas, parks and playgrounds, churches and cemeteries, public ceremonies, streets, squares and buildings and printing.<sup>97</sup> However, progress was made in less controversial topic areas; it was agreed children in primary school receive one hour art training and those students in secondary school demonstrating an aptitude for art should receive a minimum of three hours per week. The question of making art compulsory in examination was rejected by witnesses who shared in Dr. William Heron's speculation, '...it will lose much of its value, by coming to be looked on by many candidates as a necessary evil',<sup>98</sup> but many agreed the status of art in schools continued to face prejudice, at the Belfast Royal Academical Institution little time was spent on



art, '...the tacit but prevalent belief that drawing and handicraft should be reserved for boys who are too weak to be worth teaching in other subjects.'<sup>99</sup> By the end of the first year, the Council were consolidating objectives of structural reform in art education. These included increasing the prestige of art teachers, establishing stronger links between curators and teachers, promotion for art teachers and increasing art scholarships to a comparable level with other academic subjects.<sup>100</sup> In a later report charting the activities of the Council from June 1937 to June 1938, of the six listed undertakings, four were directly related to art education, confirming a prioritisation of thorough art education reform before tackling design reform in industry, one that perhaps needed a more careful and strategic approach in order to secure the cooperation of industrialists.

Throughout the Ministry of Education files, there is evidence, mainly in correspondence between the Ministry of Commerce Secretary, G.H.E. Parr and Secretary to the Art Advisory Council, J.A. Alderson, on the latest developments and challenges in design reform in England and the Irish Free State.<sup>101</sup> In reference to the latter, Parr writes of the Irish Advisory Committee on Design and Industry's first meeting, and as reported in *The Irish Times* on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1937, 'the Chairman is not very much of an optimist and he evidently feels that it is going to be a difficult task in the Irish Free State, as we indeed have felt up here, to get manufacturers to take any sort of interest in art at all.'<sup>102</sup> The noted English developments in design reform included Pevsner's book on Industrial Art (1937) in which Parr recommended the prudent purchase of one copy to circulate at Council meetings, the Industrial Art Centre in London and the establishment of the 'National Register of Industrial Art Designers' to which he believed (by July 1938), 'it would appear no Northern Irish Artist is yet enrolled' In fact, Felix C. Gotto from the Old Bleach Linen Company had been registered since January 1938.<sup>103</sup> Parr was not suggesting a register for Northern Ireland, believing it would be 'a fatal thing to do...at the same time I feel the Art Advisory Council might well raise the question with the Belfast College of Art, with a view to enquiring how far the standard of the College and its courses are designed to enable students to qualify for a distinction of this kind.'<sup>104</sup> The National Register is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

In its final meeting, of 13<sup>th</sup> December 1938, the Council's agenda included among the usual art education items, some local business in a proposal for a new hand embroidery industry in Newtownards. However, the outbreak of the war interrupted the ambition and activity of the Council which did not see a reprisal until February 1943 when the newly formed Council for the Encouragement of Music and Art (CEMA) picked up some of the formative work done by the AAC, in which no special interest was afforded to Industrial Art.<sup>105</sup>

## Summary

This chapter has interrogated and defined the complexity in the challenges of design reform within Art Education in Northern Ireland by critically analysing the evidence of the initial endeavours by Government,

from unexpurgated Committee documentation by the Ministry of Commerce.<sup>106</sup> The data gathered prior to the Committee's first meeting and the subsequent compilation of that *and* witness evidence shows a geography of design illiteracy and or ambivalence, one where design was usually viewed as decorative (although this attitude was not unique to Northern Ireland) and art education was merely for the hobbyist or at best, a contribution towards teacher training with only a small minority proceeding to advanced training outside the Province. While all appeared to agree art education needed urgent review, an undercurrent of resistance to art being pushed towards to fore of the curriculum was tacitly present in opinions expressed.

Although it is difficult to ascertain the length of each testimony, an interruption of lunch indicated a day-long hearing and the corresponding recorded paperwork is plentiful (the transcriptions of oral evidence are often up to fifty pages in length) which suggests witnesses were subjected to methodical and wide-ranging examination, even if responses were sometimes tangential or worse, furnished with a limiting monosyllabic 'Yes' or 'No'. The Digest of Evidence showed an unavoidably contradictory summary of findings across the witnesses, for example not everyone would agree on the usefulness of student competitions nor advisory committees. It is creditable the joint secretaries, E.W. Scales (Ministry of Education) and J.A. Alderson (Ministry of Commerce) could mine coherence from such diverse and often inconsistent material. This chapter amplifies, in a discrete body of evidence, the ideological and structural changes that would have needed to take place in order for art education to be more suitably fit for industrial purposes. Within this official forum (in both this chapter and the next), I have teased out several uncomfortable truths and their repercussions that were showing disquieting signs of leaving Ulster's textile industry far behind its British counterparts. The witnesses, in some cases unwittingly, offered an invaluable depiction of what a precarious condition the linen industry found itself. The aforementioned resistance could be interpreted as a fearfulness for its survival; asking its educationalists and industrialists to reform its ways of thinking about design and its implementation, may well have reminded them of its very vulnerabilities. It also goes some way in explaining the *atypical* success of Old Bleach, who had from early on in their manufacture, espoused and maintained high quality design. Yet there was a sense too, throughout the Inquiry, of the public's improving taste, who were beginning to be exposed to better merchandising and better designed goods and with that, even in times of economic uncertainty and depression, a quiet optimism. In the following chapter, I consider the Industry's responses at the Committee's Inquiry and assess whether *their* position on the role of design impeded or enhanced their trade during a period of reform.

The Art Advisory Council tenaciously held that a Central Art School, untrammelled by municipal bureaucracy, would offer a more challenging and complete art education for artistic students in *all* of Northern Ireland and perhaps quixotically, the cultural life for the whole Province would benefit from it. From the Committee's inception in 1933 to the close of the Art Advisory Council's last meeting in

December 1938, the *material* achievements in the area of industrial art were negligible however, the foundational scrutiny in the subject of artistic matters relating to industry in Northern Ireland undoubtedly paved the way for a more strategic and confident support system for the Arts in the post war period.

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<sup>1</sup> The English Committee comprised a galaxy of high profile personalities, among whom were the Art Critic Roger Fry, Sir Eric Maclagan, Director of the Victoria and Albert Museum; Chairman of the British Institute of Industrial Art, Sir Hubert Llewellyn Smith and Architect Clough Williams Ellis.

<sup>2</sup> Read, Appendix A, 1934, p.173.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> The Council for Art and Industry began its activity in 1934 with a full programme of meetings, research work, lectures, reports were researched and written particularly on art education in elementary and secondary schools, exhibitions (Silverware at the V&A in 1934, pottery in 1935, decorative metalwork in 1937 and responsibility in 1937 for the British Pavilion at the Paris International Exhibition). Michael Farr has suggested its most influential report came in 1937, 'Design and the Designer in Industry', *Design in British Industry: a mid-century survey*, 1955, pp.202-205.

<sup>5</sup> Incomplete runs of *Linen Trade Circular* and the *Irish Textile Journal* are held in the Belfast Central Library and the LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>6</sup> Regular columns on 'Art and Industry' and 'Education for Industry' featured in the *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal*, PRONI: D2088/9/3.

<sup>7</sup> The Report is available in Ulster University at Belfast, PRONI and Queen's University, Belfast.

<sup>8</sup> This chapter utilises mainly Government papers held at PRONI: Departmental Committee on Industrial Art in Northern Ireland – ED/13/1/1713; Industrial Art Committee – COM/26, ED/32 and FIN/18/16/55; Art Advisory Council – COM/23, COM/62, ED/13 and ED/41. These files offer an imperforate record of how the investigation into Industrial Art was conducted and regularly frustrated by some of the evidence.

<sup>9</sup> Memorandum on the Current Provision of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>10</sup> Joseph Rafferty's letter to the Ministry of Education, 12<sup>th</sup> September 1933, Departmental Committees on Industrial Art, PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Principal Thomas Clearkin's Response to the Ministry of Education's Inquiry (1933) into existing art training in Northern Ireland in preparation for the Committee of Inquiry (1933). PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>14</sup> John McCoubrey, Principal, Antrim Technical School, PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>15</sup> Sean Barden's book on Elm Park Preparatory School in Armagh describes a private school populated with many children of the Linen families of Ulster, the network started early. Felix C. Gotto and his brother, Christopher attended from 1921 to 1923.

<sup>16</sup> Summary of Memorandum, 1933, Departmental Committees on Industrial Art, PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>18</sup> The Sorella (sister in Italian) Trust was a charitable trust set up in the 1860s by Whisky distiller, William Dunville in memory of his sister, Sarah (1817-1863). The original aim was to improve working class housing in the Grosvenor Road area of Belfast but later funded scholarships for primary and secondary education and for exhibitions to Queen's College (QUB).

<sup>19</sup> For details see John Gilliland's Press Cuttings Book held in the LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum, by appointment only.

<sup>20</sup> Memorandum on the Current Provision of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland. PRONI: ED/13/1/1713, p.23.

<sup>21</sup> The art classes at Strabane were conducted on three nights of the week during the session. The Principal also stipulated 'Gallagher's select their employees from Strabane Technical School, owing to the fact that the Art Teacher, Mr Mc Girr, is their designer.' PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>22</sup> Memorandum on the Current Provision of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, PRONI: ED/13/1/1713.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, p.2.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Hunter (1893-1951) was a member of the 'Ulster Unit' (discussed in Chapter Two) who sought to promote modern art and design practice in the Province through a variety of channels, namely secondary school education and exhibitions.

<sup>26</sup> Joseph Rafferty's letter to the Ministry of Education, Op. Cit. p.1.

<sup>27</sup> see Appendix B, Report of the Committee on Industrial Art, Government of Northern Ireland, October 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Report of the Committee on Industrial Art, Government of Northern Ireland, October 1935, p.10.

<sup>29</sup> Manchester Art Gallery holds records of the Industrial Art Collection initiated in 1930 by the curator, Lawrence Haward with the support of councillor A.P. Simon. The gallery was committed to seeking out exemplars of well-designed goods of mass manufacture.

<sup>30</sup> Report of the Committee on Industrial Art, Government of Northern Ireland, October 1935, p.6.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.9.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, pp.15-16.

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- <sup>33</sup> Evidence of C. Tennyson, Chairman of the Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British Industries, Industrial Art Committee (NI). PRONI: COM/26/1/8.
- <sup>34</sup> Digest of Evidence, Industrial Art Committee, p.15. PRONI: COM/26/1/17.
- <sup>35</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1933, Industrial Art Committee, PRONI: COM/26/1/2.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.8
- <sup>37</sup> Ethel Mairet's dyeing, spinning and weaving workshop, 'Gospels' in Ditchling, East Sussex, was regarded as a textile pilgrimage for those who sought a deep understanding and feeling for the hand-woven process. Many of those who passed through her workshop went on to critical acclaim in designing for industry, among whom were Marianne Straub, Alastair Morton and later Peter Collingwood. Mairet was an active member of the DIA (included in the DIA membership lists, Archive of Art and Design, AAD/1997/7/109) and the first woman awarded 'Royal Designer for Industry' in 1938.
- <sup>38</sup> F.C. Stone's evidence, 19<sup>th</sup> December 1933, Industrial Art Committee p.8.
- <sup>39</sup> Report on Tour of British Industrial Art Schools, June 1934. PRONI: COM/26/1/9.
- <sup>40</sup> Digest of Evidence, Industrial Art Committee, p.4. PRONI: COM/26/1/17.
- <sup>41</sup> Evidence of R.A. Dawson, Principal of Manchester School of Art, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1934, Industrial Art Committee, PRONI: COM/26/1/6.
- <sup>42</sup> Norman Fitzroy Webb during the Hearing of Evidence of F.C. Stone, p.8. PRONI: COM/26/1/2.
- <sup>43</sup> According to Ian Johnston, Archives and Special Collections Co-ordinator, the University of Salford's records of the School of Art from the interwar period are patchy and no trace of the 'modern textile collection' has been found to date.
- <sup>44</sup> Evidence of Ivor Beaumont, Principal of Belfast School of Art, Industrial Art Committee. PRONI: COM/26/1/1.
- <sup>45</sup> The South Kensington System of art education, run by the V&A and delivered across the country, was a rigid centralised system of twenty-three stages, with designers and "ornamentals" taking most stages and continued in to the 1930s. See Christopher Frayling's *The Royal College of Art: One Hundred and Fifty Years of Art and Design*, 1987.
- <sup>46</sup> Beaumont's "modern" work included 'Adelaide House' at London Bridge (1925), 'Britannia [sic] House' at Finsbury Circus (1921-25) by E. L. Lutyens and 'South Africa House' in Trafalgar Square (1931-33) by Sir Herbert Baker and Alexander Thomson Scott. Adelaide House, by Sir John Burnet and Thomas S. Tait, was a strict interpretation of the then highly fashionable Art Deco style awash with Egyptian motifs. The two latter examples were Classical with 'South Africa House' incorporating Arts and Crafts carved details. All three buildings could be described as monolithic corporate architecture readily found in the Metropolis.
- <sup>47</sup> Evidence of Ivor Beaumont, pp.1-3.
- <sup>48</sup> The Circulation Department within the Victoria and Albert Museum consciously collected contemporary exemplars of design excellence, unlike many institutions who were unwilling to flout the 'fifty-year rule' against acquiring recent artefacts. The department was established to collect 'decorative art' material formed into loan exhibitions available to travel throughout the UK's museums, galleries, public libraries, art schools and colleges. See Peter Floud's article 'The Circulation Department of the Victoria and Albert Museum, *Museum International*, Vol. 3, Issue 4, 12 January 1950 and Joanna Weddell's essay 'Room 38A and Beyond: Post War British Design and the Circulation Department', Issue number 4, *V&A Online Journal*, Summer 2012.
- <sup>49</sup> 'Old Bleach Linen Company' nominal file, V&A Museum Registry, MA/1/0181, Archive of Art and Design.
- <sup>50</sup> The Museum's Registry is an invaluable record of the relationship an institution has with an artefacts' creator. These unexpurgated papers, mainly correspondence, reveal the journey of an object into a collection or in one instance, not quite making it; in 1933, Old Bleach dispatched the wrong fabric sample, 'Birch Bark' good enough for RMS Queen Mary, due to a typing error (on the V&A's part), it was returned in haste to Randalstown requesting its correct replacement, 'Rhythm'. MA/1/0181, Archive of Art and Design.
- <sup>51</sup> Evidence of J.F. Hunter, Ministry of Education Art Inspector, who presided over 1,837 public elementary schools, 72 secondary schools and 22 technical schools in Northern Ireland, Industrial Art Committee. PRONI: COM/26/1/15.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> The art training at the Lurgan Technical School is frequently commended throughout the Industrial Art Committee's Inquiry for good quality teaching, results and being well organised with over 450 art and craft students across the three years of each course.
- <sup>54</sup> Editorial, 'Art and Industry', *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal*, January 1932, p.17. PRONI: D2088/9/3.
- <sup>55</sup> Evidence of J.F. Hunter, Ministry of Education Art Inspector, p.36.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.23.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, p.30.
- <sup>58</sup> Ibid, p.31.
- <sup>59</sup> Evidence of R.A. Dawson, Principal of Manchester School of Art, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1934, Industrial Art Committee, p.31. PRONI: COM/26/1/6.
- <sup>60</sup> Ibid, p.4. PRONI: COM/26/1/6.

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- <sup>61</sup> Cumberlege, G. "The Visual Arts: An Enquiry", A Report by Political and Economic Planning (PEP) for Dartington Hall Trustees, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1946, pp.86-87.
- <sup>62</sup> Each witness was issued a series of pointed questions covering the key areas of the Inquiry prior to their Sitting in Belfast. These were intended to establish practical details before seeking more nuanced and perhaps philosophical opinion. Questions included 'To what extent has co-operation been carried through in the different localities in England?' 'Does design make a difference to the sale of goods?' and 'How important is originality in art work?'. Summary of Evidence of R.A. Dawson, Industrial Art Committee. PRONI: COM/26/1/5.
- <sup>63</sup> Morris Harding during 'Evidence of R.A. Dawson', 4<sup>th</sup> May 1934, Industrial Art Committee, p.5. PRONI: COM/26/1/6.
- <sup>64</sup> Evidence of R.A. Dawson, 4<sup>th</sup> May 1934, Industrial Art Committee, p.8. PRONI: COM/26/1/6.
- <sup>65</sup> Major Rupert Stanley during 'Evidence of R.A. Dawson', 4<sup>th</sup> May 1934, Industrial Art Committee, p.26. PRONI: COM/26/1/6.
- <sup>66</sup> Evidence of C. Tennyson, Chairman of the Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British Industries, Industrial Art Committee (NI), p.22. PRONI: COM/26/1/8.
- <sup>67</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, Schools Art Inspector for Lancashire, Cheshire and Cumbria, Industrial Art Committee (NI), p.13. PRONI: COM/26/1/2.
- <sup>68</sup> Victor F. Clarendon spoke, as both a Committee Member and Director of Messrs. William Ewart & Son Ltd, during F.C. Stone's Evidence, p.36. PRONI: COM/26/1/2.
- <sup>69</sup> Webb, F.C. Stone's Evidence, p.39. PRONI: COM/26/1/2.
- <sup>70</sup> Ibid, p.40.
- <sup>71</sup> Evidence of J. Maxwell, Handkerchief and Embroidery Association, 17<sup>th</sup> September 1934, Industrial Art Committee, p.5. PRONI: COM/26/1/14.
- <sup>72</sup> Digest of Evidence, Industrial Art Committee, p.10. PRONI: COM/26/1/17.
- <sup>73</sup> The F.B.I.'s Register and Employment Bureau was established in 1924. According to Michael Farr, by 1937 it had been used by more than seven hundred firms and by 1946 over one thousand artists and students had secured industrial design work. It was instrumental in helping set up the National Register of Industrial Designers in 1936 by the Council for Art and Industry. *Design in British Industry: a Mid Century Survey*, pp.199-200.
- <sup>74</sup> Evidence of Captain W. Turnbull, Industrial Art Committee (NI), p.2. PRONI: COM/26/1/8.
- <sup>75</sup> Digest of Evidence, Industrial Art Committee, p.39. PRONI: COM/26/1/17.
- <sup>76</sup> John Gilliland in Digest of Evidence, Industrial Art Committee, p.43. PRONI: COM/26/1/17.
- <sup>77</sup> Evidence of J. Gilliland, Industrial Art Committee, p.4. PRONI: COM/26/1/4.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid, p.6.
- <sup>79</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, p.4.
- <sup>80</sup> Evidence of Charles Tennyson, p.15.
- <sup>81</sup> Editorial, 'Royal Society of Arts: Industrial Design', *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal*, August 1932, p.15. PRONI: D2088/9/5.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>83</sup> Digest of Evidence, p.32.
- <sup>84</sup> Ibid, Norman Fitzroy Webb, p.15.
- <sup>85</sup> Evidence of Charles Tennyson, p.21.
- <sup>86</sup> Ibid, p.14.
- <sup>87</sup> Report of the Committee on Industrial Art, Government of Northern Ireland, 1935, p.6.
- <sup>88</sup> Ibid, p.6.
- <sup>89</sup> Ibid, p.37.
- <sup>90</sup> Elsewhere Government Schools of Design established in the nineteenth century were tried and tested with considerable success as in Glasgow. See Stana Nenadic, 'Designers in the Nineteenth Century Scottish Fancy Textile Industry: Education, Employment and Exhibition', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 27, No.2, 2014, pp.115-131.
- <sup>91</sup> Precis of Chapter Nine of the Industrial Art Committee report, p.2. PRONI: ED/41/1/1.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid, p.42.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid, p.43.
- <sup>94</sup> First Meeting of the Art Advisory Council, PRONI: ED/41/1/1.
- <sup>95</sup> Ibid, Address by Lord Charlemont at First meeting of the Art Advisory Council.
- <sup>96</sup> PRONI: COM/62/1/588.
- <sup>97</sup> PRONI: ED/41/1/5.
- <sup>98</sup> Dr. William Heron, Senior Inspector, Response to Ministry of Education's request for observation on whether art instruction should be an obligatory subject in secondary schools, 13<sup>th</sup> January, 1938. PRONI: ED/41/4/2.
- <sup>99</sup> Memorandum by the Art Inspector for Northern Ireland, J.F. Hunter to the Art Advisory Council, 8<sup>th</sup> June 1937, p.3. PRONI: ED/41/1/6.
- <sup>100</sup> PRONI: ED/41/1/7.
- <sup>101</sup> Correspondence between G.H.E. Parr and J.A. Alderson, Constitution of the Council, PRONI: ED/41/4/2.

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<sup>102</sup> Parr continued by saying the article suggested the Chairman had 'read our report or...at least the gist has been put into his hands', and that it might be useful to keep track of their proceedings as there were likely to be many similar problems. PRONI: ED/41/4/2.

<sup>103</sup> Felix Gotto's National Register of Industrial Art Designers Registration Certificate is held in his daughter's private papers (Suffolk), dated January 1938, signed by Chairman Charles Tennyson, who gave evidence to the Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland on behalf of the B.F.I. (18<sup>th</sup> June 1934) and Registrar T.A. Fennemore (a versatile designer who founded the Central Institute of Art and Design in 1940).

<sup>104</sup> Correspondence between G.H.E. Parr and J.A. Alderson, Constitution of the Council, PRONI: ED/41/4/2.

<sup>105</sup> The CEMA papers are held in PRONI along with the Arts Council Northern Ireland (ACNI) records, AC/2/1 and AC (Fond level) respectively.

<sup>106</sup> PRONI: COM/26/1-18 Files of Industrial Art Committee, 1933-1938.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### **'Just draw me a Chrysanthemum', The Manufacturer and the Designer in the Linen Trade**

While the aims of the Industrial Art Movement across the United Kingdom were broadly understood and agreed by the mid 1930s, the objectives in achieving them, centralised or not, remained somewhat unresolved and a persistent topic of debate in the general and trade press. It would be incorrect to claim it dominated contemporary industry and arts news but it was regularly reported on and this signified a growing interest in the subject and perhaps a determination to resolve the larger structural issues of design reform that would best reflect the modernity of British industry and society. Central to the discourse of design reform was the training of the designer and the Northern Irish Committee and subsequent Council devoted a substantial proportion of their attention to it. In the evidence heard at the Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, two distinct camps appeared to emerge: the educationalist and the manufacturer. In Chapter 3 the educationalist's position was critically examined while the Industrialist's point of view on design and the training and status of designers is the subject of this chapter; asking in what ways did Ulster's industrialists' views on Industrial Art differ from the educationalists and even industrialists elsewhere in Britain? Was there a detectable provincial outlook? And what, if any, constructive response came from them? These chapter aims directly relate to the core research question of the secret character of design in Ulster's Interwar linen industry.

In Northern Ireland, there is ample evidence that linen manufacturers cooperated with each other in support for the mercantile good of the industry, for example, subscriptions to and memberships of the various Linen Trade Associations were healthy, suggesting communal strength would vanquish external threats.<sup>1</sup> In addition, individual brands worked anonymously and collectively while under the support of umbrella organisations as the Irish Linen Society and the Irish Linen Guild and for Government backed publicity schemes such as Empire Exhibitions.<sup>2</sup> However, in design (unlike technical innovation), manufacturers were considerably more cautious about sharing information on their latest lines; throughout the Inquiry meetings and hearings, Norman Fitzroy (Roy) Webb never divulged any of Old Bleach's approaches to or successes in design other than a few comments on what was expected from a designer.<sup>3</sup> By the mid 1930s, the company's products were stocked by retailers, held by museums and featured in magazines, distinguished by their patronage of high quality and well-designed products and their own feted reputations in cosmopolitan global cities as London, New York and Stockholm.





Fig. 4.1 Photograph of Display of 1930's Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics, from left to right: Rathlin, Glencar, Akbar, Rimini, Belleek and Rathlin (again), Nya Linnemagasinet, Norrköping, Sweden. Source: Company Photograph Album, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

There appears to be no indication, in the Old Bleach Archive or in the contemporary local press, that Old Bleach even advertised their furnishing fabrics ranges in Northern Ireland (although advertised extensively in contemporary English modern design publications such as *Architectural Review* and *Decoration*). While their household linens were well-known and esteemed in the Province, design in such goods tended to be restrained and decorative. Furthermore, few other local linen firms advertised heavily in the local press with perhaps notice given of seasonal or special sales in the linen rooms of department stores as Anderson & McAuley and Brands (methods of sales and promotion are addressed in Chapter 5). This suggests the furnishing fabric market lay elsewhere.

One reason why manufacturers were more cautious about industry knowledge of new lines was piracy; for the plagiarist, it was relatively quick to copy or adapt a design and notoriously difficult to prove unless the manufacturer had the foresight to register their designs.<sup>4</sup> While design was considered an essential part of a textile firm's reputation and worth protecting with registration, it did not appear that the concern was carried over to the designer and it took reformers to work exhaustively to alter manufacturers' minds on the benefits of paying their own designers proportional remuneration.<sup>5</sup> If we consider the treatment of design and the designer in the local trade press, there is little on either throughout the 1920s with attention given to developments in design seen more clearly in the early 1930s but still only slight consideration of the designer. The most likely explanation for this is an industry in such decline that it viewed design as trifling next to more immediate and uncontrollable issues as unstable flax prices and trade tariffs. What is evident is that Old Bleach thrived during the Interwar period (although there were several crisis moments when work slowed to part time and a few short closures in the early 1930s) and in retrospect, it was their zenith in both financial and design terms.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4.1 The Evidence of Industrial Witnesses at the Committee of Inquiry

The choice of industrial witnesses from the local linen trade at the Committee of Inquiry covered the three main textile associations which were broadly responsible for the selling end of the business: the Irish Linen Guild (John Gilliland), the Irish Linen Merchants' Association (Major A. C. Herdman and John A. Lowry) and Handkerchief and Embroidery Association (J. Maxwell) and the English industrialist, Captain William Turnbull. Curiously, no local designers from industry were interviewed, who would have been in a position to describe the typical working life of the provincial designer. Stana Nenadic has pointed out that away from the putative glamour of a London designer, the reality of life as a designer in the provinces was acutely humbler.<sup>7</sup> This unique insight perhaps would have offered the Committee a more authentic experience of the designer in industry. Instead and possibly as an indication of the times, the Committee chose authority and seniority where the establishment's opinions were sought and valued. This missed opportunity was almost certainly connected to the status of designers, agreed by most as being low, within and without the factory and a prominent issue under consideration later in this chapter. Although Committee members Norman Fitzroy Webb and R.J. Woods were textile designers, they were by then established in the industry and enjoyed an enhanced position; Webb in particular as head of design at Old Bleach was also a director in the family firm, his salary throughout the 1930s more-likely reflected his role as manufacturer and family member rather than his artistic role.<sup>8</sup>

Divergent opinion on the ideal training of the designer emerged from the industrial witnesses, and indeed all quarters on this fundamental issue. J. Maxwell recalled having to obtain a designer from Paris who subsequently trained local designers in four houses and a number of students from the Belfast Art School, 'We found it an admirable method for those boys to gain their studentship in South Kensington because they were really taught to draw.'<sup>9</sup> This indicated a reliable approach to training from within the factory system that could lead to further art education and perhaps inferring the paucity of good designers in the Province. Captain Turnbull was questioned closely over the 'unconventional' method of training apprentices within the factory. Turnbull preferred an artist *without* industrial experience and revealed that of the six people in his works' studio, only one had been to art school. He described this scenario as common in Lancashire where students were not the product of art schools, but came into the factory system early, were 'spotted' and trained up in the work's style, explaining that while it appeared 'a very haphazard way of selecting, but actually the heads of great businesses find it part and parcel of their jobs to have a second sight in the way of selecting their talent.'<sup>10</sup> He then revealed the firm's artist lived in London (actually Surrey) and only visited the works occasionally, '...what we want from an artist are ideas, and of course, their artistic rendering of those ideas. If he were to be drawn into the hurly-burly of manufacturing he would not be very useful to us; in other words, he would lose his artistic qualities very quickly.'<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Alastair Morton of Edinburgh Weavers believed the artist's originality should be unimpeded by technical detail which the manufacturer could sort out,<sup>12</sup> although as Lesley Jackson noted, Morton himself combined 'the technical rigour of the scientist with the heightened visual awareness of the

artist.<sup>13</sup> Charles Tennyson, representing the Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British Industries (FBI) also observed it was becoming more usual for artists to only visit the works periodically, largely producing art work from home but was still an employee of the works rather than free-lance.<sup>14</sup> He did think however, that was more difficult to achieve with textile weaving than print, while Turnbull had agreed it worked satisfactorily for the designer of (calico) printed textiles.

## **4.2 Apprenticeships**

The industrial witnesses viewed apprenticeships in a number of ways; the 50/50 apprenticeship was an acceptable compromise, where trainees spend half of their time in college and the other half in the works, yet it was inferred that the present system of spending a full working week earning with part time study was the manufacturers' preference and one could see why, it maintained their productivity while up-skilling the employee in their own time. The industrialists' pragmatic sights were set on the production of designs to keep the machinery running. In a lecture to members of The Textile Institute later in 1938, Norman Fitzroy Webb spoke of the challenges to the firm in getting good design staff,

The problem of the textile designer is not that of the apprentice. The young man or woman growing up in the designing department of a big firm under a good department head, gets a sound if perhaps a limited training. To supplement that, the intelligent firm can, and does avail itself of the art schools and gives its apprentices ample opportunity to attend classes. In some ways that is the best training in design. But while it makes for competence and a professional touch, it tends to produce provincialism and a stereotyped trade outlook.<sup>15</sup>

Technical instruction embedded in the artist's apprenticeship was a condition of their training in the works but Tennyson argued that refresher art courses to avoid training designers becoming creatively stunted by technical detail were vital for continued creativity being pumped into the industry. While these worked well in quiet periods but were quickly abandoned when industry picked up, 'it is never convenient to let your best designer go away from you for three months or six weeks.'<sup>16</sup>

## **4.3 The 'Qualified' Textile Designer**

According to the 1930 Census of Production of Northern Ireland, the linen trade employed fifty-five thousand persons (with a gross output of £17,762,000).<sup>17</sup> Of this number, the Report estimated a mere ninety were employed as designers by the linen industry. Even then, the term 'designers' encompassed those creating original designs and those adapting, developing or copying designs produced elsewhere. The majority were employed by the manufacturers with some free-lance designers. The Report identified 'fancy linens', a range of household linens from tray cloths, cushion covers, towels, to bed linen and furnishing linen, as the main branch of the industry for design. Although this provided the largest scope for design, many designs for these came from English, American and Continental sources and it was reasoned that 'the search for variety legitimately accounts for the importation of design which is to some extent counterbalanced by the outlet found by Northern Ireland designers in England, notably in

Manchester, Nottingham and Birmingham.<sup>18</sup> While a number of witnesses believed, there was no pressing need to fully train textile designers here as the demand for design was being met from outside sources and the benefits from external influences ensured competitiveness and commerciality. This anomaly consolidated the Committee's recommendation that a complete artistic education must be provided within Northern Ireland in order to diminish the reliance on design brought in from elsewhere.<sup>19</sup>

#### **4.4 Demand and Supply and the Problem with Originality<sup>20</sup>**

The main routes of getting designers into industry was regularly tempered by whether the demand was there and even more controversially who would supply the demand. Major Herdman stated 'the demand for designers today is very limited, particularly at the heavy end of the trade – damask and towels, and the number of designs produced by the various houses each year is small.'<sup>21</sup> Offered as one of the principal reasons for this was the cost of producing a new design for damask. At approximately one hundred pounds to put a design into production with no guarantee of commercial success, the manufacturer 'played for safety'.<sup>22</sup> This aversion to risk was an understandable feature of industrial production but perhaps was more keenly felt and overstated in periods of financial dire straits. Staying entirely with reliable patterns made little sense to progressive manufacturers who understood increasingly capricious markets but it seemed the pursuit of modernity came at a literal cost. The Art Inspector F.C. Stone acknowledged cost as an impediment in the setting up of a new weave design but noted a greater confidence in printing that accommodated manufacturers in taking risks, 'I quite appreciate it is a very important difficulty, that is why I like the method of screen printing and stencilling they have in Lancashire. It is almost as good as printing...with short lengths and small cost.'<sup>23</sup> In evidence, J.F. Hunter imputed the buyer for manipulating demand,

I have never seen anything at all that belongs to first class artistic category of modern damask design, nothing in comparison with what I have seen in other countries. I cannot understand how it comes that the buyer here demands one particular type. Surely there must be buyers who demand a better design. The motifs adopted in Northern Ireland are very ordinary. Apparently, there is more experiment made abroad. I have seen tablecloths instead of what is adopted here, with stage coaches, modern buildings, roads with telegraph posts and so on...<sup>24</sup>

Norman Fitzroy Webb agreed it was the most conventional design in the world and recalled an attempt to break away from rules in the mid to late 1920s but while 'it paid for a little while, while money was going, but as soon as trade declined it disappeared' referring to the worldwide depression in the early 1930s. A good example of this was a lavishly produced forty-five-page photographic catalogue of table linen by the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild for the American market, launched at *the* most unfortunate moment around the time of the Wall Street Crash in 1929.<sup>25</sup>



Fig. 4.2 Modern damask cloth designs featured prominently in 'It's Impressively Correct', the promotional catalogue of table linen from the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild, New York, 1929. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Central Library, Belfast.

Hunter claimed he continued to see newer types of damask with modern designs on the tables of Paris but R.J. Woods called it 'moonshine' and Webb was insistent that 'nothing in the way of design in damask will ever be anything but of a terribly conventional nature.' In reference to the local damask trade, the Committee noted 'the general policy is not to lead in the search of new forms of expression, but rather to follow as closely as possible upon the heels of the hunt.'<sup>26</sup> Even by the mid 1950s Old Bleach were still producing shamrock patterned damask, in response to consumer demand. However, Old Bleach (and no doubt all other commercially minded textile companies) saw no conflict between simultaneously manufacturing modern and traditional and older and newer designs in an effort to maximise market share. Indeed, one of the difficulties textile historians face is in the identification and dating of Irish linen as so many patterns had a long-life span and sometimes, many iterations;<sup>27</sup> a number of Old Bleach registered patterns from the 1970s were still being woven nearly one hundred years later, albeit in different fabric combinations as linen and rayon, linen and cotton and much later, rayon and cotton and variant weave methods from hand loom to power loom production.<sup>28</sup>



Fig. 4.3 Shamrock Design (pattern A14) by Old Bleach Linen Company, December 1951. Source: Photograph Album, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

In the handkerchief end of the linen market, J. Lowry confirmed that price came first but designs had to be attractive. In a combined hearing the three witnesses representing Linen Associations confirmed that most of the handkerchief design work was supplied from New York and applied and embroidered work was done in China...at a fraction of the cost and 'without any reference to Belfast.'<sup>29</sup> Maxwell lamented, '...the trade in Northern Ireland has gone. Neither designing nor anything else is going to keep it. It is a perfect tragedy.'<sup>30</sup> He described his tireless efforts to preserve the local handkerchief trade, 'I have been one of the last bulwarks fighting for our own people', but was forced to concede the Chinese work was cheaper and often better, 'A handkerchief which we would make in Belfast to retail at 25 cents would have work in one corner, but one made in China would have the work in four corners. In a 50-cent handkerchief, the Chinese produce an article which is out of sight better. It is remarkable how good the work is.'<sup>31</sup> Maxwell described a labyrinthine method of bringing goods to market, where the Americans went to Paris to purchase French designs which were then copied by the Chinese decrying it as 'not a high class of effort drawing for this class of business.'<sup>32</sup> Despite appearing defeated Maxwell did offer some hope in the home market and the British Colonies; during the Inquiry, while the American market for Irish linen had foundered, the UK & Colonies market showed reasonable growth, by 1937, they represented 45% and 13.47% respectively.<sup>33</sup>

Although there were more designers in the handkerchief and fancy linen end than in the damask end, Maxwell stated that while he employed five people in the designing studio, most of their work was not original, 'There is a great deal of spade work in an ordinary running business that could not be called original work.'<sup>34</sup> He acknowledged the importance of genuine original work but felt that it was rare, claiming 'the bulk of designs are traditional or minor adaptations of traditional work.'<sup>35</sup> In response to the Committee's questionnaire on the subject of the origin of styles, Maxwell offered four sources: retail customers, buyers, salesmen and designers, although adding they only contributed 'some originality either in fresh ideas or alternative treatment and altered ideas.'<sup>36</sup> The witnesses from industry identified two types of designers, the 'Creative Designer' who confidently took risks and produced what was often

described as 'novelty' (new) designs and the 'Ordinary Designer', who was largely a copyist and adapter of existing designs already held in the studio or taken from publications which had been bought by the manufacturer. The majority formed the latter category where 'the trade designer in a factory is not given the opportunity of expressing himself freely and moreover does not move about so much as the free-lance artist; consequently, he is inclined to get into a rut.'<sup>37</sup> That designers were distinguishable by category also connoted a hierarchy within the job designation, in giving evidence, F.C. Stone asked, 'are they real designers or have they simply grown up through the works and achieved their positions mainly through technical ability?', presumably the 'creative' designer was the 'real' designer and the 'ordinary' designer was subordinated to design described as the 'bread and butter' work.<sup>38</sup> Even the final *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art* expressed it as a 'vicious circle' where there was little incentive to produce a 'creative designer' if there was not adequate remuneration and little inclination for industry to pay design work that failed to remunerate the industrialist.<sup>39</sup> The manufacturer in seeking out design work elsewhere by not investing in the training and advancement of the works' designers almost certainly contributed to maintaining the low status of the provincial designer during this period.<sup>40</sup>

#### 4.5 The Status of Designers

It was concluded by the Committee that the status of design and designers was low in Northern Ireland but similar to England. However, England was several years ahead of Northern Ireland in the active promulgation of well-designed goods and their acceptance by a responsive public. As discussed in previous chapters, the artistic and aesthetic community in Northern Ireland was small and class bound, although there were fledgling signs (of modernity) that modest progress was slowly and quietly taking place. Innovation in linen was the *raison d'être* of the Linen Institute Research Association (LIRA) and F.C. Stone stated that while the investment in LIRA was something comparable to the status of the Shirley Institute (Didsbury, Manchester) it highlighted the paucity of investment on the artistic side of the industry where,

there has not been any reluctance in Lancashire to spend money on the technology of the industry such as in The Shirley Institute, but they have always been reluctant to spend money on the art side...it definitely has contributed to the very backward state of designs in the weaving industry...as far as I have been able to observe, the status of the designer is very low in the industry. He is very small beer indeed. There is a general feeling that art is cheap.<sup>41</sup>

Stone felt the very talented were lost to London and moved away both physically and spiritually from the industry. Ivor Beaumont admitted that not many textile students found positions when they finished their training, citing employers offered little money as one of the reasons, 'they try to get persons of ability trained in the school on the cheap', despite being specifically asked about textile students Beaumont used architectural students as examples, when further questioned if the linen trade had ever approached him for advice, the unsurprising response was an elliptical 'No'. Throughout his evidence, his opinions and examples indicate a quite poor knowledge of the local textile industry and further corroborated a lack of intimacy between art and industry at the Belfast College of Art. Indeed, in one of the latter meetings of

the Industrial Art Committee, it was agreed 'no direct adverse criticism of the Belfast College of Art should be made in the Report' but 'it was believed that in fact the outlook of the college was unprogressive and that it was rare that modern methods were given the study they deserve.'<sup>42</sup> It was little wonder then that textile manufacturers looked to outside sources for design.

A further score against the provincial designer was one of geography; Roland Nugent (not for the first time) observed, 'the designer in Belfast is handicapped by geographical difficulties...he is...living in a corner, out of the main current of views on matters artistic'. Major Herdman agreed that the designer did not have the same facilities as his Parisian counterpart, having little or no access to reference collections like that in St. Gall (Switzerland) and Salford.<sup>43</sup> A number of witnesses agreed 'not enough has been done in Belfast to help our local designers', indicating a neglect in establishing a network of support for the local design community; of course, a branch of the DIA would have perhaps made a significant contribution to the status of designers in Northern Ireland but no such interest was taken up.<sup>44</sup> Given Northern Ireland's relative isolation the status of designers abroad was of much interest to the Committee, wanting to know about comparability on the Continent 'one of the difficulties we are up against is that we cannot turn out a designer without a longer and more intensive training than at present. On the other side, there does not seem to be a demand or opening for that type of designer. That seems to be a difficulty, and it would be interesting if we could hear what they do abroad.'<sup>45</sup> Committee member R.J. Woods, having trained under Albert Oettell of Plauen (Germany) and Emil Marfurt of St. Gall while apprenticed with James Glass & Co. Ltd (Bedford Street, Belfast) and later under Gustave Hove of Amiens and Lyon at Broadway Damask Co. Ltd (Belfast) and undertaking further study in London, Paris and St. Gall, spoke authoritatively, 'On the continent, the designer gets in the estimation and appreciation of his employer.'<sup>46</sup> Although clearly the European designers who trained Woods were working in design in Belfast which raised the vexed question over how poor status and remuneration really was in Northern Ireland in comparison to Europe?<sup>47</sup>

The Board of Trade published a report in 1935 on "Industry and Art Education on the Continent" which told of 'spacious and lavishly equipped Schools' that reflected Government and broadly, the producers of these industrial cities and countries the regard for industrial art as 'very essential'.<sup>48</sup> Even Norman Fitzroy Webb from Old Bleach, whose company's values were founded on the highest quality, conceded ever more pressing competition, where foreign competitors possessed two weapons: price and attractive sales appeal, but only the latter made him 'a really effective rival'.<sup>49</sup> Maxwell maintained that French goods had a particular quality of originality and buyers always wanted to see French goods before making a season's selection. Captain Turnbull corroborated the pre-eminence of the artistically minded Frenchman but attributed this to a cultural willingness to articulate the appreciation of beautiful things whereas the Englishman 'dries up'. He further differentiated the two markets where the French excelled in dress fabrics because he believed the French designer 'when he thinks of a dress design he thinks about who is going



to wear it, but in England, I do not think the dress designer thinks much in terms of that sort. As a matter of fact he seems to think more in terms of what the Frenchman thought last year.<sup>50</sup> Turnbull was more optimistic for the designing of furnishing fabrics end of the trade providing another cultural explanation, 'the head of the [French] family seems to think in terms of the dress of his good lady or what he is to eat next. In England it seems to me the man is fundamentally a home lover...there is great hope for the furnishing side of art and that it will always have a sort of national bent.'<sup>51</sup>

In the aforementioned report, under the often-coterminous title, 'Salary and Status', Sweden was reported as paying designers for single designs on a percentage of the production (from 2.5% at 1,000 kroner to 8% at 16,000 kroner), this principle of the artist taking a share of the profit on the sale of goods designed by him was becoming quite common. It indicated a commercial bent to designing where the profit was based on how *popular* the style sold for rather than how 'good' the design was and significantly, how the designer could profit from their work other than a flat fee.<sup>52</sup> In Northern Ireland, the general rate of remuneration was from £150 - £200 per annum, with a few designers earning £250 - £300 and the Report of the Committee claimed these salaries 'did not differ materially from those given to us for Lancashire.'<sup>53</sup> The Committee felt it sufficiently noteworthy to acknowledge the high ranking of head designers in the Continent, with sometimes, positions on the Board of Directors. Charles Tennyson, from the Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British industries also reported comparable salaries in the large firms between designers and the technical branches and opportunity for promotion. Roland Nugent believed the designer's status had to achieve parity with technical peers, 'if we could get for the designer as good a position as the chemist has that would be an enormous step forward. The designer as far as we can gather from the evidence is hardly ever in that position.'<sup>54</sup>

At Old Bleach, two wages books survive from the 1930s and the mid 1950s and the firm's Minute Books record an elevated starting annual salary for Felix C. Gotto in 1933, of £300 plus 0.05% in share dividends. Felix was the son of one of the Directors, James P. Gotto, and was expected to serve his five-year apprenticeship in the family firm. He joined after graduating from the Westminster School of Art and The Slade School of Fine Art aged twenty years old. He stayed with Old Bleach until going into war duties in 1939. His salary for the remaining four years at Old Bleach rose to £350 with year on year share dividend increases which stood at the top end of national pay scale and was, as per the Committee's Report, "exceptional" in Northern Ireland.<sup>55</sup> J.L. Lindsay was also in the firm's design department and it is notable he was paid considerably less than Felix; in 1937, his salary was increased from £190 to £215, a salary considered 'the general rate of remuneration' by the Committee's findings.<sup>56</sup> By 1955, Lindsay has been promoted to head designer on a salary of £800 with responsibility divided across three quarters of his time in fabric design and a quarter in advertising.<sup>57</sup> There appears to have been three male designers and seven female designers in the design department in the mid 1950s, Lindsay on a salary of £800 with the two other men on annual salaries of £438 and £413 respectively. All seven women were paid half or less

than the men at approximately £234 per annum. At a total of ten in the design department, it suggested a very active engagement in design and while women outnumbered men, they were paid substantially less which indicated their status was subordinated further. There is great scope for the further study of women designers in Northern Ireland.<sup>58</sup> However, during the hearing of R.A. Dawson's evidence, Norman Fitzroy Webb was seeking a new addition to the design department, 'At the present moment, I am looking for a designer. As a matter of fact, I am in touch with one, a Belfast girl, in London. All other things being equal. If her work is good, quite obviously, we will give the preference to the Belfast girl. There is always trouble in transporting anybody to another part of the world.'<sup>59</sup> This additional evidence suggests women designers were welcome in the design studio (although even more poorly remunerated<sup>60</sup>) and in the case of Old Bleach a condition of joining their studio, one had to be 'good'.<sup>61</sup>

#### **4.6 What the Producer Asks<sup>62</sup>**

According to Norman Fitzroy Webb in a lecture given to the Textile Institute, entitled 'The Training of Textile Designers' the producer asks of the trainee designer, a good knowledge of: jacquard machine, of repeats, set up of design for painting, good draughtsmanship, can paint and draw, taste of a trained sense of colour and saleability – 'the quality that every manufacturer wants to add to his products.'<sup>63</sup> This latter idea of taste in the designer was the difference between commercial success and failure for the manufacturer but one that witnesses did not agree on. R.J. Woods felt the taste of the designer was wholly marginalised,

My idea as a designer is...that to-day as a designer it does not matter what the designer does. I know that if you make an original thing here, something out of the way, or something that is the product of your own ingenuity, it will not extract a cheque at the end of the month. A man says to me "I want something new." I bring him something new and what does he say? "I do not think that is what I want. Just draw me a chrysanthemum."<sup>64</sup>

It was the middlemen, between the designer and the public, who Woods singled out for censure; the salesmen whose artistic education, in his opinion, 'consisted of writing out tickets for five years in an office and they ask his opinion. That is how designs are selected. It is no wonder things are as they are.'<sup>65</sup>



Fig. 4.4 "Sherwood" featuring the ubiquitous chrysanthemum pattern, a best seller for linen damask manufacturers. Equally popular florals included roses, anemones and daisies. Old Bleach Damask Catalogue, 1935. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.

He was not alone in thinking that the sales department possessed a disproportionate level of influence; it was a recurrent topic across the textile industry and featured regularly in contemporary local and national trade journals. The Chairman of the Committee on the Training of Textile Designers for the Cotton and Rayon Industries, Lennox Lea, reported the impact of the Sales Manager in the United States,

The method of creating and producing by textile manufacturers in the U. S. is controlled by the Sales Manager who keeps in touch with the big customers, and know their needs. He is in touch with the outside design studios, and through them finds out the types of fabrics his competitors are thinking of employing. It is more and more the custom in the U.S. for firms to give up their own private design departments and purchase from independent sources.<sup>66</sup>

This highlighted the designer's ranking in a hierarchical structure where sales staff could and did manipulate demand. From the designer's perspective, the manufacturer (unless from an art background) and sales staff were lacking in artistic judgement. It was not only the designer who thought so, it was considered of 'national priority' for a specially convened Committee on Education for Salesmanship under the chairmanship of Sir Francis Goodenough in 1931 to investigate artistic training for manufacturers. J.F. Hunter was asked by the Committee if they 'should consider seriously the question of recommending that the rising generation of manufacturers should receive some sort of artistic training?' the beleaguered R. J. Woods interjected with a pithy riposte, 'You may do that. We dare not.'<sup>67</sup> Simply, a designer was in no position to recommend to the manufacturer his need for artistic training.

It took a progressive manufacturer to *want* their design staff to act as harbingers of modern design, in Northern Ireland these were 'few and far between'.<sup>68</sup> However, Old Bleach Linen Company and Stevenson's "Moygashel" linen brand both frequently advertised their modern goods or were featured,

throughout the 1930s, in publications that espoused the modern.<sup>69</sup> These two linen companies stood out for that reason, they created and maintained a brand profile like few other linen competitors. This adoption of consistent marketing by Old Bleach is discussed in the next chapter. Another modern initiative established at the firm (since 1927) was the annual Summer School; where the management, designers, departmental heads and all sales staff from the UK and Ireland, came together for a five-day congress in Randalstown to review the year's production and commercial successes (and failures) and plan for the year ahead. While this event did not assume the designers enjoyed the same status or remuneration as the sales staff,<sup>70</sup> it did provide them with a comprehensive insight into what patterns sold well and to which markets.



Fig. 4.5 Old Bleach Summer School, May 1939, photograph by A.R. Hogg, Belfast. N. F. Webb is seated third from the right, J. P. Gotto and W. H. Webb are seated to his right with Fedoras in hands. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.

In the Chairman's opening remarks of the third Summer School, 1929, he described gains in all markets but expressed pessimism over how 'very slow...and decreasing' the linen trade was generally. It was a matter of urgency that stock control was improved citing the difficulty in having complicated stocks and 'novelty stuff is continually changing and this further aggravates the position.'<sup>71</sup> While it may have caused some inefficiencies in despatching stock, it kept designers in work and machinery running.

#### 4.7 What the Designers Offer: Infallible Prophets?

Small but significant shifts in the status of the designer were appearing in a number of ways. Christine Boydell noted *The Studio* had acknowledged the emergence of naming designers back in 1926,<sup>72</sup> and certainly the discourse in contemporary trade journals recognised and empathised with the problems facing the designer. In an article on the relationship between the designer and the manufacturer, Gordon Grey in *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* argued for the prompt payment for *all* design

work done, not merely the few patterns a manufacturer selected from a collection specially prepared for that manufacturer. He was not in favour of payment on a royalty basis for designers as this was too unstable and facilitated slow payment with no guarantees of further income for the designer. This legitimate if somewhat amoral means of payment worked only to maintain the low status of the designer. Grey insisted, 'the manufacturer has got to realise that a good designer is as important as a necessary piece of machinery – expensive maybe, but indispensable.'<sup>73</sup> Payment for designs was viewed as one area where the manufacturer could repudiate liability on the basis that there was little recourse for designers. However, the *Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* did report a case in 1935, where a manufacturer had commissioned twelve designs, selected and paid for only three or four. The judge found the plaintiff was entitled to be paid for three designs and awarded him costs. While it was not by any means a landmark case, it did demonstrate that a verbal contract was enough to substantiate a claim for payment and although he was not paid for all the designs, the modest victory consolidated the designer's status.<sup>74</sup> However the [free-lance] designer was also susceptible to the vicissitudes of the market, F.C. Stone outlined the average prices for single designs: £10-£15 for dress fabric and £10-£12 for furnishing fabrics but N.F. Webb thought they were optimistic and probably closer to the lower number with the added competition where Continental designers in London were offering designs from £5-£12 depending on the elaboration of the design.<sup>75</sup> Only the manufacturer benefitted from designers undercutting each other.

The issue of remuneration highlighted the precarious relationship between the manufacturer and the designer but the sales element further complicated the process. Allan Walton spoke of the 'lack of comprehension'<sup>76</sup> between these three functions of production while Gordon Grey triangulated the difficulties from the designer's point of view,

The designer's job is one of psychology as much as anything else. Firstly, he has got to understand the manufacturer and what he is trying to do. He should know precisely how much is spent in every department...The designer must also understand the manufacturer's travellers [sales men]. The 'bouncer' must have flashy lines and the quiet man lines that will sell themselves. Lastly, he must understand the mentality of the ultimate consumer.<sup>77</sup>

The requirement of the designer to be sensitive to the psychology of each component of the supply chain was a recurrent theme throughout the period, Alfred S. Moore reported on R.A. Dawson's belief that the designer must know the customer intimately, 'The introduction of jazz patterns met a psychological state of the people after the war and so it was necessary at the present day for the creative designer to study the psychology of the consumer.'<sup>78</sup> It was an assumed prerequisite of the age, where fashionable social science theory such as psychoanalysis and social psychology could shape the 'good' designer. Quite how these abstract phenomenological entities were to be measured by the designer was never clarified. Even Norman Fitzroy Webb opined, 'Industrial designers cannot afford to be just happy followers of their own sweet instincts...They need to be able to study and size up public demand, trend and taste. We can't ask

them to be infallible prophets, foretellers of 'certain winners.'<sup>79</sup> It was certain, the designer should be, at the very least, in touch with the latest fashions and public taste.

#### **4.8 Public Taste, Fashions and Influence**

The industrial witnesses agreed public taste was improving, although identified divergent influences ranging from an emergence of simpler taste in products and merchandise being better displayed to well-designed printed ephemera such as posters and magazines. The public support for exhibitions of industrial art and commercial art indicated a growing 'active' interest in design (although this clearly was not referring to Northern Ireland where no such enterprises had taken place since the DIA Printing exhibition in 1916 at the Belfast School of Art<sup>80</sup>). It was viewed as 'significant' by the Committee as being informed that retail buyers who were more in touch with the public than wholesale buyers, who at one time enjoyed an inflated buying power in the distribution system. The *Report of the Committee in Industrial Art* also recognised the cumulative effect of design when representatives of the Linen Trade stated 'damask fashions had been profoundly influenced by changes in the shape and design of tables upon which the cloths were being used.'<sup>81</sup>

While it was agreed *fashion* in commodities came from no single source, there was a general feeling among the witnesses that it took the enterprising manufacturer willing to take some risks and by marketing through the correct channels would 'be in advance of their predecessors, create a demand for new styles, which are in turn quickly copied by other manufacturers, with the result that newer and more modern designs secure a footing on the market and result in a general advance of the public taste.'<sup>82</sup> Undoubtedly trade publications and trade shows would have exerted significant influence on competing firms, although the Report did not emphasise this important source of market news; textile publications such as the local *The Irish Textile Journal* (the monthly supplement to the weekly *The Linen Trade Circular*) and national *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* regularly reported on new 'motifs' and 'Tendencies in Fabric Design'<sup>83</sup> which often featured firms simultaneously producing comparable designs.



Fig. 4.6 Similar use of abstracted movement in one printed and two woven fabrics: left: Grafton shadow tissue by Cepea Fabrics; middle: "Arran" designed by Felix C. Gotto, Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd; right: Printed casement in rayon and cotton, Tootal Broadhurst Lee Co. Ltd. Source: 'Tendencies in Fabric Design by Ten Well Known Buyers', *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, May 1935, National Art Library, V&A, London.

The Report outlined the demand for novelty and the challenges this brought to the textile industrialist where a change over from one design to a new one involved considerable outlay, it was estimated by one witness to be approximately £100 per new woven design and explains the growing popularity of printed textiles where the cost was considerably lower. The Report also suggested this cost would explain why textile manufacturers had 'shown some reluctance towards pioneer work in the field of design...the manufacturer has at times incurred nothing but loss as the reward of his enterprise, and accordingly there is a tendency not to adventure in new fields of textile production until the product has proved itself commercially.'<sup>84</sup> While the Committee sympathised with manufacturers' disinclination to experiment they expressed some concern over the changing market with the counsel that quality i.e. longevity, was less important (to the female consumer) as it once was, "Women are no longer prepared to pay for quality in an article which will outlast several changes of fashion. There is far more interest in current styles of design and less inclination to be guided by conventional standards, although the latter may continue to carry weight with a not inconsiderable proportion of the buying community.'<sup>85</sup> The safe industrialist was too ubiquitous in Northern Ireland but the Committee accepted that machinery must be kept running although doubted any 'practical wisdom' would sustain the linen trade. The evidence suggested quite the opposite, 'the demand for new design, as distinct from conventional design, will increase and that for guidance in the launching of new designs the manufacturer must look ultimately neither to the public, nor even to the trade buyer, but to his own instructed initiative.'<sup>86</sup> In failing to do so, the local industrialist would not keep up with advances in British industry.

Sir Roland Nugent, as Chairman, articulated the difficult truth that those consumers, 'the rich public', who could afford high quality damask were no longer buying it in favour of 'polished tables and glass tables', adding doubtfully, 'new fashions in damask do not percolate to the bulk of the market?', to which Webb concurred. A discussion of *who* determined *what* went on the market followed, some felt the buyer enjoyed disproportionate control in matters of taste, modern or not, while others were convinced the public could shape supply. The textile designer R.J. Woods, traditionalist and admirer of convention, opined, 'As far as modern design is concerned, or what is called modern design at present, pieces of broken glass and so on, I could show you so many designs that if I could sell them I could retire now...many firms made very many designs for cloths, but they were always stung with the modern stuff and a great deal of it had to be jobbed off at 50% off. You could not give it away today in America.'<sup>87</sup> Woods was enough of a realist to take whatever design work one could find in a diminishing trade, he admitted, 'I can do modern stuff as well as old. Unfortunately, I have done it.' He reluctantly moved with the times and his anachronistic position may have cost him a place on the Art Advisory Council that came out of the Industrial Art Committee's recommendations.<sup>88</sup> Nonetheless, his comment indicated the general public had little taste for displaying their modernity at the dinner table.

The problem for the manufacturer with the public shaping taste was one of supply, while committed to keeping the factory running, it needed to respond to mercurial fashions. Even in 1929, W.H. Webb warned his design and sales staff that they would have to 'develop the forecasting of all possible requirements.'<sup>89</sup> Yet what was regarded by the trade as 'sentimental' taste, designs such as 'Shamrock', 'Ivy Leaf' and 'Willow Pattern' were hugely popular, 'amongst the masses, sentiment for past designs familiar from childhood plays its part and retains old designs on the market, thus circumscribing the field for new and original designs.'<sup>90</sup> The Committee finally agreed, mainly from the industrialists' evidence, on five important influences on the contemporary linen market:

- a. Sentiment such as the Ivy leaf and Shamrock designs in linen and the Golden Shamrock in China.
- b. Styles in other lines (e.g. the shape of furniture in damask design).
- c. the growing sense of colour, the demand for showy and novel articles.
- d. the buyer instinct to play for safety and order what has already proved itself commercially successful.
- e. the enterprise of the manufacturer in seeking out and launching new designs.<sup>91</sup>

Only the last 'influence' was not connected directly to the consumer, suggesting then that the public wielded enormous impact on what came to the market place. One 'surprising unanimity' was that trade buyers (as distinct from retail buyers) only occasionally played an important part in influencing changes in design. That the designer was not viewed as influential confirmed the profession's low status, that was almost certainly connected to their relative anonymity although this was beginning to change.

When the V&A Museum originally contacted Old Bleach on the matter of buying some furnishings designs in 1933, they requested that the designer's name was supplied. So too had the Museum of Modern Art,



New York, adopted the policy of named designers accompanying mass produced objects. This advance from anonymity pushed the creator towards a certain form of recognised authorship that manufacturers soon grasped the marketing potential of. This was by no means, exclusive to the sphere of design and was probably more characteristic of an age where celebrity and its gilded associations became increasingly appealing. By the mid-1930s many respected textile companies were expounding the virtues of 'designer' goods; Old Bleach seized their chance,

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI.—APRIL 1, 1936

**modern  
artists design  
for Old Bleach  
fabrics . . .**



MARION DORN has, perhaps, had a greater influence on the design of modern fabrics than any other artist. Old Bleach gave her a free hand, and the result was the beautiful pattern used for the curtains in this picture. Its distinction is enhanced by the texture and weight of the material, which is all pure woven linen—very slow to soil or crease—fast to sunlight and with a lifetime of wear in it. If you are looking for exceptional fabrics, ask to see the new Old Bleach range, to which several of the best known modern artists have contributed. Old Bleach provide a companion upholstery fabric such as is shown here on the chair, to go with each one. You can see how well it looks.

A card to us will bring you a free copy of our book "Colour Schemes" by the well-known decorator, Derek Patmore, which is full of ideas; also illustration of the current range of patterns and a list of those houses where Old Bleach Furnishing fabrics may be seen.

**THE OLD BLEACH LINEN CO. LTD.**  
Dept. A · Randalstown · Northern Ireland

Fig. 4.7 "Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach Fabrics..." By 1936 Marion Dorn was an established 'name' in textile design, particularly rugs, but it is Old Bleach's name that occupies the copy line. *Punch or the London Charivari*, April 1<sup>st</sup> 1936. Source: Author's Collection.

This advertisement from *Punch or the London Charivari*, featuring 'Chorale' printed design on linen and rayon by Marion Dorn and companion fabric "Rathdrum", was aimed at the modern, wealthy and urbane customer. The vertiginous windows suggest at least, a Neo Georgian residence that has been afforded the interior decoration treatment by the 'well-known decorator', Derek Patmore.<sup>92</sup> The professionally designed and rendered scheme showed the affluent consumer how daring combinations of colour and contrasting pattern might work together. The clashing angularity of the companion fabric and furniture with Dorn's famous white carpet are alleviated by Chorale's calligraphic flourish pattern. While many of the scheme's components were mass produced, this was not a mass-produced interior. Indeed, it was far

removed from the modest interior for the 'Slender Purse'.<sup>93</sup> The 'Modern Artist' conferred a rarefied level of taste, one that was out of reach to the general public but much vaunted by the contemporary design journals. As members of the Design and Industries Association and with a key London office, Old Bleach were exposed to the latest strategies in promoting design and designers. The alliance with named designers and the use of screen printed fabrics made production and advertising relatively good value. No special cloths needed to be woven; existing figured patterns and plain grounds were selected as highly suitable fabrics to print on, "Milan" and "Mecca" were both very fine woven damask and "Quarry Cloth" and "Donegal" offered a coarser surface with a 'slubby' or ribbed quality to add fashionable texture.

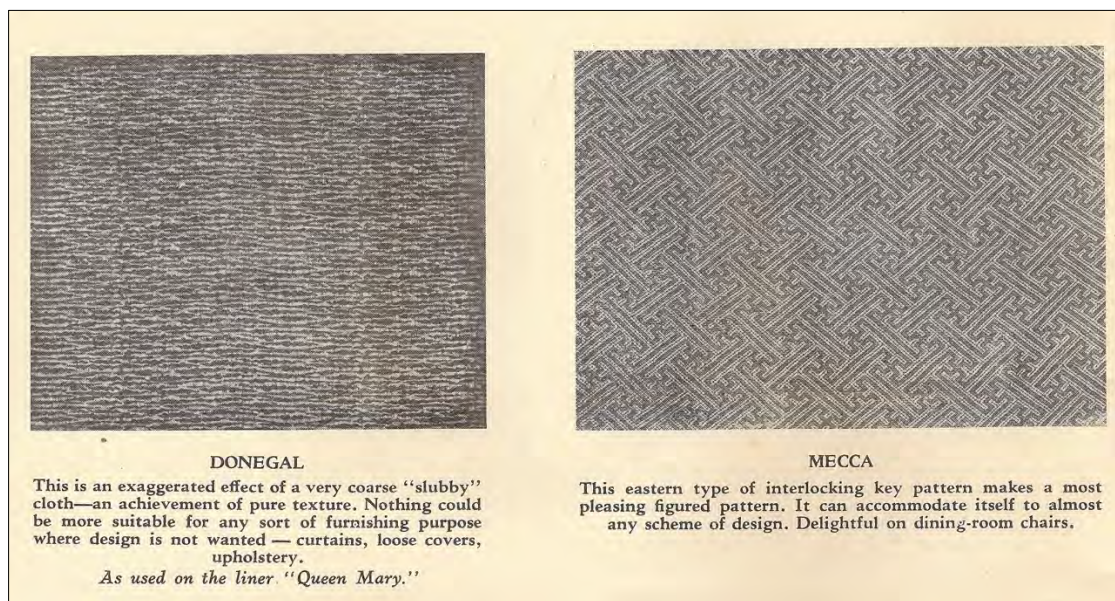


Fig. 4.8 'Donegal' a coarse linen plain weave and 'Mecca' a fine woven figured Sayagata pattern used in many of Old Bleach's printed furnishing fabrics. Old Bleach Furnishing Range Catalogue, 1936. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.

The Company brought out two series of 'Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach' and while the design contributions came from a range of practitioners who were professional designers, a smaller number came from artists who included textile design in their repertoire. These modern designs are discussed more fully in Chapter 6. By the mid-1930s, the naming of individual designers signalled industry and public acceptance that the profession of design was increasingly creditable; it demonstrated designers could offer additional prestige to a company (even though they always had) and in turn conferred new levels of refined taste in the modern consumer.

## Summary

This chapter considered both the Industrialist's view of Industrial Art and the training, role and status of the designer within a contracting industry. The Industrialists' evidence distinguished itself from the educationalists' evidence in a number of ways. Firstly, industry suspicion held that art education in Northern Ireland was barely adequate for the demands of industry and *that* wariness was confirmed in the evidence

given by local witnesses from education, whose knowledge of the textile industry was inexplicably meagre.<sup>94</sup> This gap (although not as big as industry would have education believe) between what the industry needed and what art education offered gave industrialists reasonable pretext to bring in designs from elsewhere; to the manufacturer, there was simply no demand for more designers, of any quality, in the local linen trade. A further difference in how the industrialist viewed design was based on hard-headed economics. New designs were costly and many linen manufacturers were less likely to take risks with untested patterns, particularly in woven linens. The advent of screen printed fabrics did allow for some experimental work and it was here where Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics exploited the new technique along with celebrated named designers and in doing so, reached into new markets.<sup>95</sup> However, the industry was reputed as being largely conservative in their choice of designs and it was felt by the Inquiry, that it was a foolhardy long term strategy,

We were told that, while genuine original work in this field [fancy linens] is always important, it is rare under present conditions. The bulk of designs are traditional or minor adaptations of traditional work, as in the case of damask design. We are of the opinion that, if the trade is to maintain its traditional leadership in this end a bolder policy will have to be adopted in the future.<sup>96</sup>

A third concern for textile manufacturers was competition and piracy. Whilst textile manufacturers across the United Kingdom were circumspect about piracy and many registered their designs as a measure of protection, there are only a few Northern Irish companies recorded in the Board of Trade's 'Register of Designs', now held at The National Archives, Kew.<sup>97</sup> There are a number of possible interpretations for such low registration such as high volume of designs against high cost of registration, but there was an overwhelming sense that design was a low priority in the context of more immediate issues as competition from new and cheaper fibres and difficult trading conditions since the depression. Linen companies were more inclined to support *technical* innovation over *design* innovation, viewing the former as redemptive to any industry's survival yet simultaneously being blindsided by the potential for well-designed textiles in new markets. So too was the former properly supported by LIRA, no such support existed for the latter.

The question of taste was also vigorously debated, manufacturers always had external sources for creative choice to turn to and in doing so maintained an unprogressive status quo, as the Report noted, *following* rather than *leading* was ultimately imprudent. The linen industry's support of innovation in linen research (through LIRA) did not transfer to innovation in design, although this was noted as comparable to North West of England (Shirley Institute, Didsbury). Yet Manchester and a number of Midland's Cities (Birmingham, Nottingham and Leicester) did have branches of the Design and Industries Association where didactic support was utilized and regarded. A great opportunity was missed when Belfast, which had several occasions to capitalize on the DIA's expertise, did not establish a local branch. An organised design body formed *by industry for industry* would have signalled a constructive response to the Report's findings and opened up a new network for the industry to operate in. The Art Advisory Council, as a

Government quango, was intended to go some way to address issues of good taste and design but (as discussed in Chapter 3) in its nascency, it only addressed art education before the interruption of war.

The industrialist's role in relation to art did not go unnoticed by the local press, in 1937, *The Irish News* dryly commented in an article entitled 'Art an Industry', 'We might be inclined to ask is there really any practical intercourse between them [art and industry], and if so, to what extent, let us take Belfast as an example. Industrialists in the past have admittedly had no time for the cultural side in the competitive rush...the cultivation of the arts has been left for outsiders.'<sup>98</sup> It further asked what had happened to the recommendations of the [1935] Government Report, citing France and Italy had budgets of over £100,000 per year, Czech-Slovakia had a budget of £60,000 a year, while Great Britain despite its boast as an art-minded nation only gave £15,000. In that context and given the resistance to improving levels of design in local industry, Northern Ireland was not going to receive a large tranche of a tiny budget. The largely primary evidence presented throughout this chapter indicates a detectable provincial outlook in relation to design, and this insularity helps explain how Ulster lost competitiveness and in turn, why we know so little about design and designing in Ulster's Linen industry. While manufacturers were enthral to foreign design, it never occurred to them, with only a few exceptions, that with the right quality and level of training, they only had to look to their own backyards for design excellence.

If manufacturers' attitude to design was provincial, their approach to sales and promotion was distinctly un-provincial; in the following chapter I critically examine the plethora of promotional vehicles available to the linen industrialist and trade in the name of 'good design' or, more likely, provenance (in Northern Ireland, the two appeared to be mutually exclusive). The Industrial Art Movement placed great faith in the exhibition as the ultimate medium for educating the designer, the manufacturer and the public all at once, a number of notable examples are reviewed.<sup>99</sup> The age of advertising too brought a new sophistication of suggestion and persuasion to a willing public. Old Bleach as exemplar, having learnt from the Americans, dedicated a generous annual budget to publicity and I explore the methods they used to nurture their carefully crafted network. In a contracting industry, methods of sales and promotion of linen offer us insights into how linen traders reminded the public of linen's unique material properties and sometimes, its capability of being modern.

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<sup>1</sup> Although, as per Chapter 1, there were possibly too many separate sectoral bodies. See also, Ollerenshaw, P. "Stagnation, War, and Depression: The UK Linen Industry 1900-1930", pp.285-307.

<sup>2</sup> Primary source material on the ILG is available in the LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum (by appointment only); Government Empire Exhibition records are held in PRONI: CAB/9/F/14, British Empire Exhibition (Cabinet Secretariat), 1922-1926; CAB/9/F/14/1, Ulster Pavilion, British Empire Exhibition, 1922-1926; ED/32/A/1/24 British Empire Exhibition, 1924-25; COM/16 Scottish Empire Exhibition, 1936-38; COM/62/1/548A, Empire Exhibition (South Africa), 1935-36 – both Ministry of Commerce files.

<sup>3</sup> As discussed in Chapter 1, technical innovation in the linen trade was not especially secretive, some experimental research took place in collaboration between firms and the Linen Industry Research Association (LIRA) and would have been known about within the industry. In addition, linen industrialists were all members of myriad local and national trade associations and the network was active.

<sup>4</sup> Design piracy was a regular and topical issue in the English trade journals but appeared less frequently in Northern Irish publications. For companies, the cost of registration in the UK was prohibitive; ten shillings per design deterred many. However, Old Bleach regularly registered their designs in classes 13,14, and 15. See "Piracy of Designs: Improved Facilities for Registration Sought", *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal*, February, 1934, p.25.

<sup>5</sup> Not all linen firms in Northern Ireland were concerned with design as the bulk of their production was in plain weaves (lawns, crashes, cambric, sheeting, ticking, diapers, dowlas etc.). In the pre-Great War period the trade was largely plain goods while the Interwar years were mainly fancy goods. Evidence of J. Lowry, p.6, PRONI: COM/26/1/14.

<sup>6</sup> According to the Company's main Balance Sheet (excluding several smaller subsidiary companies) in 1939, capital and liabilities and property and assets stood at £218,001.9.2, showing the company was solvent. Old Bleach Accounts as at 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1939, Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.

<sup>7</sup> Nenadic, S. 'Designers in the Nineteenth Century Scottish Fancy Textile Industry: Education, Employment and Exhibition', *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 27, No.2, 2014, p. 129.

<sup>8</sup> According to the Company's Minute Books, N.F. Webb's annual salary during the Interwar years ranged from £1,000 (before bonuses and share dividends) in 1925 to £1,520 in 1936, with only one 10% voluntary reduction in 1932 on account of the economic effects of the depression. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>9</sup> J. Maxwell, p.8. (Maxwell also referred to this 'occasionally foreign designers have been engaged in Belfast.' p.4.) PRONI: COM/26/1/14.

<sup>10</sup> Evidence of Captain W. Turnbull, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1934, p.4, Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, PRONI: COM/26/1/8.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid, p.1.

<sup>12</sup> The commercial artist Ashley Havinden recalled his design work with Edinburgh Weavers where Morton had reassured him that it was his and his assistants' job to find a technical way of interpreting Havinden's designs into weaving. Havinden quoted in Jackson, P.74.

<sup>13</sup> Jackson, L. *Alastair Morton and Edinburgh Weavers*, p.9.

<sup>14</sup> Evidence of Charles Tennyson, Chairman of Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British Industries, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1934, p.11, Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, PRONI: COM/26/1/8.

<sup>15</sup> Norman Fitzroy Webb in a lecture entitled "The Training of Textile Designers", to The Textile Institute, Peebles, 17<sup>th</sup> June 1938, reprinted in the *Irish Textile Journal*, August 1938, pp.6-7.

<sup>16</sup> Evidence of Charles Tennyson, Op. Cit. p.14.

<sup>17</sup> the Cotton Industry in Northern Ireland was comparatively small but growing as a result of unstable and usually increasing flax prices. The Census of Production of Northern Ireland recorded 1,187 persons employed in 1930, with a value of household articles and handkerchiefs at £420,000 and £486,000 respectively. The scope for design was excellent as a large proportion were printed or embroidered. *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, Government of Northern Ireland, 1935, p.12.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>19</sup> Many designs were purchased from England and abroad, but designs were also taken from English and foreign trade publications (Ibid, p.11). For example, The Old Bleach design library is well stocked with English language and foreign design publications such as *Etoffes et Tapis Etrangers: Exposition des Arts Decoratifs* by M.P. Verneuil, (1925) and Josef Pilgers' *Das Moderne Ornament* (1910-13). These resources acted as both inspiration (in a creative and practical sense), a method of training junior design studio staff and a means of keeping abreast of recent design developments.

<sup>20</sup> This subheading refers to (and differs from the similar subheading in Chapter 3) the reported low demand for designers in Northern Ireland yet the linen industry was still supplied by foreign design and designers.

<sup>21</sup> Major A.C. Herdman, who gave evidence along with J.A. Lowry and J. Maxwell, Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, p.2. PRONI: COM/26/1/14.

<sup>22</sup> Comparable to the cost of establishing a new damask weave pattern, Ernest Goodale, Warner & Sons, in a lecture 'Design and Manufacture', reprinted in the *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 4 April 1941, stated the cost of each

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engraved copper roller was £100, requiring a print run of 5000 yards of [cotton] fabric to achieve a good return. Taken from Boydell's endnotes, "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?", p.41.

<sup>23</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, Art Inspector for Cheshire, Cumbria and Lancashire, p.20. Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, PRONI: COM/26/1/2.

<sup>24</sup> J.F. Hunter, p.26. PRONI: COM/26/1/15.

<sup>25</sup> The American etiquette expert, Emily Post contributed the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild's campaign slogan, 'It's Impressively Correct' and wrote on the seemingly endless and mainly social, benefits of Irish and Scottish table linen. Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild's Catalogue, 1929. Alfred S. Moore Collection, Central Library, Belfast.

<sup>26</sup> The report made clear it was not in the position to question the prudence of such an approach but expressed doubt over the future stability of the damask trade. *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, Government of Northern Ireland, 1935, p.17.

<sup>27</sup> See P. Sykas on the longevity of textile patterns in *The Secret Life of Textiles: Six Pattern Book Archives in North West England*, 2005.

<sup>28</sup> In the Nineteenth Century, 43 Old Bleach damask patterns were registered with the Board of Trade from 1875-1883. The National Archives, Kew. BT44/30/296994 – BT44/30/407772.

<sup>29</sup> J. Maxwell, p.8. PRONI: COM/26/1/14.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid, p.8

<sup>31</sup> Ibid, p.11.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid, p.8.

<sup>33</sup> "Where Linen Went in 1937" reported 45% UK home market, 22.21% USA, 13.47% British Dominions, 8.76% other Countries, 5.47% China, 4.99% Latin America. Statistics published in *Trade Review of Northern Ireland*, 1937. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Central Library, Belfast.

<sup>34</sup> J. Maxwell, Op. Cit. p.17.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, p.3.

<sup>37</sup> Letter from Reginald Mills in reply to an article entitled "Designing for the Retailer", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, 5<sup>th</sup> July 1935.

<sup>38</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, p.19. PRONI: COM/26/1/2.

<sup>39</sup> 'The Reaction of low status and remuneration on the type of training provided for designers.', *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, pp.18-19.

<sup>40</sup> Boydell used Captain Turnbull's statistics, from a 1935 article published in the *Journal of Careers*, to convey the source of designs as 42% from studio staff of textile works, 13% from English commercial studios, 42% from the Continent and 3% from free-lance designers. Boydell, C. "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?", p.29.

<sup>41</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, p.5 (of fifty pages of dense and illuminating evidence), PRONI: COM/26/1/2. The 1930s saw a dramatic surge in scientific research, see Chapter 1 for a relevant discussion on its impact on the linen industry.

<sup>42</sup> Industrial Art Committee, Minutes of Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February 1935. PRONI: COM/26.

<sup>43</sup> St. Gall (Gallen) established in 1863, began to specifically collect pattern samples for local manufacturers to serve as models for production and to cultivate 'good taste'. Today, its Special Collections comprise over 2,000 sample books of machine embroidery (from mainly Swiss companies) and the library has one copy of "Linen Embroidery and Drawn Fabric Work: A Collection of Articles Dealing with the Above and Kindred Subjects", J.D. Rolleston, editor of *The Embroideress*, published jointly by the Old Bleach Linen Company and the linen thread firm J. Pearsall.

<sup>44</sup> There is no evidence in Government papers, Belfast College of Technology records, trade journals or local press that a local DIA branch office was even mooted. However, a membership list in the DIA records in the Archive of Art and Design, London, includes the Old Bleach Linen Company (N.F. Webb), no other firm from Northern Ireland is listed. "List of Members to March 1947." AAD3/20/1978.

<sup>45</sup> Roland Nugent, the Committee's Chairman during Evidence of J.F. Hunter, p.32. PRONI: COM/26/1/15.

<sup>46</sup> "Mainly Personal", industry profile on R.J. Woods, *Irish Textile Journal*, Vol.4, No.7, July 1938, p.8.

<sup>47</sup> There is scope for further study in this area of textile design. It is likely that designers from important Continental textile centres, such as Plauen and Krefeld, had been persuaded over to the still prosperous Irish Linen trade in the late nineteenth century.

<sup>48</sup> A synopsis of the Board of Trade's Report is in the N.I. Industrial Art Committee Files, Countries considered: USA, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, Italy, The Netherlands, Hungary, Japan, Czecho-Slovakia, Switzerland and Austria (although France is not included); Key areas considered: training of designers and craftsmen; art training for management and selling staff; Art Schools, Industry and Modern trends in design: general system of co-operation; relations of industry with art and technical schools; connection between art schools and technical institutes; exhibitions, modern trends etc.; contact with foreign industrial design; training and qualification of teachers; the state and industrial art training; art students and industry (practical work and placement service); salary and status; origin of design; films and publications. PRONI: COM/26/1/18.

<sup>49</sup> N.F. Webb, "The Training of Textile Designers", Op. Cit. p.6.



- <sup>50</sup> Evidence of Captain Turnbull, p.8. PRONI: COM/26/1/8.
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid, p.9.
- <sup>52</sup> Synopsis of the Board of Trade's Report, "Industry and Art Education on the Continent". PRONI: COM/26/1/18.
- <sup>53</sup> Lancashire figures were supplied to the Committee by the Inspector of Arts Schools in that area, F.C. Stone. Report of the Committee on Industrial Art N.I., p.18.
- <sup>54</sup> Roland Nugent, Chairman, during evidence of Charles Tennyson, Chairman of Industrial Art Committee of the Federation of British Industries, 18<sup>th</sup> June 1934, Committee of Inquiry into the Position of Industrial Art in Northern Ireland, PRONI: COM/26/1/8.
- <sup>55</sup> Report of the Committee on Industrial Art, p.18.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid, p.18.
- <sup>57</sup> By 1959, the Design Department's salaries' bill stood at £2,339 for six members of staff with the head designer (Lindsay) on £900 per annum. J.L. Lindsay leaves the company in 1959 and is replaced by Harold Smith who was a member of the Design Department since 1955. Salaries Accounts Ledger, Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.
- <sup>58</sup> Boydell includes the status of women textile designers in "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?" and more fully in the essay, "Women Textile Designers in the 1920s and 1930s: Marion Dorn, a Case Study" in *A View from the Interior: Feminism, Women and Design* edited by Judy Attfield and Pat Kirkham, 1989, as does Jill Seddon and Suzette Worden (eds.) in *Designing Women: Redefining Design in Britain Between the Wars, 1994*, Jill Seddon in "Mentioned, but Denied Significance: Women Designers and the 'Professionalisation' of Design in Britain c. 1920-1951" *Gender & History*, Vol.12, No.2, July 2000, pp.426-447.
- <sup>59</sup> N.F. Webb of Old Bleach during the evidence of R. A. Dawson, P.4, PRONI: COM/26/1/6.
- <sup>60</sup> See Jill Seddon's point on 'pseudo-inclusion' in "Mentioned, but Denied Significance: Women Designers and the 'Professionalisation' of Design in Britain c. 1920-1951", p.444.
- <sup>61</sup> Although difficult to substantiate, Webb could be referring to Jean MacGreggor. She was working at Old Bleach during the 1930s and one charming nursery design of printed linen is attributed to her; 'Winnie the Pooh' (1936). The iconic 'Penguin' design was produced around the same time but is attributed to 'Old Bleach Studio'. It is stylistically similar but unrecorded as to its designer, however, Heal's fabric sample books record her as the designer. MacGreggor, discussed in Chapter 2, had trained at the RCA, London and returned to Belfast around 1933-34 when she became a member of the Belfast art group 'Ulster Unit', exhibiting and selling pots in their only exhibition in 1934.
- <sup>62</sup> This subheading is presumptuously borrowed from a sub heading in the lecture by Norman Fitzroy Webb, "The Training of Textile Designers", Op. Cit.
- <sup>63</sup> Ibid. p.6.
- <sup>64</sup> R.J. Woods during the evidence of Captain W. Turnbull, p.6. PRONI: COM/26/1/8.
- <sup>65</sup> Ibid, p.7.
- <sup>66</sup> "Training Textile Designers", Extracts from Memoranda by Lennox Lea, *Art and Industry*, April 1936, p.166.
- <sup>67</sup> R.J. Woods during the Evidence of J.F. Hunter, p.38. PRONI: COM/26/1/15.
- <sup>68</sup> Ibid, p.7.
- <sup>69</sup> Moygashel (Stevenson's, Dungannon) were often the only other Northern Irish linen company to feature in contemporary publications like the export journal *International Textiles* and the fashion magazine *Vogue*. Like Old Bleach, they also manufactured a very wide range of linen goods but it was their dress linens that caught magazines' attention. This is another very interesting linen company who have escaped proper academic interest, probably due to an absence of sufficient archival material. There is in existence a small 'archive' of materials relating to the company, compiled by ex-employees. In addition, local historian Mona Wylie has written a book, *Moygashel Mills, a Brief History*, 2007.
- <sup>70</sup> Sales staff in particularly lucrative regions, such as South East England, could earn annual salaries of £600 with commission. Old Bleach Minute Book, 1938. Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.
- <sup>71</sup> Opening Address from W.H. Webb, Randalstown Conference, July 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> 1929, tucked into the rear of an Old Bleach Price List for 1929. Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.
- <sup>72</sup> Boydell, Op. Cit. p.32.
- <sup>73</sup> Gordon Grey, "Designer and Manufacturer", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, 15 June 1935, p.442.
- <sup>74</sup> "Payment for Designs", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, 8 June 1935, p.388.
- <sup>75</sup> Evidence of F.C. Stone, p.49. PRONI: COM/26/1/2.
- <sup>76</sup> Allan Walton, "Furnishing Textiles", *Journal of the Royal Society of Arts*, 4 January 1935, p.168.
- <sup>77</sup> Gordon Grey, Op. Cit. p.442.
- <sup>78</sup> Summary by Alfred S. Moore of a lecture on "Style, Fashion and Modernity in Textile Design" by R.A. Dawson (Manchester School of Art), delivered before The Textile Institute, Irish Section, Municipal College of Technology, Belfast. No date is cited but it is likely to be May 1934, the time of Dawson giving evidence at the Industrial Art Committee. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Central Library, Belfast.
- <sup>79</sup> N.F. Webb, "The Training of Textile Designers", Op. Cit. p.7.

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<sup>80</sup> A number of efforts were made to attract exhibitions of industrial art to Northern Ireland, but were stymied by poor judgement and timing. The first attempt involved Arthur Deane from the Belfast Municipal Museum and Art Gallery who claimed the Museum's Committee rejected it on the grounds of prices attached to objects (as discussed in Chapter 2) and later in October 1937, when the Art Advisory Council requested the loan of the RIBA travelling exhibition, "Exhibition of Everyday Things", learned it had been 'broken up and distributed', and therefore no longer available.

<sup>81</sup> *Report of the Committee in Industrial Art*, p.8.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>83</sup> 'Tendencies in Fabric Design by Ten Well Known Buyers', *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, 4 May 1935, pp.181-185.

<sup>84</sup> *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, Government of Northern Ireland, 1935, p.8.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>87</sup> Woods during the Evidence hearing of J.F. Hunter, p.27, PRONI: COM26/1/15.

<sup>88</sup> Woods wrote the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Commerce, G.H.E. Parr in 1937 expressing concern and seeking an explanation over the absence of a textile designer on the newly formed Art Advisory Council. Parr (after conferring with Andrew Bonaparte Wyse, Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Education) explained the Ministry's desire to keep the council membership compact and Norman Fitzroy Webb, director and head of design at Old Bleach, would satisfy both areas of textile manufacture and design on the council. Art Advisory Council File, PRONI: COM/62/1/588.

<sup>89</sup> Opening Address from W.H. Webb, Randalstown Conference, July 2<sup>nd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> 1929, tucked into the rear of an Old Bleach Price List for 1929. Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, Private Collection.

<sup>90</sup> Digest of Evidence, PRONI: COM26/1/17.

<sup>91</sup> Digest of Evidence, PRONI: COM26/1/17.

<sup>92</sup> Patmore was hired by Old Bleach as a stylist and adviser and most likely for his bulging 'Wheeldex' (a forerunner to the 'Rolodex'); he was very well connected and it is almost certain Patmore was a client of W.S. Crawford, the leading Advertising Agency in London during the Interwar years who was responsible for much of Old Bleach's marketing.

<sup>93</sup> The exhibition "Industrial Art for the Slender Purse" was organized by the British Institute of Industrial Art in 1929 and held in the North Court of the Victoria and Albert Museum. Michael Farr in his mid-century survey, *Design in British Industry*, described it as a 'remarkable title' but it was a blatant appeal to the masses who might then understand well designed goods and inexpensive goods were not mutually exclusive. Farr, p.199.

<sup>94</sup> With the exception of the Art Inspector for Northern Ireland, J.F. Hunter, whose evidence was knowledgeable, up to date and wholly credible.

<sup>95</sup> Old Bleach had not explored the printed fabric market prior to their collaborations, in 1936, with well-known artists and designers such as Ronald Grierson, Paul Nash, Eva Crofts, Nicolas de Molas, Albert Rutherston, Diana Donnelly and Bernard Adeney.

<sup>96</sup> The Report covered three main areas of linen production in Northern Ireland that concerned itself with design: linen damask, dress linens and fancy linens. In each of these paragraph summaries, it was found that manufacturers were 'naturally diffident'. *Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, pp.16-17.

<sup>97</sup> Throughout the 1930s only the Old Bleach Linen Company and Belfast handkerchief manufacturer, Sefton's Ltd registered designs regularly. The Register of Designs also recorded occasional entries from Stevenson & Son Ltd (Moygashel) (2, class 13), Ireland Bros. Ltd (1, class 14), William Liddell (1, class 14), John Compton Ltd (6, class 13) and John Morrow & Co. Ltd (1, class 14). Board of Trade, Register of Designs, BT53/120 – BT53/128 The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>98</sup> "Art and Industry", *The Irish News*, May 18 1937.

<sup>99</sup> Exhibitions were the main focus and recommendation of The Gorrell Report, 1932.



## CHAPTER 5

### **The Linen Web(b): Promoting Irish Linen<sup>1</sup>**

Throughout the Interwar years in Britain, publicity took on a more ubiquitous role through a broad range of promotional activity: advertising, direct mail, packaging, demonstrations, publicity stunts, displays, collections and exhibitions all sought the attention of the consumer and it was hoped, the loosening of their purse strings. Organizations and manufacturers employed one or two methods of promotion while others, budget permitting, used the full range available to them. The rise in promotion during this period is commensurate with the rise in competing trade and traders, manufacturers' brands used advertising to gain competitive advantage over their rivals by differentiating their products and department stores used a number of methods to distinguish themselves from the competition of the emerging chain stores. The number of British advertising agencies grew alongside American agencies opening offices in London such as J. Walter Thompson (JWT) in 1919.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, Britain was caught between American and Continental stylistic influences, the former characterized by unfettered hyperbole and the latter for its avant-garde experiments in simplicity, abstraction and asymmetry.<sup>3</sup> The essence and *image* of modernity was captured through visual and textual narratives that appealed to the new middle classes with developing tastes and more importantly, increased spending power. The state also harnessed the potential of publicity, through organizations as The Empire Marketing Board, Empire Exhibitions at home and abroad and international expositions. Philip Taylor's 1981 book, *The Projection of Britain: British overseas publicity and propaganda 1919-1939* is structured by reference to its variable forms: political, commercial and cultural propaganda. Taylor observes how different government departments *valued* propaganda, the Foreign Office argued cultural and commercial publicity were mutually complementary and 'one means of salvaging something of benefit from the decline in world trade' whereas the Treasury saw it as an expensive substitute for good government.<sup>4</sup>

Design reform quickly established a series of approaches to persuade the consumer of the merits of well-designed goods. Exhibitions and fairs, graphic design and a rise in strong branding were all persuasive conduits of modern living. Exhibitions and fairs could attract huge numbers to survey carefully curated artefacts that educated the visitor, reassured them of their nationhood or simply promised and (mostly) delivered a good day out. Empire exhibitions were symbols of immoderate territorial greatness while more modest exhibitions with an industrial art theme aimed to persuade the public *not* in consuming more but consuming better. Patronage too played a critical role in building a network of well-connected consumers, for example, Irish linen was regularly gifted to royalty by the people of Northern Ireland and *to aristocracy from aristocracy*. Old Bleach nurtured relationships with London's high society by engaging key professionals with extensive contact lists, offering a bespoke service and giving glamorous launch parties. This important network is discussed further in the chapter.

Evaluating the *benefits* of promotion, publicity and propaganda in all sectors continually offer challenges to the historian but it is clear they were extensively utilized between the wars and can offer insights into social, cultural and political aspiration, or even survival, in the modern world. In relation to the core research question of why we know so little about design and designing in the linen trade, this chapter aims to identify if the promotion of linen was an allied or divergent activity of design reform for linen merchants. In investigating any form of material culture, in this case Irish linen, its visual and material representation in a number of contexts can help in placing the product's legitimacy, status and longevity, especially in the face of emerging competition from new tastes and fibres. By the end of the Great War, Irish Linen's fortunes had endured a considerable pounding from internal constraints and dramatic shifts in world-wide markets. Linen needed a new image. Although its traditional image of a hand-woven product of distinctly Irish agrarian origin was still surprisingly reassuring (if misleading) to consumers, steadily declining sales signalled industry contraction. The iconography of Irish linen promotion utilised a narrow range of emblems such as the shamrock, Celtic spirals, trinity knots, flax flowers, the Irish harp and outdoor pastoral scenes of improbable edenic simplicity. Even Old Bleach largely abandoned such visual formulae after the war, in favour of a more sophisticated marketing approach that reflected and targeted the market position it wanted to join: a modern, urbane and affluent market.<sup>5</sup>



Fig. 5.1 Old Bleach Advertising: Pre-War examples incorporate the Irish harp and the bleaching green. Left: c. 1900-1905; middle: *Woman at Home Supplement*, 1913; right: *Decoration*, January 1935. Source: left and middle: Collection of Author; right: Manchester Metropolitan University.

In Fig. 5.1 the early advertisement from c.1900 is text heavy and displays a single indicative product (of over 200 varieties and designs of towels<sup>6</sup>), 'The Sun Bleaches "Old Bleach" Linens' from 1913 is probably the best-known image associated with the company and one can see why; crepuscular rays and stretched white linen webs reach into the four corners of the composition, it is a joyous fictive scene of nature, industry and graphic art coalesced. By 1935, Old Bleach's advertisements focus on the modern-ness of their fabrics, in this example designs from the Old Bleach Studio (left) and H.G. Hayes Marshall (right)

rather than their provenance or production. Less romantic perhaps but employ the argot and chunky style of the modern age.

This chapter examines the range of promotional activity the Irish linen industry employed throughout the interwar period across distinct sectors and markets in the United Kingdom and its most important market, the United States, and qualitatively evaluates whether reputational impact was obtained and if design was used as a distinct selling point. Linen was represented in Industrial Art exhibitions and lectures, trade and commercial exhibitions of modern design, empire exhibitions, marketing campaigns aimed at the home and foreign markets and the contemporary general and design press. This chapter will show its ubiquity and how challenging trading conditions became for the industry. A good example of this was where consumers of linen were regularly asked to support local industry by *buying local* products, it was an explicit appeal to one's patriotism and a tacit bid to keep linen sales healthy. An advertisement by Belfast linen manufacturer and merchant, Robinson and Cleaver Ltd., in 1917 with a copy line 'Support Home Industries', urged customers to 'spend your money at home and so help keep down imports into the country. This is not only a duty, it is a matter of self-protection. Practically all Robinson and Cleaver products are manufactured at home from materials obtained from within the United Kingdom. Their linens are recognised as the best for a generation, and are offered at manufacturers' direct prices, thus saving you the middleman's profit. Write to-day for Illustrated Catalogue of Household Linens, Fancy Linens, Towels, Handkerchiefs, etc.

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**Buy Linens Direct**

**TABLE LINEN.**—Linen Damask Table Cloths, size 2 x 2 yards, 8/11, 11/9, 12/9 each; 2 x 2 yards, 11/1, 14/6, 17/3 each; 2 x 2 yards, 13/4, 15/9, 20/9 each; 2 x 2 yards, 19/2, 23/11 each; 2 x 2 yards, 22/-, 25/6, 28/- each. Linen Damask Table Napkins to match, size 21 x 24 inches, 12/6, 16/3, 19/7 per dozen.

**BED LINEN.**—Linen Sheets, size 2 x 3 yards, 3/4, 3/6, 4/10 per pair; 2 x 3 yards, 4/10, 4/6, 5/6 per pair; 2 x 3 yards, 4/6, 5/6, 5/8 per pair. Linen Pillow Cases, 21 x 20 inches, 3/6, 3/10 per dozen; 22 x 22 inches, 4/6, 4/8 per dozen; 22 x 22 inches, 4/6, 4/8 per dozen; 22 x 22 inches, 4/6, 4/8 per dozen.

**TOWELS.**—Grass-bleached Linen Huck Towels (Hemstitched), size 21 x 41 inches, 2/6, 2/9; 21 x 41 inches, 2/6, 2/9; 27 x 41 inches, 3/6, 3/9 per dozen.

**HANDKERCHIEFS.**—Ladies' Fine Linen Handkerchiefs, with Hand-embroidered Initial, per dozen, 9/3 and 12/-; Gentlemen's Fine Linen Hemstitched Handkerchiefs, with any Hand-embroidered Initial, per dozen, 11/3; Khaki Military Handkerchiefs, per dozen, 2/1 to 6/11.

**Robinson & Cleaver**  
LONDON BELFAST GLASGOW

Fig. 5.2 Robinson & Cleaver "Support Home Industries" Advertisement, 1917. Source: Grace's Guide to British Industrial History.

Typical of newsprint advertising style of the period, the textual treatment mimics the layout in newspaper columns with minimal pictorial representation; here the aesthetic and material attributes of the linen product are subordinated in favour of economic and political rationality. Advertising, in the United

Kingdom at least, had yet to fully exploit the tool-kit of psychological chicanery that the United States were already proficient in, as Roland Marchand has called them 'new ways to play on our anxieties and to promise solace for the masses' by employing 'uncontradicted visual clichés and moral parables.'<sup>7</sup>

### 5.1 Irish Linen Promotional Initiatives: The Irish Linen Society (1919-1921)

The forming of The Irish Linen Society (henceforth ILS) in 1919 and the Irish Linen Guild (henceforth ILG) in 1928 to act as 'associations of an uplift rather than an executive nature' representing the whole Ulster linen industry signalled an organized and collective attempt to remind consumers of linen's unique attributes.<sup>8</sup> The ILS was short lived (collapsing in 1921) but managed to orchestrate a two years long campaign of activities and press in linen's main market, North America, appearing in a number of mainstream magazines as *Life* (1883-1936) *Vogue* (1892-), *The Ladies Home Journal* (1883-) and *The Century* (1881-1930) and promotional displays in the larger stores in the United States and Canada.



Fig. 5.3 Left: Detail of the General Office of the Irish Linen Society, Belfast, showing advertising display boards. The poster just seen is of 'Polly-Anna Underwear', available in "'True Irish Linen', lovely silks or from such an attractive line of cottons.", Chas E. Shedaker & Sons, Philadelphia. Photograph by A.R. Hogg, photographic specialist, Belfast. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library. Right: Polly-Anna full page advertisement in *The Ladies Home Journal*, March 1920, p.44, artwork by E. C. Stoner. Source: Etsy.

The ILS succeeded the Irish Linen Merchants' Association, its president W.H. Webb of Old Bleach, then took on the chairmanship of the Linen Society. Webb was a perfect choice for representing the selling end of the business, he had been regularly crossing the pond since 1909<sup>9</sup> where Old Bleach maintained a New York office and published widely on linen, 'Being of the opinion that "selling" in the Linen Trade,



including that of our own business was not all it should be. I personally, for several years gave up a considerable portion of my time to visiting distributors in Great Britain, the United States of America, Canada and elsewhere, with a view to studying distribution generally and finding out how we might better serve our customers.'<sup>10</sup> Enamoured by America's enlightened business practices and go-ahead mentality, Webb with a daemonic ambition strove to apply them to every aspect of linen production, distribution and consumption, 'I run my place on the American system, which may be described as the German system humanized.'<sup>11</sup> He was, in his own words, "the principal mouthpiece" of Irish Linen propaganda and it was no surprise that the United States would be the recipient of such a sustained campaign with a projected costing of \$120,000 over a four-year period.<sup>12</sup>



Fig. 5.4 Left: "For Formal Use", The Irish Linen Society, *The Century*, 1919. Right: "For Beauty", The Irish Linen Society, *Vogue*, 1920. Source: ProQuest.

The press campaign asserted a number of bold (and specious) claims for linen, 'There is no substitute for linen' and 'the scarcity only enhances its value in the minds of those who know and appreciate perfection in taste and quality'. Published in magazines with an educated and importantly affluent audience already familiar with linen, the advertisements connoted the symbolic properties associated with linen without any overt reference to the fabric itself. Described as incomparable, comfortable, luxurious *and* economical, it was immaterial if adverts contradicted themselves or offered no product detail. These suggestive tableaux showed how linen discreetly facilitated the leisured class, 'when people of good taste dine, True Irish Linen is spread to make a background worthy of the occasion.' Aimed at the White Anglo Saxon Protestant constituency, the campaign featured visual and graphic tropes alluding to an East Coast high society. Imposing domestic interiors of high ceilings, pilasters, chandeliers, neo classical mouldings with a fully dressed dining table (often of banquet proportions) are staffed by servants, gourmet picnics on the beach after a morning of sailing or more intimate scenes of the boudoir with the lady of the house (and presumably) her two daughters all dressed in white linen 'intimate wear' with the attending maid denoted

in those inviolable signifiers of servitude, a uniform of black dress with white frilled and starched collar and apron were all scenes redolent of what Thorstein Veblen called 'conspicuous leisure'.<sup>13</sup> The campaign approach was devised to remind affluent and possibly nostalgic or romantic Americans of the dependability of 'True Irish Linen' to maintain an established etiquette. Its additional messages of product authenticity and temporary scarcity would reassure customers of linen's integrity. As a campaign, it assiduously avoided specific products and their design features, no damask patterns or stitching and embellishment details are conveyed and thereby identifiable. Formalistically, the pictorial elements are illustrated and would have precluded the rendering of product details, and we see this change with the popularity of photography in commercial art later in the 1920s, with the medium's rising credibility. Appealing to a largely conservative consumer meant safe and indistinct product lines. The concept of modernity as a strategy is abandoned in favour of tradition, where old American money (as an institution) had no truck with the latest fashions in table ware. In effect, this kept linen firms producing the same tried and tested patterns; in a period of post war recovery most linen manufacturers understandably endured with known best sellers such as 'Rose Pattern' and classical motifs in the 'Adam style' of scrolls, urns, festoons and medallions. As David Johnson has observed because Ulster specialized in medium to fine linens (essentially luxuries) it *needed* affluent customers,<sup>14</sup> regardless of their stylistic preferences. This also locked manufacturers into creative torpor, stymied by a market resistant to the experimental and novel.

The debate on the old-fashioned designs of Irish linens had been around since before the war, the *Irish Textile Journal* in 1907 had reported on the New York market identifying artistic disparity between Irish and Continental designs. At the Tariff Commission in 1905, Irish firms were in the firing line for continually recycling old patterns whereas the French were regarded as more naturally willing to produce fresh work, the Belfast linen bleacher and merchant, John Frazer asserted, 'They produce a new and artistic design where we have been content to go on with the old one, but that is largely because we have no security in laying out our money in producing a new one.'<sup>15</sup> It was not until well after the war that a more co-ordinated strategy to compete with foreign textile trades was considered. In a confidential letter to the not yet Prime Minister of Northern Ireland James Craig, W.H. Webb outlined a four-point structural approach that included 'Propaganda on Irish Linen with a Trade Mark which would be so fully established by the time Germany tried to come back to the American market that she would be effectually blocked.'<sup>16</sup> Although a strategy, of sorts, was outlined, it was not until later in the 1920s that new designs were launched on the American market. By then, the ILS was replaced with two promotional bodies, the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild to serve the American markets (including Canada) and the Irish Linen Guild to operate in the home market.

## **5.2 The Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild (1926-1932 and 1934-1939)**

Since the war, the American markets, although still comparatively large and important to the linen trade, had shown yearly reductions. However, in linen piece goods alone, the United States had imported from

the United Kingdom 390 million yards valued at \$158 million dollars with annual shipments from Belfast to New York of six to seven million yards. The market was worth preserving. In 1925, from a report researched and written by 'salesmen resident in New York and representatives of Belfast and Scottish houses'<sup>17</sup> a United States damask publicity campaign was inaugurated by the Irish Linen Merchant's Association with the support from the Irish (53.26%) and Scottish (13.11%) trades, the Government of Northern Ireland (27.89%), the Irish Linen Society (although by then defunct, 2.86%) and the banks (2.88%). Financed by £61,000 for the period 1926-27, the campaign's main purpose was to regain the prestige of linen damask in the American markets.<sup>18</sup> The publicity was orchestrated out by The Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild (ISLDG), a New York based organisation focussed exclusively on the linen damask trade in North America (although the Executive Board was based in Belfast).

The Guild secured first class professional New York companies to organise the campaign. The Paul L. Cornell Company looked after the advertising and marketing leg of the campaign while Riis and Bonner were in charge of publicity with Julien Elfenbein (editor of the respected New York trade journal 'Linens and Domestic') oversaw editorial and promotional material.<sup>19</sup> The Cornell agency compiled a six point strategy comprising advertising in national magazines, co-operation with retail stores and laundries, window displays, trade paper advertising, direct mail (to linen buyers) and publicity in articles written as if they were editorials. In mitigating a *full* strategy for the Guild, they incorporated a lengthy quotation from the freshly published thesis by O.H. Cheney 'The Answer to the New Competition' (1927), who baldly stated 'the modern commercial and trade association must be something more than instinctive and primitive cooperative action.'<sup>20</sup> The overarching concept for the campaign was based on the slogan 'Linen Damask: Impressively Correct', appealing to the socially conscious consumer where for example, the austere correctness of the 'drop' of a cloth for a formal (or informal) dinner setting was of paramount social importance.<sup>21</sup> Whether 'correctness' would appeal to the mass market had yet to be determined.

The agency had identified approximately 43,000 dry goods retail and department stores in the country; 23,000 of which were 'responsible from a financial standpoint but not all possible outlets for linen', it was concluded the campaign should 'concentrate on a reasonable number of these stores...where we feel would be resultful.'<sup>22</sup> The retail store played an integral role in the success of keeping linen sought after by the customer and translating that desire into sales, 'we must keep in mind that it is the woman of the household with sufficient income to satisfy some of her desire for linens.'<sup>23</sup> Albert Adams from Derryvale Genuine Irish Linens, who knew the U.S. market well, had written an open letter to the Irish linen industry in November 1925 counselling on the strategic and critical co-operation of retail stores (also known in the trade as 'Dealer Helps'), 'if you meet the retailer in a fair way and give proper co-operation he is willing to do his share.'<sup>24</sup>

Special linen events and sales promotion were arranged with stores across the country. A number of linen experts travelled throughout the 'better cities' where upstanding female members of the community would be educated on 'the use of table linens and proper laying of the table.'<sup>25</sup> Fig. 5.5 shows a typical Guild & store collaboration, Miss Mary King Hunter lectured on 'The Physchology [sic] of Color as Applied to Table Decoration' to a Kalamazoo audience of invited ladies' groups including the Ladies Library Association and the Visiting Nurses Guild of First Presbyterian Church. Notably, Old Bleach Linens are (just seen) featured as the only discrete brand within this advertisement, The Guild proudly published store testimonials in the members' magazine, *The Linen Guildsman* to demonstrate campaign success.<sup>26</sup> A letter from the department store La Salle and Koch in Toledo, Ohio, declared, 'I consider it one of the finest promotional events that we have ever held in the store... Mr. Koch insists that she (Miss King Hunter) return for the first week in October for the opening of our new linen section and also the first fall meeting of the Women's Club in Toledo.'<sup>27</sup>

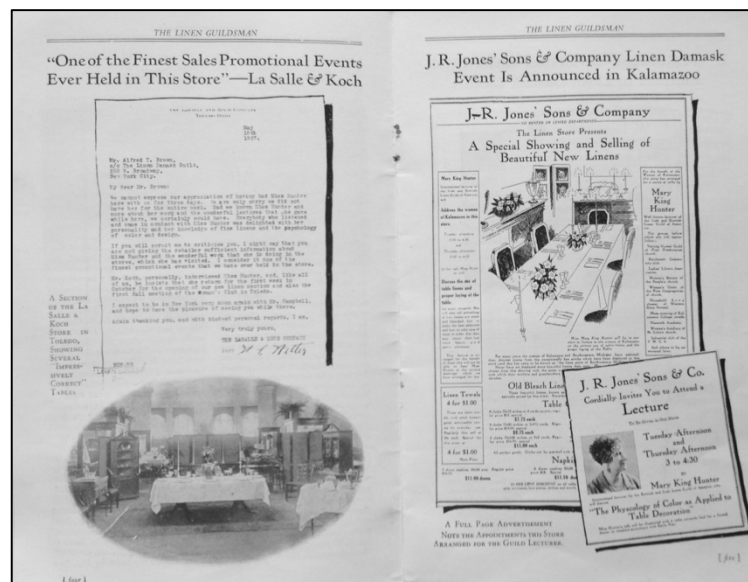


Fig. 5.5 *The Linen Guildsman*, July 1927. Note the inclusion of Old Bleach Linen in the J.R. Jones' Sons & Company advertisement. Source: John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Department stores could also be supplied with window display material including large 'camera paintings' (photographs) and show cards. The shop window was considered the premier showcase for goods and the linen industry were troubled by linen goods being inched away from window and ground floor displays and relegated to first floor sections in favour of novelty fashions in clothing. A number of dedicated linen stores and large department stores like Macy's and Bloomingdale's continued to find new ways to display linen goods. *The Linen Guildsman* included an example in June 1927 of the famous McCutcheon's Linen Store, New York, showing damasks of modern design and claimed, 'these linen damask windows were so fascinating, many smart women stepped out of their cars on Fifth Avenue to join the throngs who stood



studying the exhibits.’<sup>28</sup> The Guild’s ‘co-operation’ with retail stores came at an annual cost of \$3,000, a modest sum when compared with the proposed print advertising (see table 5.6).

National magazines that appealed to a particular demographic would host many of the Guild advertisements. With a slogan of “Linen Damask: Impressively Correct”, the print advertising was the most expensive element of the campaign but with a national reach could target large population numbers, strategically they selected ‘national magazines of a better grade where the greatest portion of the circulation is going to the better cities’, that way readers could actually buy the merchandise from well stocked large stores.<sup>29</sup> Two distinct categories were identified and targeted, ‘Class Media’ and ‘Mass Media’. The ‘Class Media’ group was estimated as comprising approximately 800,084 women ‘each of whom is a leader in her community’, while the ‘Mass Media’ had a smaller reach of 765,310 women. The former category would target magazines such as *Vogue*, *Harper’s Bazar*, *House & Garden* and *The New Yorker* and the latter aimed at hugely popular monthlies like *Woman’s Own Companionship* and *Good Housekeeping*.<sup>30</sup>

| <b>Circulation</b>      | <b>Magazine</b>        | <b>Coverage</b>  | <b>Cost</b>            |
|-------------------------|------------------------|--|------------------------|
| 130,654                 | Vogue                  | 9 full pages at \$1,140 each   | \$10,260               |
| 130,825                 | House & Garden         | 2 full pages at \$950 each<br>4 half pages at \$475 each               | \$3,800                |
| 1,873,150               | Women’s Home Companion | 6 Insertions of 224 lines =<br>two thirds of a page at \$2,576 each    | \$15,456               |
| 1,095,876               | Good Housekeeping      | 2 full pages of colour at \$4,200 each<br>4 half pages at \$2,280 each | \$17,520               |
| 90,000                  | Harper’s Bazar         | 2 full pages at \$1,000 each<br>6 half pages at \$500 each             | \$5,000                |
| 67,823                  | House Beautiful        | 2 pages at \$700 each<br>4 half pages at \$350 each                    | \$2,800                |
| <b>Total: 3,388,326</b> |                        |  | <b>Total: \$54,836</b> |

Table 5.6 Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild, Cost of National U.S. Magazine Advertising Program, 1926-27.  
Source: John Gilliland’s guard book of Guild activity, LIRA, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

The ‘class media’ advertisements, with names like ‘Perfect’ and ‘The Mystery of Loveliness’ used a range of photography and illustration. In the ‘The Mystery of Loveliness’ the agency asserted a different approach from a detailed photograph by using, Kemp Starrett, a well-known New York illustrator ‘of unusual charm and excellence.’<sup>31</sup>



Fig. 5.7 'The Mystery of Loveliness', November 1927.  
Source: John Gilliland's guard book, ISLDG, LIRA Library,  
Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

The agency claimed two departures in this example from the usual advertising approach. They relaxed the emphasis on the correctness of linen damask and 'made a plea on the basis of the beauty and loveliness of damask as a table covering' and used Kemp's drawing in the medium of charcoal to capture 'with admirable warmth and softness the charm of a dinner set on linen damask.'<sup>32</sup> The copy describes a dinner guest induced into a hypnagogic state by 'soft smooth whiteness of the linen damask... the unerring choice not only of your hostess, but of generations of distinguished hostesses.'<sup>33</sup> Similar in spirit to the earlier campaign of The Irish Linen Society with its elliptical narrative of patrician society, it only hinted at modernity through the sartorial simplicity of the female diners' fashionable flapper dress, jewellery and marcel waved hair. Once again, the product disappears under a haze of decorum, here in both a literal and metaphorical sense. The 1920s saw a populist revival in correct social conduct, although contemporary commentators noted a general decline in social behaviour, which some put down to prohibition.<sup>34</sup> None the less, magazines like *Modes and Manners* and books, especially the best-selling *Etiquette* by the authority on social mores, Emily Post, taught the masses how to negotiate modern social terrain.<sup>35</sup>

Astutely, the agency hired Post to write a 'charming' forward in the Guild Book, "We Dine on Linen Damask" available by mail from the Guild offices in New York. The copy "The Table Proclaims the Hostess" is framed as a quotation from her book, *Etiquette: The Blue Book of Social Usage* (1922), and aimed at the mass media. The agency described the advertising concept of a hostess who is 'young and well bred, without being over-dressed and too sophisticated. She is the type of person we believe, from

a study of editorial illustrations, the average reader of these magazines would like to be.<sup>36</sup> This aspirational tone signalled a positioning of the product to a more youthful and fashion conscious consumer. By the following year, the campaign adopted a more assertively *moderne* style in layout and content (Fig. 5.8).



Fig. 5.8 Left: "Suitably suited to the Modern Table", *Vogue*, October 1928. Right: "Linen Damask: Loomed Luxury for the Table", *Vogue*, January 1930. Source: The *Vogue* Archive, ProQuest.

'Superbly suited to the **MODERN TABLE**', with its European inflected off-set layout, Ad man technique of repetitious textual copy of the 'smart younger crowd' and a highly-stylised rendering of modish gamine women in the company of effete men was aimed at American 'bright young things'.<sup>37</sup> However, the design of the cloth is readable (unlike the earlier ILS campaign), a modern panelled cloth with individual pattern drops at each setting on a fashionably spare table dressing, noting in the copy, 'it no longer suffices that the table be correctly set.' By 1928, the Guild, building on the success of the initial damask campaign, was beginning to emphasise the modernity of designs and that perhaps the more youthful consumer was a market worth capturing. In the advertisement from 1930 (Fig. 5.8), we see a shift away from social dining intercourse to a display of a clothed but otherwise naked table. The attributes now are the physical properties of the cloth, a dramatic design shown unimpeded by the ornament of an (overly) dressed table. The users of the linen have now been subjugated, to a small scene set to one side by the most salient item and with familiar hyperbole claims, 'With consummate feeling for dynamic rhythms, *master weavers have created a design* of conventionalized irradiations and suggested shadows, ingeniously utilizing the dual tone of the fabric to an extraordinary brilliance of effect.'<sup>38</sup> Of course, the master weaver did not design the cloth; the designer did, but it was still early days for textile designers to be properly acknowledged,

unlike much of the Guild's advertising imagery which was regularly signed by its creators, such as Kemp Starrett and Fitz.<sup>39</sup>

With *The New York Times* headline "Irish Linen Drive Pays" (March 7, 1928), the late 1920s' campaign was considered, 'the most successful publicity scheme ever undertaken by the trade.'<sup>40</sup> At the first General Conference of linen damask manufacturers' salesmen, in conjunction with the ISLDG held at The Wool Club, New York in June 1927, a buoyant mood was felt but acknowledged that despite a successful publicity campaign, many problems remained unsolved, not least the issue of design, 'emphasis was laid on the urgent need of more modern damask designs';<sup>41</sup> W.H. Webb spoke at the conference,

I had no idea that in such a short time so much could be accomplished. There has not been time, however, for the full force of this publicity to become effective, this sort of thing develops slowly – but the time has come for the salesman to make the fullest possible use of it; through *their* enthusiasm to create enthusiasm in their *customers*. The best sales promotion work would be ineffective without the whole-hearted co-operation of the salesman, who have now a wonderful opportunity to improve their own position and that of the concerns for which they work.<sup>42</sup>

It was agreed much work was still to be achieved, the confidential report "A Linen Trade Publicity Effort" warned if the linen trade wanted to hold onto the lucrative American market, publicity needed to continue on a more ambitious scale to include *all* classes of linen goods and spread the coverage in to the Colonial, Dominion and home markets, 'as the trade is in every market faced with intensive propaganda in favour of other textiles'. An extended publicity campaign of four years was agreed upon and with that an increased budget of up to \$60,000 per annum was necessary.<sup>43</sup> With much at stake, a delegation of twenty one (spinners, bleachers, manufacturers and merchants) Irish and Scottish linen men from Belfast was sent out to study the movements of style and fashion in America so that 'they might catch the atmosphere which would enable them to further adapt and create specialities to replace those bulk staple goods which, for years before the war, kept the machinery humming.'<sup>44</sup> Their timing could not have been worse, hardly a month later Wall Street had crashed, prompting a world-wide depression and the worse kind of blow to a declining industry.

One of the first activities of the extended campaign was the hiring of style advisors to advise specifically on apparel lines, this design intelligence would enable linen to become more competitive. In the post war period, apparel linen's function had dramatically changed from under-skirting and interlinings to an outer fabric in itself, demonstrating abundant potential as a fashionable and versatile fabric choice for designers and consumers. This too pressed manufacturers into the research and development of crease resisting linen.<sup>45</sup>

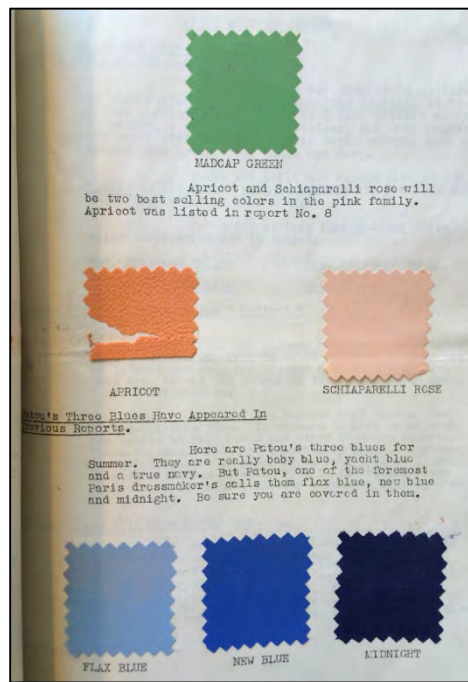


Fig. 5.9 Section of the Style Advisor's 9th Style Report on 'Last Minute News on the Colour Situation in Dress Linens for Summer 1932', February 1932. Published in *Lindaguild News*. Source: Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library.

Hired 'Style Advisor' Agatha Illava<sup>46</sup> sourced her style information from 'outstanding' silk houses, apparel buyers, stylists and cutters, forecasting magazines of fashion magazines and analysis of 'Paris advices'. Typical reports included fashions in linen for Palm Beach and Spring, 'advices from our Paris representative' and accounts from recent Paris openings, colour trends and discussion of the Irish linen handkerchief survey.<sup>47</sup> Advice was proffered on key trends and colours, in Fig. 5.9 Illava counsels, 'Here are [Jean] Patou's three blues for Summer. They are really baby blue, yacht blue and a true navy. But Patou, one of the foremost Paris dressmaker's [sic] calls them flax blue, new blue and midnight. Be sure you are covered in them.'<sup>48</sup> That Parisian couturiers' work, such as Elsa Schiaparelli and Jean Patou, were closely followed by the Linen Guild showed the trade's ambition to make significant advances in the apparel sector. The stylists not only gathered intelligence but also advised on creating dress linens acceptable to American fashion authorities by modulating à la mode Parisian style for American taste. It was not yet fully realized that paradoxically, it took a decline in damask demand that would open up new textile lines for linen manufacturers and fashion possessed a regular cycle that linen could satisfy, from Spring/Summer wear to year-round resort wear.

### 5.3 The Irish Linen Guild (1928 – Present)

The Belfast based Irish Linen Guild<sup>49</sup> was responsible for tackling the marketing for the overlooked home and Dominions market. Established in 1928, it took a year to convene a committee, organise industry conferences and undertake industry research to agree on a strategic approach to revitalising a flat home market. Its Director of Marketing and Publicity, John Gilliland, was a tireless advocate for and consummate



promoter of the industry, he ran his own company designing and manufacturing, from 1894, embroidered linens and specialising in ready-to-wear dress linens and had been organising prestigious linen events and exhibitions, for both his own company and the linen industry, on a national and international stage since 1897.<sup>50</sup>



Fig. 5.10 John Gilliland & Co. Catalogue Pages from 1925 and 1926. Left: Hand printed "Nil Crush" linens, 'Iriselle' frocks, Right: Hand blocked printed linen frocks. "special spacing of printing". Source: John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

His earlier promotional work had given him ample experience and confidence to propose radical new steps to widen the linen market in Great Britain and Ireland. Having re-organised the Irish Linen Industry exhibit and Ulster Pavilion at the British Empire Exhibition at Wembley, 1924/25, Gilliland was forthright in his position that the merchandising and promotion of linen was not good enough in the modern market. In his report on Wembley to the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, 'the system of merchandising as a whole had for years been quite pathetic and in some cases absolutely pathetic...bearing in mind competition.'<sup>51</sup> He was equally unequivocal over manufacturers' complacency, 'manufacturers evidently expected that each cloth would rise off the table in a white cloud, like some kind of textile "Pepper's Ghost" and proclaim its own virtues and quality to the family circle or assembled guests.'<sup>52</sup> As a result, Gilliland put forward a scheme for consideration by the Irish Linen Merchant's Association of a leaflet inserted with linen items so every woman becomes a 'real live missionary', with an assumption the purchaser would proselytize on behalf of the industry on the prescribed virtues of linen. It was a rudimentary approach and inadequate to make a difference. The home market from 1925 – 1929 was considered a buyer's market, 'distinctly difficult and unprofitable' for all. In a memorandum to members of the Guild in early 1929, Gilliland identified the main industry problems in relation to sales and promotion and cautioned 'publicity of any

kind will not by itself work miracles; other factors must also operate...market research must also be pursued in regard to new goods and new uses for linen; we must strike the modernity note much quicker than heretofore.<sup>53</sup>

In an effort to curb the opportunists' hunting ground, the Irish Linen Guild appealed to the membership and consulted with trade representatives for ideas and tactics.<sup>54</sup> The main proposals included all manufacturers produce 'standard quality' linens, capable of capturing a *mass* market, a Guild ticket attached to all standard goods to signify a guarantee of authenticity and fixed buying and selling prices. Among a number of meetings, a London conference was organised in July and August 1930 where it was agreed to proceed with the standard quality and a Guild ticket and although Gilliland was in favour of fixed buying and selling prices, the trade (both wholesale and retail) unanimously rejected the former but were tolerant on set selling prices.<sup>55</sup> The conference also raised the issue of consumer views and usage of linen, 'table cloths among private consumers have become more of a fashion than a staple' and the industry's attitude towards design, 'more attention necessary here in regard to design and popular price.' In particular, the representatives from the West End stores (incl. Harrods, Harvey Nichols, Derry & Toms, Waring's, Whiteley's) collectively recommended 'Irish makers to settle down on production, create novelty and variety, and leave selling to retailers.'<sup>56</sup> It was a robust and well-defined message that quality and volume (of samey goods) could no longer be a selling proposition; customers were applying new criteria and developing new tastes in their buying habits. The standard quality and Guild ticket were easy for the industry to resolve and quickly implemented. The thorny issue of design standards in the linen industry would rumble on (inconspicuously) until the intervention of Government in 1933 with the formation of the Industrial Art Committee.

In response to trade opinion, the Guild devised an ambitious propaganda blueprint with three key approaches administered in three phases: general mass attack in the national press (trade and consumer), localised publicity for the country buyer and shopping centres across the country and a 'zone system' of co-operative effort.



Fig. 5.11 'Standard lines to make easy sales' and 'Carrying the message to the Millions', Irish Linen Guild Retail Trade Brochure. Source: John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

Fig. 5.11 shows pages from the Guild's professionally produced brochure for retail traders, outlining the benefits of Guild support to retailers and explaining the concept of standardisation, after all, many of the suggestions for trade uplift came from them. The polished levels of graphic design, printing and packaging in the Guild's publicity material motivated trade buyers and retailers and inspired confidence in consumers. For the first time, the industry, albeit by necessity, was promoting itself as in control and unified. The first phase, beginning in September 1929, was a nine-month scheme in magazines such as *Britannia and Eve*, *Vogue* and *Good Housekeeping* introducing the standardised linen product, extolling the *affordability* of good quality Irish linen. It was a subtle departure from selling on the concept of quality alone; value had now become a modern imperative and the global economic aftershocks post-Wall Street would be felt soon enough.

National and regional newspapers were to play an important part in advertising special Irish linen weeks throughout the year. Functional in approach, the newspaper advertisements dispensed with emotive associations linen users might have with the goods and carried unembellished information on price, variety, quality and expertise. Price conscious consumers could cross reference local availability and compare at a glance. In Fig. 5.12, John Gilliland's handwritten caption below a full newsprint page reads, 'Type of publicity carried on over Gt Britain on behalf of the industry, and appearing in over 80 leading journals – over various zones – retail stores paying for own advt.'





Fig. 5.12 'Ireland's Lovely Linens: Opportunities for "House Proud" Women', *The Kentish Gazette and Canterbury Press*, March 10, 1934. Source: ILG Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

The accompanying articles, invariably written by Gilliland, contained a curious mix of fact and unfounded opinion: the industry viewed the fad for table mats a scourge (among many), and blamed women for having the temerity in trying new things, 'Men did not like these peripatetic adjuncts, where, when at home, they wanted to feel so'.<sup>57</sup>

Gilliland's review (for the Guild) of the initial campaign to consumers was broadly upbeat but cautioned, by way of an analogy, that it took Gordon Selfridge to spend £100,000 during the first year to sell his store to the British public. He had learnt from his Wembley experience to 'look more to cumulative than particular results'.<sup>58</sup> However, his post book 'gives ample evidence of public interest.' The trade propaganda, was deemed a great success with 'agreeable results, more definite in six months than from USA in three years' confounding the critics who had denounced the ILG as 'only a tail for an American dog'.<sup>59</sup> Gilliland knew the scheme would only work with full 'community effort' and his report details membership indifference, a number of contretemps and his own frustrations given his commitment; out of thirty two members, fifteen offered no or feeble support, while a further five were only interested in the handkerchief and dress linen markets, leaving twelve firms to participate.<sup>60</sup> This rupture in policy and practice would contribute to long term effects for the linen trade even if the short swing efforts were to prove temptingly remunerative.

The second phase to be implemented was to attract the 'country buyer' in shopping centres, the home Guild had nothing like the American budget and relied on only practical and economical plans. A localised publicity campaign would run in the shopping centres of cities from Glasgow and Edinburgh, down through

the Midlands, the West Country and the South-East Region. The third phase, scheduled for 1931-1934, was perhaps its most determined attempt to secure the loyalty of the home buyer, called 'the zone system of co-operative effort'. One hundred and fifty of the main shopping centres were grouped into twenty zones and on particular dates, 'pull all leading stores into the linen publicity by making them co-operate, at their own expense, in their own local press, and offer definite linen items at attractively special prices.'<sup>61</sup> Gilliland reported initial resistance from retailers and newspaper owners and described, euphemistically, that objections were 'gradually overcome'.<sup>62</sup>

#### **5.4 Additional Guild Promotion**

Throughout the 1930s, the Guild instituted a number of further promotional activities. A series of lectures under the auspices of the ILG, took place at the respected Barrett Street Trade School<sup>63</sup>, Oxford Street, London with W.H. Webb's lecture on merchandising in two categories, on quality and on price. With a typically provocative bias, Webb counselled, 'if the customer wanted something cheap she bought cotton, while if she wanted something good, she bought linen.'<sup>64</sup> The second lecture in the series contained a further distinction between cotton and linen, 'Cotton is for the young, but linen is for all ages' opined Doris Saunders from William Ewart & Son Ltd on the versatility of linen.<sup>65</sup> Locally, Gilliland on behalf of the Guild, lectured to the Belfast College of Technology Textile Society on "Marketing and Distribution" in 1933, where he acknowledged societal changes that the linen trade must note: the short skirt, silk stockings, bobbed hair which 'offered women of all ages their first real emancipation; every woman from twenty to seventy seemed to get a new idea of herself.' He spoke on the 'quickening of effort towards more originality in design so as to get away from the indolence of the Victorian Era' and warned of 'the development in style, design and make-up of many cheaper class textile articles, offered distinct inducements to millions of consumers to pursue the policy of repeated change...if the masses were being led along the line to "buy cheap and often" further difficulties lay ahead.'<sup>66</sup> Additionally, he published widely on linen with notably an emerging focus in the 1930s on the issue of design in the linen trade; for example, "New Fashions in Irish Linen: Improvements in Design and Colouring" tacitly acknowledged the sluggishness of Irish linen makers in 'capturing the modern note.'<sup>67</sup>

The Guild was also represented in conventional parades held in Belfast such as the Lord Mayor's show and the British Empire Week Parade of Industry and Commerce. The concept of Ulster *within* the Empire was played out in such extravaganzas, in a letter to Viscount Craigavon from the Editor of *Ulster Protestant* magazine, he claimed, 'Ulster is larger than Northern Ireland and extends to the utmost ends of the Empire.'<sup>68</sup>



Fig. 5.13 Left: three photographs depicting Miss Belfast 1830 and Miss Belfast 1930 (in "Ulster made frocks") participating in the British Empire Week Parade with both paying a visit to the Empire Marketing Board Kitchen in the bottom photograph. *The Northern Whig*, May 17, 1930. Right: Irish Linen Queen at an Irish Linen Guild Exhibition at Queen's University, Belfast. 'Glendun' furnishing fabric by Old Bleach is seen directly behind Major Herdman. *Belfast News-Letter*, July 21, 1937. Source: ILG press cuttings book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

The 'Irish Linen Queen' was the personified industry, a feminine symbol of linen's best features chosen to amplify the dress linens the industry had been developing throughout the 1930s.<sup>69</sup> Some queried the relevance of the role, G.A.E. Roberts, Secretary of the Guild, rebuffed any doubters, 'the visit of the Irish Linen Queen and her various activities during the special weeks attract the editorial attention of the local press, while her extensive Irish Linen wardrobe is always a matter of great interest to the lady journalists.'<sup>70</sup> Mary Faloona was the first 'Linen Queen' elected from over 30,000 linen workers. Her ambassadorial role took her across the United Kingdom during five discrete 'linen weeks' throughout the year, 'there is no doubt that the personal touch created by the visit of the delegation from Northern Ireland to each selected area does more than anything else to stimulate interest and goodwill, in Irish Linen.'<sup>71</sup> Even by 1938, when the design agenda had been pushed to the forefront of British industry, the linen damask and fancy linens trade remained wedded to consolidating traditional ideas about linen goods whereas the linen furnishing and fashion sectors were developing and more readily concomitant to modernity's twined principles of form and function.

## 5.5 Exhibitions

With Gilliland appointed in 1928, by unanimous vote (he included this detail in his CV), as its Director of Marketing and Publicity for the Guild, exhibitions would surely be incorporated into the Guild's propaganda arsenal. His Wembley appointments for 1924 and 1925 finished with almost £2,000 surplus (and managed to sell the exhibit between an Oxford Street house and an Australian importer<sup>72</sup>), he had exhibited at the Foire de Lyon (1919), with the Federation of British Industries (Paris, 1920) and then at Continental exhibitions in Brussels, Leipzig and Prague (1928/29).<sup>73</sup> At first hand, he understood the

potential for considerable direct and indirect business at both trade fairs and imperial events such as the Empire exhibitions. Gilliland opened his Wembley report to the Belfast Chamber of Commerce (1925) with metrics: 27 million visitors with an estimated 6 million at the linen display, over £10,000 of direct business with manufacturers (plus repeat custom) and over 13,000 linen souvenirs purchased with a clean net profit of £600 and one hundred and twenty-four Ulster linen firms participating. He maintained the vastness of the exhibition would not overwhelm those interested in Irish linen, indeed quite the contrary,

The public also had an unequalled opportunity of seeing, in one spot, a collection of linens which they knew to be all Irish, and had not a sympathetic attention distracted by what often occurred in all modern retail linen department displays, a quite too large proportion of foreign goods mixed in with whatever Irish goods were shewn.<sup>74</sup>

An entirely different tone was adopted by Gilliland in his Wembley report to the Irish Linen Industry Committee in July 1924, he was incredulous at the amount spent and in his view, flagrantly wasted on the Ulster Pavilion, for example the extravagant and incongruous use of 117 yards of velvet to decorate four show cases where linen could have been used to better and more appropriate effect.<sup>75</sup> He had little charity for the agency involved, the acclaimed W.S. Crawford's of High Holborn (and the same agency engaged by Old Bleach), 'All advertising agencies are notorious and extravagant spenders of other people's money...if Crawford's activities had been confined to the one thing they are best at – publicity - which is their business, and the practical part of ordering and arranging the showcases, display features &c. – which they know nothing about – kept out of their hands, a complete and proper display for about £500 would have been the first result.'<sup>76</sup>

Gilliland was the first to introduce textiles to the British Industries Fair (BIF), London, in 1930 with a special exhibit for the Irish Linen Industry and in the same year organised the Linen Industry Research exhibition held at the South Kensington Science Museum attended by H.M. The King and Queen Mary (which resulted in his Highness's support of flax research on the Sandringham estate).<sup>77</sup> Throughout the 1930s, the Guild exhibited annually at both the BIF and the Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition in London. His conviction, 'nothing educates the public like an exhibition' became a central policy in the Government's quest to raise the standards of design across the country.<sup>78</sup> As a shrewd business strategy, exhibitions partially removed the (sometimes self-interested) buyer from the chain, giving the public direct access to the manufacturer, Gilliland told the Industrial Art Committee, 'one of the reasons why we go to the expense of exhibitions...is to let the public see what we want them to see and not go through the bottleneck of a buyer and what he wants. I think we've got a good section of the public educated.'<sup>79</sup>



Fig. 5.14 Irish Linen Guild stand at the Ideal Home Exhibition, Olympia, London, from *The Belfast Telegraph*, 31<sup>st</sup> March 1933. Source: Irish Linen Guild Press Cuttings Book, LIRA, Lisburn Museum and Linen Centre.

The value of exhibitions, both national and international, to the linen industry was fully understood and exploited. The question of displaying linen was a constant challenge. Fig. 5.14 shows an almost unbroken line of table damask, usually removed straight from the packaging and folds stubbornly intact with an assortment of smaller fancy goods on the table top, partially obscuring the cloth's pattern. Fabric display generally was a routine trial for exhibition organisers, 'the problem of fabric display is still awaiting complete solution' in a review of the 'British Art in Industry' Exhibition in 1935.<sup>80</sup> The Guild in representing the whole industry had the great difficulty in editing the range of goods (Old Bleach alone manufactured in nineteen categories of linen production) for display.<sup>81</sup> There was also, inevitably, some tension between collective (i.e. anonymised) representation and firms wishing to be known for their goods within campaigns. This intermittently occurred at exhibitions where brand packaging or promotional literature was unavoidable but not permitted to enjoy a prominent self-promoting position. Old Bleach was at the centre of a dispute at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition (1938) when some of the firm's marketing material was found on the Irish Linen exhibit.<sup>82</sup>



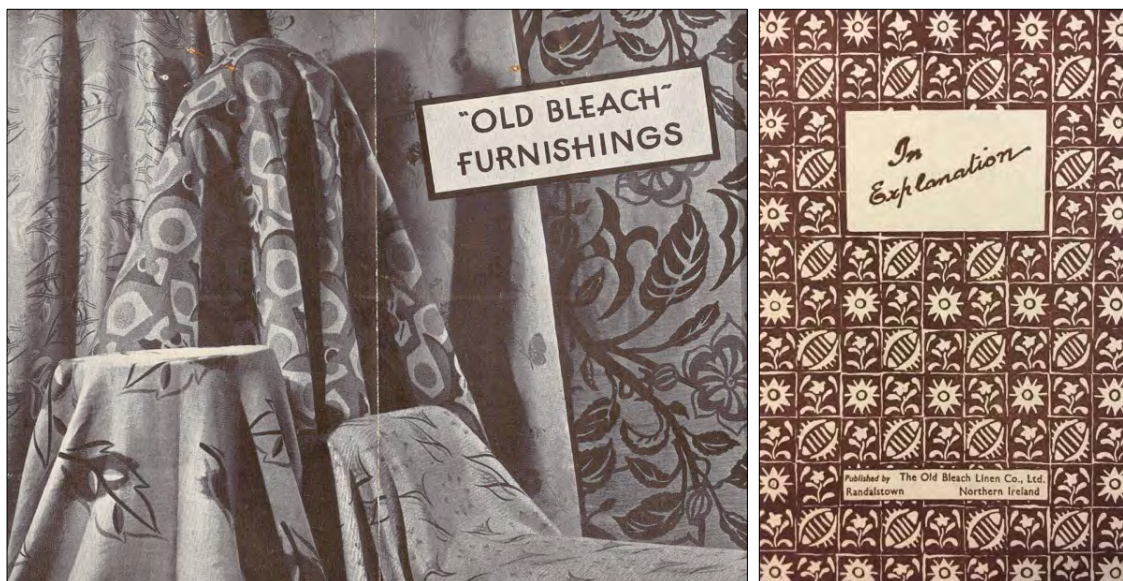


Fig. 5.15 The offending Old Bleach literature at the Scottish Empire Exhibition, 1938. Left: Furnishings pamphlet featuring fabrics from the company's series 'Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach'. Back from left: 'Pandora' by Marion Dorn, 'Ceres' by Nicolas de Molas, 'Persian Rose' by Eva Crofts; Front from left: 'Delos' by Ashley Havinden, 'Fugue' by Paul Nash, 'Sirius' by Albert Rutherston. All screen-printed linen/linen & rayon mix. Right: Four-page pamphlet relating to a short history of the company. Source: Scottish Empire Exhibition Minutes, PRONI: COM/16/13.

A month-long flurry of urgent missives was exchanged between the Guild and the Ministry of Commerce over the forbidden presence of Old Bleach 'publicity matter' on the Northern Ireland stand. In a rather melodramatic letter to the Ministry, G.A.E. Roberts, Secretary of the Irish Linen Guild protested,

I am horrified to learn that Old Bleach literature is being distributed to the public from the Northern Ireland stand at Glasgow. You will appreciate only too well the position in which the Guild will be placed if this becomes known among members, and I trust you will see to it that the giving out of this literature is stopped immediately. I wonder could you find out whether the literature was actually asked for by the people on the stand, or whether Old Bleach supplied without any request. In any case, however it happened, it is a most unfortunate occurrence.<sup>83</sup>

The material had been supplied by the firm's Glasgow agent upon request by those staffing the stand in order to satisfy innumerable enquiries over the furnishing fabric on display. The response by the Ministry's representative in Glasgow to the Ministry's Assistant Secretary, the redoubtable G.H.E. Parr, defended the action, 'I would like to point out the literature refers to the Furnishing Fabrics only, and no literature regarding any other type of linen is distributed here. You will appreciate that the Old Bleach have a unique position here in regard to their furnishing fabrics, in that they are the sole exhibitors of this type of material', he continued, 'Little use would be served by their excellent display if we were unable to tell interested parties [from both home and overseas] where the materials could be obtained.'<sup>84</sup> Their display in fact was comparatively simple but seemingly impactful, the Ministry files document the related paperwork in the planning and execution of the linen exhibit. Old Bleach supplied furnishing fabric, at a modest discount, eighty yards of BD 10/8000 and thirty-three yards of PAW 21/5.<sup>85</sup> The latter was one of the printed linens from the 'Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach' range and made up into curtains by the equally esteemed Glaswegian cabinet makers Wylie and Lochhead. It was not quite true that it was only furnishing fabrics

literature as a second brochure, "In Explanation", on the history of the company was found on the stand which prolonged the tempest in a teapot, however this shows the esteem Old Bleach was held in by the establishment and a pragmatic understanding in the purpose of such modes of publicity and propaganda as Empire Exhibitions. Projecting an image of modernity was never more crucial for Northern Ireland as both a source of high quality industry and a place to visit, after all its stand was located within the Travel and Tourism Pavilion. The selection of one 'Modern Artists' fabric design and a series of thirty-six custom made linen dresses, six of which were refreshed every month during the six months of the exhibition, showed off to an exhibition audience of an estimated thirteen million visitors, the Province's contemporaneity. *Vogue* had agreed to collaborate with the linen exhibit in the sponsoring of linen using *Vogue Patterns*.



Fig. 5.16 Left: Northern Ireland Stand within the Travel and Tourism Pavilion showing part of the linen exhibit. Right: Vogue Pattern 558 in black Moygashel linen and Vogue Pattern 7678 in dotted pink Coolaire linen. "Vogue Pattern dresses grace the Ulster Pavilion at the Glasgow Empire Exhibition." *Vogue Pattern Book*, June-July 1938. Source: PRONI: COM16/25 and COM16/13.

The two Ulster linen companies supplying the linen were Stevenson & Sons from their Moygashel range and Dickson's 'Coolaire' range, both from Dungannon in County Tyrone and both building reputations for good quality and importantly, desirable dress linens.<sup>86</sup> *Vogue's* contribution guaranteed a meticulous standard was reached in the selection of linen material and allocation of them to the proper pattern designs, the making up of the dresses, their accessorising and styling. This tight control benefitted both parties in promoting linen as a highly fashionable and versatile fabric. As part of its contract *Vogue* agreed to ensure the 'discarded garments' were displayed in 'important retail stores' for as long a period as possible and to 'extend as much editorial co-operation as possible to this particular aspect of the Glasgow Exhibition.'<sup>87</sup> The Display Manager of the linen exhibit, T. M. Stitt sent the Ministry of Commerce a pull of some of the dresses featured in May's edition of *Vogue* (Fig. 5.16), with a note, 'I think you will agree they have done justice to the Ulster cause.' The reply was favourable in which the Ministry's Assistant Secretary expressed how 'very pleased' he was with the publicity.<sup>88</sup>

Guild and Empire exhibitions represented the country's *industrial* strengths, linen displays were a regular feature of Northern Ireland's excellence and relevance in the home, dominion and empire markets. For the Glasgow Exhibition, the Irish Linen Guild has raised over £3,000 towards the cost of the linen exhibit on the Northern Ireland stand, which Major A. C. Herdman promised, 'would be found to be different to anything yet seen.'<sup>89</sup> Indeed, it took on a more overtly modern design, as seen in Fig. 5.16, with clean, pared down displays.<sup>90</sup> A number of architectural tropes of modernism are employed in the predominantly white scheme with unadorned pillars and fluid curved corners, evocative metaphors in the age of speed and efficiency. The Glasgow Exhibition espoused a progressive empire, one that was less romantic about its Imperial legacy, although one that could still project a symbol of immoderate territorial greatness, and with an increasingly unstable Europe, wished to promote 'the peaceful aspirations of the British Empire.'<sup>91</sup> The Guild and Empire exhibitions promoted linen in a more inclusive way as a *material* and a unique industry, incorporating its key customer-enticing product lines: household linens, furnishing fabrics, linen tweeds, handkerchiefs and 'wearing apparel', whereas the Industrial Art Movement exhibitions promulgated 'good design' and it seemed that attribute was best demonstrated more precisely in furnishing fabrics and dress linens.

## 5.6 Linen and Industrial Art Exhibitions

While the linen trade was alert to the significance of exhibitions in promoting industry and commerce, it is perhaps indicative of a certain oblivion to industrial art present in the linen men of Ulster that only a few Irish linen companies were represented in the many British Industrial Art exhibitions throughout the interwar years. These tended to be companies with product lines in dress linens and or furnishing fabrics, namely Old Bleach Linen Company, Moygashel (Stevensons) and Lamont Ltd. It also helps explain why Old Bleach is known for only 'fancy linens' (household textiles) of high quality in Northern Ireland and elsewhere enjoyed a quite different reputation for well-designed linen products. The contemporary local newspaper, commerce and textile press probably reflected a certain unresponsiveness to design issues of the time. There were occasional short pieces *reported* in the *Irish Textile Journal* and *Belfast Chamber of Commerce Journal* which indicated how relatively minor design issues were viewed, in contributing to the linen economy. Very few references are made to the Industrial Art Movement. In a rare example of the subject of industrial art in linen discourse, John Gilliland, in October 1934, acknowledged the role linen might play in the context of British industrial art, 'Whatever grounds there were a year or two ago for the criticism, the question of design and colouring has since been receiving more particular attention and at the forthcoming British Art in Industry Exhibition at the Royal Academy, the Irish Linen Industry will no doubt justify itself as a leader in British Textiles.'<sup>92</sup> However, this was printed in English publications, the *Manchester Guardian Commercial* and reprinted in the *World Textiles Supplement*, as part of the ILG's effort to reposition the linen trade vis-à-vis the mighty Manchester cotton industry. Earlier that year, giving evidence at the Industrial Art Committee in relation to the topic of artistic imagination and status, he



predicted, 'The proposed exhibition at The Royal Academy will probably produce a new feeling in regard to that during the next couple of years because it is a distinct part of the programme that the designer's name shall be associated with the design and attached to it.'<sup>93</sup> By and large, the *impact* of the Industrial Art Movement appeared to bypass Northern Ireland's industrialists.

The Industrial Art exhibitions were curated with a broadly domestic bias. The rationale was to encourage the public that 'British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home' (1933) and 'Everyday Things' (1936) could be well designed, attractive and affordable, hence such exhibition titles by the Design and Industries Association (DIA) at Dorland Hall and the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) respectively. Many struggled to contain the brief of *affordable design*, press and trade reviews catalogued many instances where exhibits were well out of reach to those on sub-£400 per annum salaries. In a sober review of "Exhibition of Everyday Things" (1936) by 'an everyday woman' who noted, 'most of the articles displayed in this exhibition are economically available, I should say, to about one per cent of the public.'<sup>94</sup> Design journals tried to be more sympathetic by emphasising the virtues of particular exhibitions where domesticity and design excellence were not mutually exclusive. However, as regular industrial art exhibition exhibitors, Old Bleach consciously manufactured for the higher end of the market, they were not producers of 'value' goods, their company price lists from the 1930s include a quotation from the prolific Canadian author on technology and business, Herbert N. Casson on 'The Fallacy of Cheapness',

When a person buys a cheap article he feels good when he pays for it,  
and disgusted every time he uses it.

When he buys a good article, he feels better every time he uses it, for  
the recollection of quality remains long after the price is forgotten.<sup>95</sup>

Despite their vaunted efforts to raise the level of design consciousness among the public, the persistent criticism of elitism followed design reformers with some validity. However, this was somewhat allayed by exhibitions in less intimating environs as department and furnishing stores such as Bowman's, Whiteley's and Harrods in London, Kendal Milne's, Manchester and Rowntree's of Scarborough.<sup>96</sup>

### **5.7 Old Bleach and Industrial Art Collections and Exhibitions**

Old Bleach consistently exhibited in industrial art exhibitions throughout the 1930s either through being part of industrial art collections or specially obtained for exhibitions. Its first contribution to 'industrial art' was to the British Institute of Industrial Art's permanent collection in 1933, with a number of linen furnishing fabric lengths of the newly launched 'Slemish' range purchased, later that year further samples of the same fabrics ('Sperrin' and 'Rhythm') were acquired by the Circulation Department of the V&A Museum.<sup>97</sup> Lamentably, there is little or no reference to these exhibitions or collections in the surviving Old Bleach archives or in any of the (mainly business) company papers held by local records office and museums in order to gain some understanding of the firm's response to such prestigious accession. The

Old Bleach archive contains several press cuttings books and photograph albums, but they offer little on Industrial Art representation and press and mainly cover the firm's participation in national trade fairs such as British Industrial Fair (BIF), international fairs in Canada and Denmark and domestic exhibitions such as The Daily Mail Ideal Home Exhibition and retail store exhibitions (that had become a popular conduit for promoting good design in the interwar period).<sup>98</sup> Our knowledge of Old Bleach's role in the Industrial Art Movement is mainly derived from two sources: the English institutions that either hosted industrial art exhibitions or hold the collections and the contemporary design press who regularly reviewed Old Bleach's furnishing fabrics.<sup>99</sup>

The 'Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home' held at Dorland Hall from June 20 to July 12 in 1933 was considered to be 'the first creditable attempt to translate the findings of Lord Gorrell's Committee' and a preface to the Royal Academy's hosting of the 'British Art in Industry' exhibition later in 1935.<sup>100</sup> With over 30,000 'enlightened' visitors in a three-and-a-half-week period, it invigorated the wider public's curiosity, after a period of economic slump, in the modern home and its potential for displaying, if according to many of the exhibits, one's self-advancement. In amongst the 12,000 exhibits were seven Old Bleach fabrics from their new furnishings range, (listed and discussed in Section 5.9 of this chapter). Criticisms of luxury and questionable functional efficiency aside, the 1933 Dorland Hall exhibition was deemed sufficiently popular to spawn similar exhibitions. Its 1934 iteration, "Contemporary Industrial Design in the Home" stepped further into the future with more outlandish concepts for the home with a 'series of furnished rooms belonging to the Contemporary Home', Pevsner described it as 'slightly too Corbusierish...to be right for this country.'<sup>101</sup> It is unlikely he was referring to architect and designer Oliver Hill's luxe contribution, with its snake's skin living room, circular dining room and bathroom; Hill found an unconventional way to use Old Bleach's 'Donegal' linen furnishing fabric as wall panelling in his dining room, that 'suggests a cabin in a fancy ship of some kind'<sup>102</sup>, 'Donegal' was a coarse 'slubby' cloth, perhaps unbeknownst to Hill, Old Bleach pronounced it as, 'nothing could be more suitable for any sort of furnishing purpose where design is not wanted.'<sup>103</sup> Its slight wavy appearance along with a ship's wheel and rope hung in a festoon style contributed to the maritime and somewhat whimsical theme. In fact, it was a perfect 'companion' cloth to a more strident 'feature' cloth or scheme whose impact was only felt in the deft supporting role of a receding pattern.



Fig. 5.17 'Donegal' is featured here on the top right of the page from The Crompton Prize Fund Scheme Reference Collection, 1936-37, alongside 'Fanad' by Old Bleach on the left and bottom, a weave of two warps and three wefts by Warner & Sons Ltd, 'sheet' (page) twelve. Image on right: detail of 'Donegal'. Source: The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

The furnished display rooms were spectacles of the designers' imagination, improbable show pieces to capture the visitor's attention, however it was not entirely dedicated to theatricalities and a number of firms had their own displays to showcase their (well-designed) wares. *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* was broadly positive about this follow up exhibition,

Taken together as a whole the Contemporary Home is a slightly fantastic conception, but contemporary industrial design takes many less bewildering if not less original directions, as may be seen in the fabric displays on the first floor. Old Bleach Linens, Ltd., have a very well grouped selection of all-linen furnishing material for upholstery, curtain, loose covers etc.<sup>104</sup>

As Christine Boydell has argued elsewhere, that although textiles were often treated in a subordinate role in the modern interior by the Modernist camp, as a category within the Industrial Art Movement it appeared to escape more caustic commentary as its functionality was rarely in doubt, although its decorative status was exhaustively challenged.<sup>105</sup>

Of all the industrial art exhibitions, The Royal Academy's 'Exhibition of British Industrial Art' (in conjunction with the Royal Society of Arts) at Burlington House in 1935 was a sign, along with H.R.H. the Prince of Wales's endorsement, of the Establishment's acknowledgement of the increasing importance of good design. Yet its reputation supported by such an august institution did not protect it from the most savage criticism, Herbert Read described the specimen rooms as 'designed in the plutocratic tradition' while Anthony Blount called it 'self-conscious pomposity'.<sup>106</sup> Even measured reviews such as Hesketh Hubbard in *The Connoisseur* observed 'a certain straining after novelty is evident'.<sup>107</sup> However the textile section was viewed more favourably, Sir Thomas Barlow thought furnishing textiles was one of the best sections and at the same DIA meeting, F.J. Donald of Donald Bros. explained the challenges in how 'manufacturers had been handicapped...in submitting goods for the exhibition by the condition that nothing previously

offered to the public or kept in stock should be exhibited. Goods had to be produced irrespective of whether the manufacturer felt he had the best design at that time, and as a consequence the artistic value of the exhibit might be lessened.<sup>108</sup> Some six hundred furnishing fabrics were arranged across a number of rooms.<sup>109</sup> Gallery C housed two thirds of the textiles with a dramatic design (Fig. 5.18), facilitated by the immense ceilings of Burlington House, by P.A. Staynes in collaboration with Fortnum and Mason's designer, H. G. Hayes Marshall. Described by *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* where 'the effect is extraordinarily fine', it listed Old Bleach among the textile firms whose fabrics were hung in long strips, in folds from ceiling to floor and included a photograph of 'Nerissa', a woven linen of modern design, by Old Bleach within the review.<sup>110</sup>

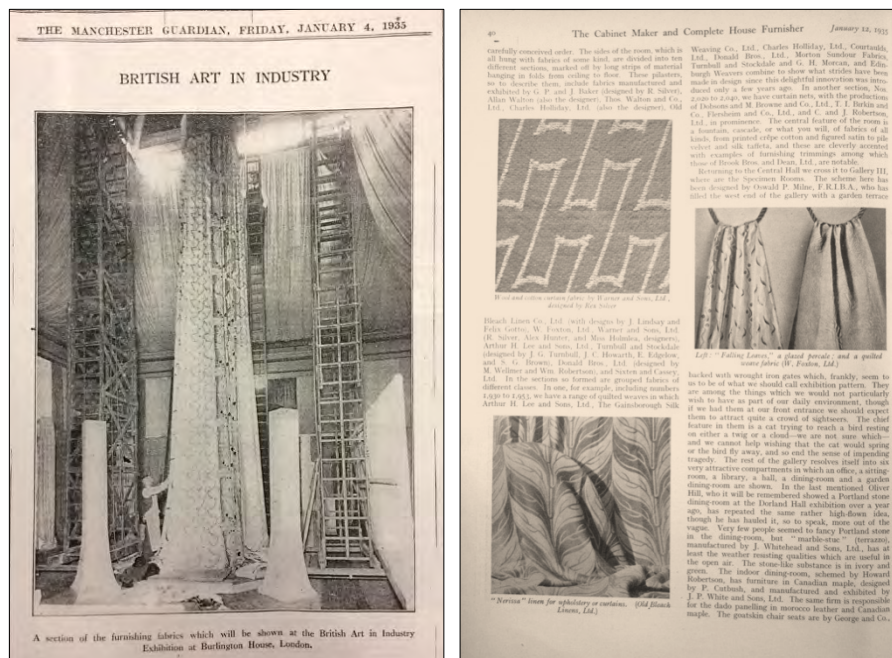


Fig. 5.18 Left: The hanging of furnishing fabrics at The Royal Academy's Exhibition of British Art in Industry at Burlington House, *The Manchester Guardian*, January 4 1935. Right: 'Nerissa' by Old Bleach – bottom photograph, as featured in *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher's* review of textiles and furnished rooms at the Burlington House Exhibition, January 12 1935. Source: Industrial Art Collection files, Manchester Art Gallery and National Art Library, V&A, London.

According to *The Linen Trade Circular* a number of Irish linen firms were selected for the Royal Academy's Exhibition including Broadway Damask Co. Ltd, Dickson & Co. Ltd, William Ewart & Son Ltd, Ireland Bros. Ltd, Irish Linen Mills, J.N. Richardson, Sons & Owden Ltd, Stevenson & Sons Ltd, John S. Brown & Sons Ltd, Old Bleach Linen Company and Samuel Lamont & Sons Ltd.<sup>111</sup> Of the last two, *The Journal of the Royal Society of Arts* in its review of textiles at Burlington House, mentioned a number of notable designs including 'the conventional floral pattern in flax linen by the Old Bleach Linen Company (1888) is quite exceptionally satisfying. One envisages it in a rather sumptuous room, subtly furnished, though not with more than a touch of modern steel or glass' and 'nothing could be more elegant, more chic, than Messrs. Lamont's white patterned linen (1536).'<sup>112</sup> The ambition for the Exhibition was encapsulated in the title of the accompanying book, *The Conquest of Ugliness*, edited by the exhibition's organiser John de la Valette.

The essays contained within exalted in the 'rejuvenated textile industries of Britain' and on textile manufacturers finally understanding the necessity to forecast fashion, not simply follow it.<sup>113</sup> Exhibitions and their literature thus revealed the discomfort between design idealism & commercial reality.

### **5.8 Old Bleach in Manchester<sup>114</sup>**

In December 1932, *The Textile Recorder* reported news of plans afoot in developing 'a collection of modern work chosen for its trueness to type and almost entirely animated with the idea of providing the future generation of textile designers with all the material they can require for the evolution of still newer and better styles in keeping with their own times.'<sup>115</sup> The councillor A.P. Simon and Museum curator Lawrence Haward with the support of the DIA, hoped local textile manufacturers in the wider Manchester area would willingly contribute modern samples to the museum. However, their full support was not forthcoming<sup>116</sup> and the museum had to appeal to a much broader textile constituency and while Manchester was not renowned for its linen manufacturing, it would soon have an assortment of Old Bleach linen furnishing fabrics in this important collection.<sup>117</sup> Representation from across the United Kingdom was welcome as the Textile Institute's Journal (whose headquarters was in Manchester) covered the whole of the country and not merely Lancashire.<sup>118</sup>

From its inception, the committee was clear on its aim, 'the chief concern of the Textile Sub-Committee is to secure examples of all that is of outstanding merit from our warehouses and factories, i.e. industrial mass production.'<sup>119</sup> The Sub-Committee wrote (via trade associations such as the Federation of British Furnishing Manufacturers) to and directly approached firms (at BIF) they were interested in. Old Bleach were part of the group of firms outside of the Manchester area whose modern design fabrics would form part of the textile section; others included Donald Bros. Ltd (Dundee), Scottish Textiles Weavers (Darvel) Morton Sundour (Carlisle) McCaw Allan (Lurgan) and Warner & Sons Ltd (Braintree). By January 1934, the Sub-Committee were still trying to garner sufficient responses from manufacturers even though the 'British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home Exhibition' had taken place in the Gallery in 1933.<sup>120</sup> This exhibition's catalogue lists eight lengths of Old Bleach furnishing fabric and cushions designed by Norman Fitzroy Webb and two upholstered chairs (designed by Fortnum & Mason). The fabrics were from the firm's first collection of 'Slemish' fabrics: 'Birch Bark', 'Chevron', 'Sperrin', 'Creel', 'Milan', 'Rhythm' and two qualities of 'Cobra' (see Fig. 5.19).<sup>121</sup> In Henry Dowling's contemporary *Survey of British Industrial Arts* (1935) he commented, 'Of the firms producing textiles, there are certain houses which deserve credit for the high position the textile industry has attained... "Old Bleach" Linens, as have been revealed in the Exhibition at Dorland Hall, certainly give evidence of the importance which has been given to the relation between design and texture, their named designs, particularly 'Birch Bark', 'Cobra', and 'Rhythm' by N. F. Webb, are all of outstanding merit.'<sup>122</sup>



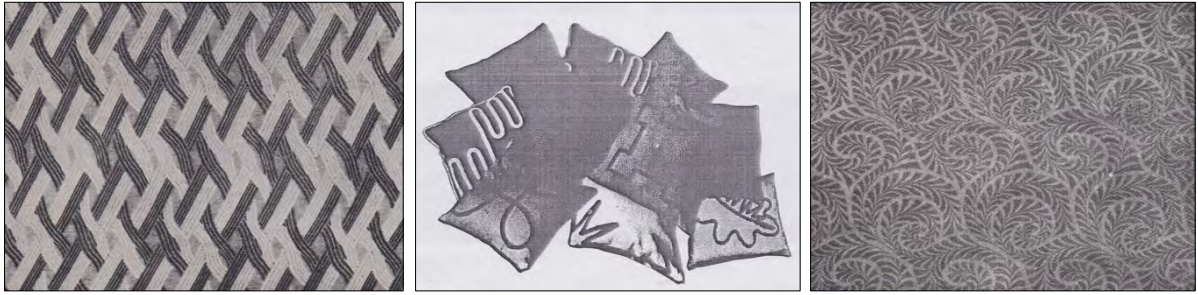


Fig. 5.19 From left: 'Creel' – 'a perfect design for almost any purpose, neither modern nor antique, but always fresh', Cushions designed by Norman Fitzroy Webb and 'Milan' – 'the inspiration for this design is really from Constantinople and the Near East, but it has been imported to Italy in the Lombard style, and hence the name.' Descriptions from Old Bleach catalogues 1936 and 1938-1939. Source: Old Bleach Archive and (image of cushions from a photocopied catalogue held in) The Whitworth Gallery.

It was becoming industrial art exhibition convention to furnish listings of artefacts with (where possible) the designer's name, fabric composition, fabric width and the retail price (as discussed in Chapter 2, Arthur Deane at The Belfast City Museum had objected to displayed prices and thus stymied the first significant opportunity for the Northern Irish public to see good quality designed goods). In the first few years of production, 'Slemish' fabrics were all pure linen, 50 inches wide and retailed between 7s. 11d - 9s. 6d. While trade fairs were where essential business was transacted, these exhibitions were important channels for the public to see what had been decided on as good modern design i.e. 'approved taste'.<sup>123</sup> They were not exempt from criticism of the manufacturers' perceived opportunism or the didactic tone of design reformers. *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Finisher* from October 8<sup>th</sup> 1932, wryly noted they would elevate already educated taste and do little for the masses.<sup>124</sup> In retrospect, Nikolaus Pevsner's 1937 *Survey of Industrial Art in England*, pronounced '...this exhibition remains the best survey of modern and well-designed objects which has so far been held in England.'<sup>125</sup>



Fig. 5.20 Left: Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics – 'Birch Bark', 'Rhythm' and 'Cobra' framed by lighting by Best & Lloyd Ltd and others, 'Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home', City Art Gallery, Manchester, 1933. Right: Detail of upholstery fabric (on armchair) on the Old Bleach stand at British Industries Fair, 1933, as featured in the British Industrial Art Exhibition. Source: left: Industrial Art Collection Files, Manchester Art Gallery Archives. Right: Old Bleach Archives, Photograph Album, Randalstown, Northern Ireland.

Despite the naysayers, the Museum persevered with growing the collection. In February 1934, four samples of Slemish fabrics were gifted by Old Bleach, fabric names are not specified in the IAC papers but the labels accompanying the fabric samples (now held in The Whitworth Gallery) supply more information. The “black and white floral” is ‘Samoa’, a modern large scale exotic floral/leaf pattern with chevron, the other three are ‘Corrib’, large abstract leaves overlaid with a dainty floral arrangement; EC I I, spiky fronds in red and green and ‘Glengarry’, a grey and ecru plaid used on the “Queen Mary”.<sup>126</sup>



Fig. 5.21 From left: ‘Glengarry’, ‘EC I I’, ‘Corrib’ and ‘Samoa’. Gift from Old Bleach to the Industrial Art Collection, Manchester City Art Gallery, 1934. Source: Author’s photographs with kind permission from The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

Only ‘EC I I’ has a distinctly 1930s feel to it, the remaining three designs are remarkably fresh some eighty years on. Together, they show a variety of weaves, some with a heavy coarse weave and bulky yarns creating texture and others with very fine precise detailing and sharp lines. It demonstrates the stylistic and technical versatility of Old Bleach and of course, the novelties demanded by the market, for example, the 1930s saw a popular tendency for patterns combining florals with geometry as seen in ‘Samoa’ with its voluptuous leaves cut through with thick bands of asymmetric chevron and texture was often a strongly considered part of the design.<sup>127</sup>

Manchester City Art Gallery hosted a further exhibition of industrial art in 1936, with the Royal Institute of British Architects’ “Exhibition of Everyday Things”. A touring exhibition originating in RIBA’s London headquarters in Portland Place, it was already subject to the now familiar criticism of the inclusion of luxury goods as dominant exhibits. Elizabeth Denby’s review in the DIA magazine *Trend in Design* (Spring 1936) decried the exhibition for ‘still catering for £1,000 a year incomes’.<sup>128</sup> Certainly, by the time it came to Manchester, Lawrence Haward was keen to supplement exhibits with artefacts from the Industrial Art Collection. In the original RIBA exhibition, Old Bleach was represented by nine lengths of furnishing fabrics and according to the Manchester exhibition catalogue, six more Old Bleach examples were then added. Five linen woven lengths: ‘Glenavy’, ‘Ferrard’, ‘Charolette’, ‘Jack Tar’ and ‘Kilgarvin’ and one hand printed length, for the nursery, of ‘Winnie-The-Pooh’ were “presented” (donated) to the Manchester Art Galleries Committee and thus remained in the Industrial Art Collection at Manchester.<sup>129</sup> Like the previous gifts, these six textiles are stylistically divergent. ‘Charolette’ is a Regency pattern, restrained and formal in



composition of finely braided rope and tassel with roundel; Old Bleach described it thus, 'It has that late Georgian, early Victorian flavour that goes so well with many of the present schemes of decoration. Regency is so chic.'<sup>130</sup> The remaining five designs are in the modern idiom: 'Ferrard', like 'Samoa', combines the floral and geometric, whose 'full merits are not immediately visible. But it is an exceptionally clever one, and because it grows in favour, remains in favour.' The firm's catalogue's doggerel supplies no further practical description of the cloth while the exhibition catalogue offers only the exhibits' price per yard (ranging from 5s. 11d. – 9s. 11d. per yard).<sup>131</sup>



Fig. 5.22 Top from left: 'Charolette', 'Glenavy' and 'Jack Tar'. Bottom from left: 'Ferrard', 'Kilgarvin' and 'Winnie-The-Pooh'. Gifted to the Industrial Art Collection and displayed at the Manchester "Exhibition of Everyday Things", 1936. Source: Author's photographs with permission, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

'Glenavy' and 'Kilgarvin' share the period's design tendency for optical movement, while the former is naturalistic and textural, the latter's vertical kinked lines and controlled coarseness are akin to a sanitised Western iteration of Kuba cloth.<sup>132</sup> Whimsy is the subject of 'Jack Tar' and 'Winnie-The-Pooh'; a prancing seaman in a sophisticated counter-change pattern alongside gambolling cartoon animals show a playfulness from the design studio. Taken together, with the nine other Old Bleach furnishing fabrics, these textiles



demonstrate weaving virtuosity and a pragmatic range the English exhibition visitor (i.e. consumer) could understand good *modern* design did not strictly equate with suspiciously Continental *modernist* design.<sup>133</sup>

The Sub-Committee relied on gifts from manufacturers but also a small budget to acquire new textile designs.<sup>134</sup> Lawrence Haward and A.P. Simon visited the British Industries Fair in 1934 to seek out new additions for the IAC. The BIF was one of the best opportunities for firms to keep abreast of their rivals and recent innovations and trends and it made sense for design reformers to capture the design zeitgeist in one place. Throughout the mid to late thirties, it added further Old Bleach examples of their modern furnishing fabrics through gifts and purchases. According to Liz Paul, the Industrial Art Collection remained in storage for much of the thirties which was somewhat self-defeating, neither promoting modern design nor propagandising on its moral benefits.<sup>135</sup> As a collection, it was displayed only once, in 1939, when more valuable artefacts (presumably Fine Art) were stored with the certain threat of war. Its outing did not last, with the outbreak of war it was returned to storage and remained so until an exhibition in 1998, curated by Liz Paul and more recently, 2015's 'House Proud' exhibition inspired by the Gallery's Industrial Art Collection.<sup>136</sup> The Whitworth Gallery is now the holder of the Old Bleach textiles from the Industrial Art Collection along with a variety of additional Old Bleach textiles in Platt Hall, Manchester, which represent the largest collection of Old Bleach fabrics in Great Britain.<sup>137</sup>

## **5.9 Old Bleach Publicity**

From its earliest days, Old Bleach had understood the necessity for brand differentiation. Originally, the firm known as Webb Brothers, quickly built a reputation for very high quality linen goods. From 1874, the name Old Bleach was adopted when they began trading in America and later in 1888 the partnership between the two founding brothers, Charles James Webb and Richard Thomas Webb was dissolved.<sup>138</sup> It was one of the first textile firms to use a trademark from 1874 and then register two trademarks on 20<sup>th</sup> September 1876 (No. 9076), after the Trade Marks Registration Act came into force in 1875.<sup>139</sup> Throughout the surviving company Minute Books, publicity and advertising's scope and budgets feature regularly in the Directors' meetings signalling an essential part in the identity and management of the business. The advertising agency, W.S. Crawford, engaged by the company since 1918, were paid a monthly fee (frequently renegotiated) and it is evident in company papers, it was a longstanding and fruitful partnership. By engaging one of the leading and best connected London agencies, Old Bleach demonstrated its own market position. Leading writer on the history of advertising, Richard Hollis has described Crawford's stable of companies as 'West End clients', who included Daks and Simpson Piccadilly (both owned by Alexander Simpson), Wolsey woollen hosiery, Dutch airline KLM, Eno's Salts and Morton Sundour Fabrics.<sup>140</sup> By the 1930s, the Agency's self-taught Art Director, Ashley Havinden, had taken charge of much of Old Bleach's publicity, designing new product and new season fabric party invitations, advertising materials and company literature.

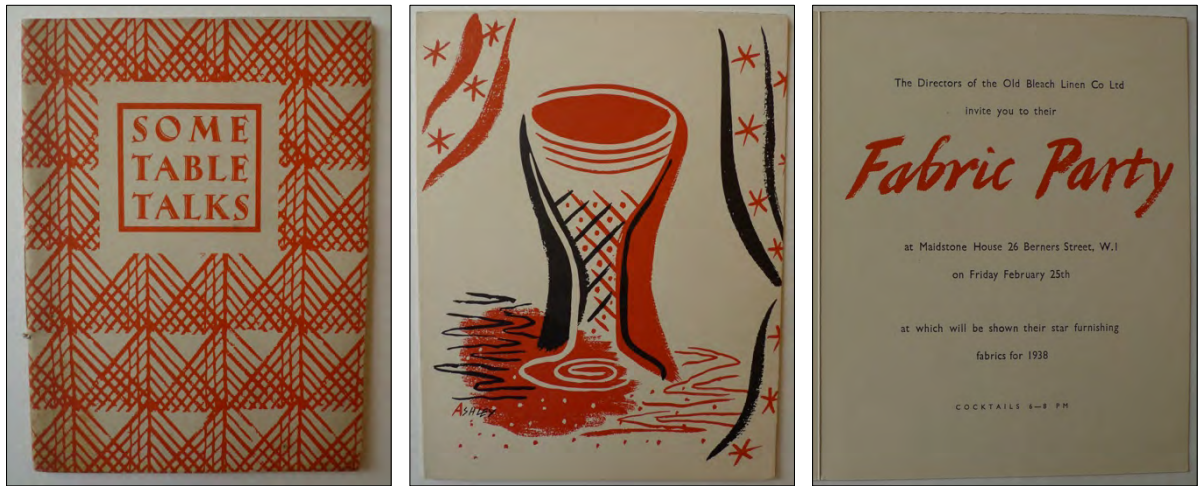


Fig. 5.23 Ashley Havinden for Old Bleach. Left: "Some Table Talks", company booklet on new damask table cloth designs, c. 1935. Middle and Right: "Fabric Party" Invitation for the launch of the firm's latest furnishing fabrics, 1938. Source: Ashley Havinden Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh: GMA A39/4/329.

Havinden's art work was characteristic of a very British approach to modern visual representation, it skilfully balanced modernist principles with evidence of the commercial artist's hand. His brushed lettering and seemingly casual mark-making concealed an industrious perfectionist. Combining the decorative and the modernist concept of rationalism imbued his work with a palatable (to the public) vision of modern British life. Products were rendered as jaunty or sophisticated, but always enlivened by the artist's hand. Seeing his commercial art work as valid as fine art, he signed each piece, as seen here in Fig. 5.23 (middle), inspired by the same practice of fellow commercial artists as F.H.K. Henrion, Edward Mc Knight Kauffer and A.M. Cassandre. In an age opening up to the possibilities of artists and designers working across artistic disciplines and facilitated by W.S. Crawford's belief in a 'twentieth century renaissance' allowed Havinden to produce much admired art and textile designs. Of the latter, he designed for Duncan Miller Ltd, Campbell Fabrics, Edinburgh Weavers and one, 'Delos', for Old Bleach (discussed in the next chapter.)

Old Bleach's fabric parties were held in London and Glasgow, in either their showrooms or in opulent hotels (also their clients) such as The Savoy, The Dorchester or Claridge's. Invited guests were a potent and diverse mix of inter/national and trade press and industry people connected directly to the textile or design trade or simply influential mavens, often of aristocratic stock. They were either reporting on, supplying, retailing or using new fabrics. The Old Bleach Visitor Book from the 1930s is a dazzling roll-call of illustrious signatories from designers J. Christopher Heal and Ashley Havinden and his wife, Margaret Sangster, to the architect E. Maxwell Fry and the mural artist Edward Halliday. Heal's and Havinden's signatures appear many times throughout the Visitor Book, that spans a forty-year period from 1921 to 1959, indicating an enduring relationship with and an endorsement of the design work from Old Bleach. Other guests included journalists from various specialist trade sectors such as architecture, furniture, shipping, hospitality, design and textiles: *Shipping World*, *Hotel Review*, *Drapers' Organiser*, *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, *Architectural Review*, *Decoration* and *International Textiles* (later renamed *The*

Ambassador and with owner Elspeth Juda in attendance). Women's magazines were richly represented in two broad categories, the ever familiar 'fancy linens' for the household of the domesticated modern reader and the new dress linens for the fashion-conscious modern woman.<sup>141</sup> Manufacturers of domestic goods ignored the female consumer at their peril, the prevalence of so many journalists from this genre show how pragmatic Old Bleach were about their ideal customer.



Fig. 5.24 Left: "Warings [sic] Review of Bedroom Equipment for 1935" with new modern towel designs from Old Bleach: Nos. 1 & 2 - hand-run needlework borders on coloured huckaback, 3 & 4 - crepe weave in zebra stripe and new embroidery effect and 5 - coloured rainbow towels, *Vogue* February 6 1935. Right: "Fabric Choices: that make smart frocks", four printed dress linens of the new Spiralspun range by Old Bleach on the top row. Stevenson's Moygashel dress are also featured at the bottom of the page. *Vogue Pattern Book*, August-September 1935. Source: National Art Library, V&A.

These publications were aimed at the middle and upper markets: *Good Housekeeping*, *The Lady*, *Women's Wear Daily*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue* (and later, *Vogue Export Journal*), *Weldon's Ladies Journal*, *Britannia and Eve* and *The Queen*. Textile and design clients and rivals (often one and the same thing) also attended the firm's parties, Duncan Miller Ltd and Gordon Russell Ltd were regular customers, and textile manufacturers Donald Bros. of Dundee, who were stylistic allies with Old Bleach are all recorded. So too are the retailers, a country wide roster of the most respected and often, design and quality conscious retailers who also collaborated with design reformers in bringing good design to the fore of the retail experience: Selfridges, Liberty & Co., Heal's, Waring & Gillow, Whiteleys, Maple & Co., Binns, Army & Navy and John Lewis. The Visitor Book also records Old Bleach's global press reach with names such as Fairchild Publications (USA), Argus South African Newspapers Ltd, Australian Newspapers and the British and Latin America Chamber of Commerce attending press and launch parties. Despite the glamour of these cocktail parties, generous publicity and tangible business was expected from them. Editorial features

and advertising campaigns were produced (see Fig. 5. 24). The Visitor Book as an inventory of Old Bleach's connections underlines how seriously the company valued and worked at publicity and promotion.

New product launches were often more lavish affairs that spiked interest from the press and the public. In anticipation of launching Old Bleach's new dress linen 'Old Bleach Spiralspun'<sup>142</sup> in 1935, £2,600 was allocated as publicity expenditure, a sum approximately equivalent to over £170,000 today in addition to the company's agreed publicity budget for 1935 of £7,000.<sup>143</sup> Rather than take a conventional approach, Old Bleach recruited the help of Edith, seventh Marchioness of Londonderry for the launch. Her vigorous support of the Northern Irish linen industry was instrumental in placing linen into blue-blooded households willing to pay for the very best quality, and extended to the running of a small embroidery school at Mount Stewart, her Ulster residence.<sup>144</sup> Edith and W. H. Webb had developed a long-standing relationship, with Old Bleach regularly supplying the embroidery school with embroidery linen and household linens as gifts from Edith to Society friends and family, for example, in 1934 she organised a joint wedding gift of linen, at the request of The Queen, to Prince George and Princess Marina.<sup>145</sup> A small proportion of the gift was composed of linen from the luxury French brand Porthault (£130 off the £500 collected), the remaining monies were spent on Irish linen with a considerable contribution from Old Bleach. In a letter from Edith to the Duchess of Abercorn, she explained the Prince's antipathy toward white linens in favour of coloured linens, '...He would like them all tinted pale colours, such as oyster, beige, duck's egg green and Wedgwood blue. I know the Old Bleach Linen Co. have some beautiful napkins like this, as I have some myself.'<sup>146</sup> In response, Dolly Abercorn confirmed Old Bleach would supply all the coloured towels. These clients were important to linen manufacturers as they offered succour by way of endorsing the quality of linen and supplying a further International network of potential customers.

Edith offered to host the launch of Old Bleach's Spiralspun dress linen at her London residence, Londonderry House, Park Lane from February 26 – 28, 1935. Her role was not merely titular, she exploited all related connections to put on an impressive 'Dress Exhibition' using only Old Bleach's Spiralspun linen.<sup>147</sup> The papers, held in the Public Records Office (NI) relating to the organisation of the event amply demonstrate her apparently limitless social and political skills and tenacity in supporting the linen industry.<sup>148</sup> Central to that aim was to encourage a closer partnership between Paris and the home industries. After enlisting English designers such as Norman Hartnell, Digby Morton, Victor Stiebel and Fortnum and Mason, Edith sought out the great Parisian couturiers, this Anglo-French *entente cordiale* may well have been a pioneering initiative. The celebrated Parisian designers responded in kind, louisebolanger, Maggy Rouff, Molyneux, Lucien Lelong, Lucile Paray, Worth, Mainbocher, Heim, Jodelle and the Callot Sœurs all contributed with a mix of day dresses and evening gowns, cocktail wear, country ensembles, beach ensembles, travelling coats and wagon lit ensembles and accessories in shoes, hats and bags were all of Spiralspun linen. Considered a success, the Director of Publicity for Old Bleach Fashion Fabrics, Winifred Boulter wrote to Edith telling her of a Monsieur Ricard, representative of the *Syndicat de la*

Textile who had attended the event, returned to Paris declaring it 'très grande classe'.<sup>149</sup> W.H. Webb wrote thanking Edith and the Marquess for the use of their London home, 'The setting was perfect and a number of leading dress houses have informed me it was one of the most remarkable dress exhibitions ever held in London.' Sensitive to the broader industry benefits and not simply Old Bleach's, he carefully added, 'I feel quite sure this will have a beneficial effect on the Linen Trade as a whole and you will be pleased to hear that several members of the trade have so expressed themselves to me.'<sup>150</sup>



Fig. 5.25 Left: Spiralspun Linens Launch Invitation by Ashley Havinden; Middle: Photograph of the bridal dress in Londonderry House, *Birmingham Post*, 17 February 1935; Right: Full page advertisement designed by Ashley Havinden in *Vogue*, 20 March 1935. Source: left - Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh; middle - John Gilliland's Press Cutting's Book, LIRA, Lisburn; right - National Art Library, VAM, London.

With a stylish union of couturiers and aristocracy, the press coverage was plentiful and spanned the globe. *The Evening Independent*, St. Petersburg, Florida featured a photograph and editorial, 'The tropical colonies inspired this Petit Docks sports creation. The topee [pith helmet] is made of Spiralspun linen in deep ecru shade matching the suit of the same fabric. String gloves and sweater complete it.' while *The Melbourne Argus* correspondent Shirley Derbyshire focussed on 'Molyneaux Shows his Spring Collection: Fashion Displays of Linen at Londonderry House.' To appeal to the all-important American market, favourable reviews appeared in many local newspapers including the *Ballston Spa Daily Journal* (Saratoga County, N.Y.), *The Utica Observer-Dispatch* (Utica, N.Y.), *Spokane Daily Chronicle* (Spokane, Washington), and *The Portsmouth Times* (Portsmouth, Ohio). *The Urbana Daily Courier* (Urbana, Illinois) reported on "Ulster Linen Brides' Gown", 'This bride's dress of heavy white linen was shown in London, England, recently at a display organised by Lady Londonderry in the Long Gallery of Londonderry House. The show was arranged to demonstrate Old Bleach Spiralspun, a new linen from Ulster, which London and Paris are using for Spring and Summer brides.'<sup>151</sup> In aligning themselves to a (fashion) design based industry that enjoyed a global reputation and profile that relied on high-frequency publicity and promotion, certain sectors of the fine linen trade had reason to feel more confident in an uncertain future.

## Summary

If the Ulster linen industry was largely conservative in taste and complacent about the role of design, they were distinctly more proactive in matters of publicity and promotion during the Interwar years. As we have seen in this chapter, the industry engaged in a plethora of promotional activities that broadly positioned linen as authentic and of high quality and only occasionally highlighting design features. The establishment of the various trade societies and guilds were organised attempts to consolidate the general reputation of linen rather than proselytise its diversification. The Irish Linen Society's publicity reminded the consumer of linen's integrity and versatility, attributes that only the Ad men could anthropomorphise. Polly Anna Underwear's "True Irish Linen" ensembles (Fig. 5.3) promised nebulous benefits as 'fastidious femininity' and 'gives to slim and stout figures alike such grace and absolute freedom'. Linen was also sold as an aspirational product capable of connoting a whole lifestyle, although one only really supported by a household of servants contractually obliged to maintain the laborious 'integrity' of the fabric. It was the engagement of top publicity agencies in America who convinced the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild to orient their campaigns to a more fashion conscious and obviously younger market. The design of linen was brought to the fore in order to persuade young consumers that linen could be modern with the advantage of being stylistically distant from anachronistic parental taste. Their timing in 1929/1930 was disastrous and linen's luxury status was dramatically diminished. On the other hand, The Irish Linen Guild that catered to the home market was more concerned with preserving the concept of quality for 'house proud women' and at no point, it seemed, thought to collaborate with design reformers to fortify their message. It suggests an incontrovertible belief in the *material* quality of linen but little on how design could enhance it. The cautious, if leaden approach to the publicity of linen fancy goods was in direct opposition to how those manufacturers, who were determined to diversify linen production, promoted furnishing fabrics and dress linen as highly fashionable.

This chapter has shown how progressive linen manufacturers utilised the exhibition as an optimal medium for promoting its wares in a variety of contexts: domestic, national, international, empire and design reforming opportunities. Exhibitions could attract huge visitor numbers and were perfect, if competitive, vehicles for introducing novel lines and often, in novel ways. Old Bleach was represented in the most important industrial art exhibitions of the period and extending into permanent additions to industrial art collections (and the only Ulster linen firm to do so). Smaller more intimate exhibitions such as the 1935 dress exhibition at Londonderry House could be equally impactful with generous national and international press coverage and the opportunity for Old Bleach to access a raft of couturiers and a normally arcane network of Society clientele. Fabric parties introducing new products or the latest range were also exclusive affairs, where firms could cherry-pick their guests; as discussed earlier, Old Bleach's Visitor Book is a unique document that places the company at the heart of textile design and production history. It shows literally how energetically it worked at promotion, this book travelled across the United Kingdom with locations recorded as Randalstown, Belfast, London, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle, Oxford,



Glasgow and Aberdeen and included guests from Baghdad, Jamaica, Uruguay, New Zealand, Australia, Cape Town and New York. This was a company who thought globally and promoted themselves in that context.

Publicity was by no means commonly regarded in a naively positive light, in 1935, the respected Fortnum and Mason designer and stylist, H.G. Hayes Marshall (who produced one design for Old Bleach – see Fig. 5.1, p.2) warned of the occasionally bad influences of modern widespread publicity, which he claimed was apt to create a vast demand for the wrong things, “we all want business but we also want better business.”<sup>152</sup> In fact, publicity and promotion concealed the full diminution of the linen industry; if we judged the linen industry by publicity, promotion and propaganda alone, it would have appeared to be in rude health. This chapter has shown how the dynamic nature of linen’s propaganda throughout the interwar years did not match the industry’s diffidence to design; whereas progressive manufacturers, such as Old Bleach, saw these as concomitant and integral aspects of business. The range of examples discussed in the chapter also suggest how good design need not be a substitute for good quality, perhaps exposing a deep-rooted fear held by the fine linen trade. By the post war years, despite diversification in more design oriented sectors of the textile industry, linen companies *had* to move towards greater percentages of union blends thus demanding a new approach to its promotion. “True Irish Linen” was steadily becoming an oxymoron.

By the 1980s, not only were Old Bleach no longer working in linen at all, they were only working in cotton and cotton blends. However, their design ethos survived even when the very fabric that made it distinct did not. In the next chapter, I examine the textiles of Old Bleach in terms of their design methodology, assess the evidence of their significance and evaluate their Interwar contribution to textile design. Along with the V&A and Whitworth collections of Old Bleach furnishing fabrics, I have utilised on the surviving company archive to mine information on how they designed. Even with a lamentable absence of sample books and tangible fabrics in the archive, we can still get a reliable idea of the company’s rich output from a diverse range of records elsewhere. Because of their notable engagement with design, two contemporary sources have been useful in tracking-down many of their fabric designs; the Board of Trade’s Registers of Designs held at The National Archives, although these have only a company name and registration number to identify them, and trade and design magazines and journals of the period. Other invaluable sources have included illustrated company price lists and several catalogues and gaining access to the unpublished memoirs of Old Bleach’s Interwar designer, Felix C. Gotto.<sup>153</sup> Perhaps though, the most valuable extant source of design methods and inspiration has been the rescued design library. This unique, albeit incomplete, source offers new insight into just how significant design was to the Old Bleach Linen Company.

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<sup>1</sup> A web of linen is a whole piece of cloth woven on the loom.

<sup>2</sup> For an overview of the British industry see T.R. Nevett, *Advertising in Britain: a history*, (1982) E.S. Turner *Shocking History of Advertising* (1952) and M.L. Olney, *Buy Now, Pay Later: advertising, credit and consumer durables in the 1920s* (1991). The History of Advertising Trust (<http://www.hatads.org.uk>) has an online catalogue of over 37,000 adverts, 25 advertising agency archives including W.S. Crawford Ltd - Old Bleach's agency – and 8 career collections.

<sup>3</sup> Roland Marchand's *Advertising the American Dream: making way for modernity 1920-1940* (1985) is an insightful analysis of the graphic record of the interwar American Dream, while Steven Heller and Louise Fili's *British Modern: graphic design between the wars* (1998) offers a visual catalogue of stylistic influences on British graphic design.

<sup>4</sup> Taylor, p.103.

<sup>5</sup> Facilitated by the engagement of W.S. Crawford's Advertising Agency, London, since 1918.

<sup>6</sup> The National Art Library, London, hold a small catalogue of towels by Old Bleach from c.1900, with very similar linen towel designs. NAL, Victoria and Albert Museum, TCB Box 4, T.C.K 0118.

<sup>7</sup> Marchand, Introduction, p. xx.

<sup>8</sup> W.H. Webb "Irish Linen: a lecture by W.H. Webb" Part Two: The Seal Masters, Linen Associations and The Irish Linen Society, a twelve-part lecture series by Webb. The archive holds a copy of the lecture series which was produced by Webb in c. 1923 with an updated introduction and later sections added in 1935. Old Bleach Linen Company Archive, Randalstown.

<sup>9</sup> The New York Passenger Lists record twenty Transatlantic trips for Webb, from 1909 and then every year from 1919 to 1937. He is listed as a 'Linen Merchant' or 'Manufacturer', [www.libertyellisfoundation.org](http://www.libertyellisfoundation.org). According to the Old Bleach Minute Books, in 1921 his trip to America is primarily to install a new agency manager, but the Board withdrew the carte blanche he had previously enjoyed and advised not to commit the company to further trading no matter of inducements offered without consulting the Board. He was to use his best efforts to dispose of stock, using price concession if necessary.

<sup>10</sup> W.H. Webb, Introduction, "Irish Linen: a lecture by W.H. Webb", 1935, p.1.

<sup>11</sup> W.H. Webb, confidential letters to James Craig, 8<sup>th</sup> & 11<sup>th</sup> March 1921. PRONI: CAB/9/F/8/1.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Veblen, T. (1899) "Conspicuous Leisure", Chapter 3, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, 1994, pp.23-43.

<sup>14</sup> Johnson, D.S. "The Northern Ireland Economy: 1914-1939", in *An Economic History of Ulster: 1820-1939*, 1985, pp.184-223.

<sup>15</sup> Tariff Commission, Evidence on Flax, Hemp and Jute Industries, para. 3863, in P. Ollerenshaw, "The UK Linen Industry 1900-1930", p.289. The Commission was set up by the Tariff Reform League who campaigned for an imperial tariff on goods coming in to the British Empire.

<sup>16</sup> The three other strategic points included: 'hold prices steady that would ensure a reasonable profit for all, research generally but more especially in connection with flax and the establishment of reterries to increase and improve the flax supply and finance – the forming of a co-operative financing organisation in order to hold things steady during periods of depression.' Webb's letter to Craig is unofficial and *sub rosa*, although written on Old Bleach headed paper, he writes neither as its Director nor Chairman of the Irish Linen Society, but in the capacity of Intelligence. 8<sup>th</sup> March 1921. PRONI: CAB/9/F/8/1.

<sup>17</sup> Reported by Alfred Moore, "Irish and Scottish Linen Guild: Propaganda in the United States and Canada", *Belfast News Letter*, September 28, 1929. Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library.

<sup>18</sup> The Scottish proportion of 13.11% amounted to £8,000 from ten Dunfermline firms. "A Linen Trade Publicity Effort", Irish Linen Merchants' Association Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>19</sup> ISLDG Campaign Plan, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>20</sup> The Cornell Agency Propaganda plan was a detailed strategy with advertising concepts described and explained with estimated costings included. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>21</sup> The 'drop' was the measurement where the table cloth fell off the edge of the table top, for example in 1934, 12-15 inches was advised for formal settings and 15-18 inches for informal dining. "Style Trends in Linen: American Expert's Views" *The Linen Trade Circular*, July 21<sup>st</sup>, 1934.

<sup>22</sup> The Cornell Agency Propaganda plan was a detailed strategy with advertising concepts described and explained with estimated costings included. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid, The Cornell Agency Propaganda Plan.

<sup>24</sup> Albert Adams, Derryvale Genuine Irish Linens, open letter to the Irish Trade, 17 November 1925, copy in John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>25</sup> ISLDG Sales Promotion Event at J.R. Jones Sons & Co., Kalamazoo, Michigan, advertisement as featured in the Guild's members' magazine, *The Linen Guildsman*, June 1927.

<sup>26</sup> *The Linen Guildsman* is first published in 1926 with Julien Elfenbein as editor (and sales promotion director of the Linen Guild). In 1931, *Linens* is published by Sylvia Hoffman and later in 1932 the two merge and the name changes to *Linens and Domestic*s. It continued to be published until 1969.



- <sup>27</sup> Letter dated 18<sup>th</sup> May 1917 from La Salle and Koch Department Store, Toledo, Ohio, printed in 'The Linen Guildsman', June 1927. Macy's bought the company in 1923, but it retained its name and autonomy from its second iteration in 1883.
- <sup>28</sup> *The Linen Guildsman*, June 1927. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>29</sup> Cornell Agency Notes for the ISLDG Advertising Print Campaign, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>30</sup> Other participating magazines included *Vanity Fair*, *House Beautiful* and *Junior League Bulletin*. Added later in the extended campaign were *Country Life*, *Garden and Home Builder*, *Canadian Home Journal*, *Sketch*, *Midweek Pictorial* and *Merchants Journal of Commerce*.
- <sup>31</sup> Cornell Agency Notes for the ISLDG Advertising Print Campaign, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> 'The Mystery of Loveliness', November 1927. Source: John Gilliland's guard book, ISLDG, LIRA Library, Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>34</sup> Benjamin De Casseres, *New York Times Book Review and Magazine*, 1921, in Gary D. Best, *The Dollar Decade: Mammon and the Machine in 1920s America*, Prager, 2003, p.17.
- <sup>35</sup> *Etiquette* is still in print and updated for a 21<sup>st</sup> century readership.
- <sup>36</sup> Cornell Agency Notes for the ISLDG Advertising Print Campaign, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum. p.5.
- <sup>37</sup> The 'bright young things' were group of Bohemian well educated socialites (usually of aristocratic stock) in 1920's London.
- <sup>38</sup> My emphasis, U.S. *Vogue*, January 1930.
- <sup>39</sup> Kemp Starrett was a newspaper cartoonist and comic strip artist for the *Brooklyn Eagle*, *New York Herald Tribune* and the *Philadelphia Public Ledger* and it appears from his cartoons, brilliant at drawing people at dinner tables. 'Fitz' or Daniel R. Fitzpatrick was a two-time Pulitzer winner who drew cartoons for the *St. Louis Post-Despatch* from 1913-955. Both were regarded and in demand.
- <sup>40</sup> "A Linen Trade Publicity Effort" Report, Irish Linen Merchants' Association Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>41</sup> The article reported that several speakers had raised issues of production and distribution but highlighted design and price cutting among manufacturers and retailers as persistent problems. *The Linen Guildsman*, July 1927, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>42</sup> *The Linen Guildsman*, June 1927, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>43</sup> Years 1-4 would cost \$46,000, \$49,000, \$53,000 and \$60,000 respectively. "A Linen Trade Publicity Effort" Report.
- <sup>44</sup> Alfred Moore, "Irish and Scottish Linen Guild: Propaganda in the United States and Canada", *Belfast News Letter*, September 28, 1929. Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library.
- <sup>45</sup> The Manchester firm Tootal (Broadhurst Lee) established a research department in 1918 and pioneered much of the crease-resistant technology in mainly the cotton and synthetic sectors. Old Bleach was manufacturing and attempting to perfect crease resistant linen in the early thirties.
- <sup>46</sup> According to the 1930 U.S. census, Agatha Illava was listed as a 'Stylist' in Advertising, born 1893, aged 37 years, married to a sculptor with two daughters and one servant.
- <sup>47</sup> Three reports (November, 1930, August 1931, February 1932) from Agatha Illava are included in the *Lindaguild News*, a confidential bulletin published periodically by The Linen Guild, NYC, for the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild and the Irish Linen Guild. Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library, M13 (11).
- <sup>48</sup> "The Eighth Style Report", February 1932. By 1932, in addition to apparel, Illava was advising on household linens. Alfred S. Moore Collection, Belfast Central Library.
- <sup>49</sup> The Guild represented four of the main linen associations in Ulster: Flax Spinners' Association, Irish Power Loom Manufacturers' Association, Bleachers' and Finishers' Association, the Irish Linen Merchants' Association and allied interests.
- <sup>50</sup> Gilliland's résumé is among his papers in LIRA library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>51</sup> John Gilliland's report to the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, "Wembley Exhibition and Publicity for Irish Linens", 1925. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>53</sup> "Some Notes on the Question of Fixed Prices", Memorandum from John Gilliland to ILG members, 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1929. Irish Linen Guild Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>54</sup> Inducements totalling £200 were offered by the Guild to buyers or assistants in linen departments in the home trade for the twelve best suggestions to help increase sales in the home market. 1,200 replies were received with over half advocating the standard quality and the guild ticket. Irish Linen Guild Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.
- <sup>55</sup> It was also recommended that a London Advisory Committee be established to convene and report back to the Guild on retail and consumer developments from the West End buyers and London salesmen. Report on London

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Trip, July 10<sup>th</sup> August 4<sup>th</sup>, 1930, and Consultation with Trade Representatives in Regard to Guild Policy and Propaganda. Irish Linen Guild Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.4.

<sup>57</sup> "Irish Linen: Are You 'Linen Conscious?'" , *Western Mail and South Wales News*, September 21, 1931. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>58</sup> John Gilliland's report to the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, "Wembley Exhibition and Publicity for Irish Linens", 1925. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>59</sup> "Irish Linen Guild Publicity: The First Phase", John Gilliland's six-page review of the national publicity campaign, 26<sup>th</sup> June 1930.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> "The Guild and The Home Market" seven-page Committee Report to Guild Members, 1934. Irish Linen Guild Papers, John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

<sup>63</sup> The trade school was founded by the London County Council Technical Education Board in 1915, specialising in training pupils the clothing industry. Its current incarnation is the London College of Fashion (UAL). The archive is held at LCF, reference: GB 2159 Barrett Street.

<sup>64</sup> *The Belfast News-Letter*, 21 January 1939.

<sup>65</sup> Saunders' lecture was entitled "Linen from a Fashion Angle", the remaining lectures for 1938 included "Linen as a Generic Term – Definitions and Descriptions by J.M. Paynton from Retail Standards, "Linen from the other Side of the Counter – what to sell" by the Guild's Secretary G.A.E. Roberts and "Colour as a Fashion Element in Linen" by Robert Wilson, Art Director for the British Colour Council. *The Irish Textile Journal*, January 1938.

<sup>66</sup> "Wooing the Shopper: Marketing Problems" *Belfast News Letter*, 22 November 1933. Irish Linen Guild Press Cuttings Book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>67</sup> "New Fashions in Irish Linen: Improvements in Design and Colouring" by John Gilliland, reprinted from the Manchester Guardian Commercial, *World Textiles Supplement*, October 6, 1934. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>68</sup> PRONI: CAB 9F/123/9.

<sup>69</sup> However, 'Textile Queens' rarely escaped the eagle eye of textile manufacturers, *The Linen Trade Circular* (September, 1938) reported on the "'Wool Queen" was under a cloud at the moment as irate Yorkshire manufacturers discovered that she wore a silk gown at a recent fashion parade.'

<sup>70</sup> "Irish Linen Guild Activities", G.A.E. Roberts, *The Irish Textile Journal*, Vol. 5, No.1, January 1939, p.7.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> "Irish Linens at Wembly [sic]", Press Release for the Associated Press and Draper's Organiser by Gilliland, April 1925. LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>73</sup> John Gilliland's résumé, LIRA library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>74</sup> John Gilliland's report to the Belfast Chamber of Commerce, "Wembley Exhibition and Publicity for Irish Linens", 1925. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>75</sup> "Criticising the original Irish Linen Industry Exhibition, British Empire Exhibition 1924, letter to the Committee responsible" (handwritten 'title' on the first page), 28 July, 1924. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

<sup>77</sup> John Gilliland's résumé, LIRA library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>78</sup> "The Production and Exhibition of Good Design and Articles of Everyday Use", better known as The Gorrell Report (1932) emphasised the role exhibitions could play in educating the public in the importance of well-designed goods and raising the standard of design.

<sup>79</sup> Evidence of John Gilliland, 11 January 1934, Industrial Art Committee, PRONI: COM/26/1/4.

<sup>80</sup> *Commercial Art and Industry*, February 1, 1935, p.39.

<sup>81</sup> Categories included art linens, cambrics, damasks (in the piece and finished articles), dress linens, diapers, embroidered linens, towellings, sheer linens, hucks, bed linens – pillow linens, pillow cases, sheetings and bedspreads. According to the "Index to Contributors", Irish Linen Industry Exhibit at the Ulster Pavilion, British Empire Exhibition, 1924, the categories of linen goods totalled sixty-two. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>82</sup> Scottish Empire Exhibition Committee Northern Ireland Minutes, PRONI: COM/16/36.

<sup>83</sup> Letter to W.D. Scott, Ministry of Commerce, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1938. Scottish Empire Exhibition File on Linen Exhibit. PRONI: COM/16/13.

<sup>84</sup> G. F. Woods, 11<sup>th</sup> August 1938. Scottish Empire Exhibition File on Linen Exhibit. PRONI: COM/16/13.

<sup>85</sup> To date, I have been unable to identify this fabric as the paperwork only refers to the product code and none of the company literature or records have revealed its identity. By way of deduction and conjecture, the code 'PAW' was assigned to some of the 'Modern Artists' range, for example, 'Sirius' by Albert Rutherford is PAW19 and Marion Dorn's 'Aircraft' is PAW23.

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<sup>86</sup> Along with Old Bleach, their dress linens had featured regularly in women's fashion magazines such as *Vogue*, *Tatler* and *Harper's Bazaar* throughout the 1930s.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Will Davenport, Advertisement Manager at *Vogue*, outlining and confirming the dress linen arrangements to T.M. Stitt (Robinson & Cleaver Ltd), Display Manager of the Linen Exhibit, 7<sup>th</sup> March 1938. PRONI: COM16/13.

<sup>88</sup> T.M. Stitt to G.H.E. Parr, 13<sup>th</sup> May 1938. PRONI: COM16/13.

<sup>89</sup> Major A.C. Herdman, *The Belfast Telegraph*, 26<sup>th</sup> April, 1938.

<sup>90</sup> For more detail on the 1938 Glasgow Empire Exhibition see Emma McVeigh's PhD thesis, 'Regionalism, Modernism and Identity: Sculpture in Northern Ireland 1921-1951', Ulster University, 2012.

<sup>91</sup> However, Sarah Britton recounts a radical anti-imperial 'counter exhibition' staged in Glasgow to coincide with the Exhibition at Bellahouston Park. "Come and see the Empire by the All Red Route" showed how exhibitions could be contested, in this case by the political left. It offered a behind the scenes interpretation of the glossy power and glory narrative typical of Empire exhibitions and mimicked the conventions of exhibition display and spectacle. It even included a display holding the empire directly responsible for the Irish Famine. Britton, S. "Come and See the Empire by the All Red Route!: Anti-Imperialism and Exhibitions in Interwar Britain", *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 69, Issue 1, 1<sup>st</sup> March 2010, pp. 68-89.

<sup>92</sup> "New Fashions in Irish Linen: Improvements in Design and Colouring" by John Gilliland, reprinted from the Manchester Guardian Commercial, *World Textiles Supplement*, October 6, 1934. John Gilliland's guard book, LIRA Library, Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum.

<sup>93</sup> Evidence of John Gilliland, 11 January 1934, Industrial Art Committee, PRONI: COM/26/1/4.

<sup>94</sup> "Is 'Design' Planned to Reach the Majority? Report on the recent Exhibition of Everyday Things by an Everyday Woman", *Art and Industry*, May 1, 1936, pp.168-172.

<sup>95</sup> Casson (1869-1951) wrote 168 books on business, scientific management and technology; topics dear to W.H. Webb and reflected in his correspondence and company marketing.

<sup>96</sup> Pevsner, 1937, pp. 161 and 170.

<sup>97</sup> Nominal File, Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, V&A Museum Registry File, MA/1/0181, Archive of Art & Design.

<sup>98</sup> The Old Bleach cuttings books and photograph albums span a period from mid 1930s – 1980s. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

<sup>99</sup> In addition, reviews of industrial art exhibitions and articles on the latest design developments in the contemporary design press have consistently featured Old Bleach in the context of the Industrial Art Movement.

<sup>100</sup> Review of "The Exhibition of British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home", *The Studio Year Book*, January-June 1933, p.108.

<sup>101</sup> Pevsner, 1937, p.170.

<sup>102</sup> "Contemporary Industrial Design: Good Sense and Freakishness at Dorland Hall", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, October 27 1934, pp.127-128.

<sup>103</sup> 'Old Bleach Furnishings Range' catalogue, 1936. Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown, private collection.

<sup>104</sup> Edinburgh Weavers, Scottish Textile Weavers, Eileen Hunter Fabrics, Turnbull and Stockdale and Donald Bros. were also commended for their textile displays. "Contemporary Industrial Design: Good Sense and Freakishness at Dorland Hall", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, October 27 1934, pp.127-128.

<sup>105</sup> See Boydell's essay on how textiles were debated, negotiated and used in the modern home, "Textiles in the Modern Home", in *Disentangling Textiles: Techniques for the Study of Designed Objects*, pp. 81-94.

<sup>106</sup> "Novelism at The Royal Academy" H. Read, *The Architectural Review*, March 1935; Anthony Blount's review in *The Spectator* was included in "Some Press Criticisms of the Royal Academy Exhibition of British Art in Industry", *The Architectural Review*, March 1935.

<sup>107</sup> Hubbard, H. "British Art in Industry Exhibition at Burlington House", *The Connoisseur, with which is incorporated International Studio*, Vol. XCX, January-June 1935, pp.91-94.

<sup>108</sup> The Guardian article reported on a branch meeting of the DIA and Red Rose Guild at the City Art Gallery, chaired by Sir Thomas Barlow with guest speaker F.J. Donald of Donald Bros. "Art from the Machine: A War on Ugliness, Manchester Views on the Exhibition" *The Guardian*, February 28 1935.

<sup>109</sup> *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* reported, in November 17 1934, over 1,300 lengths of furnishing fabrics had been submitted to the Royal Academy Exhibition's Committee for consideration.

<sup>110</sup> "Design in Industry: Furnishing Textiles and Furnished Rooms at The Royal Academy", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, January 12 1935, pp.38-41.

<sup>111</sup> "Short Lengths", *The Linen Trade Circular*, February 1 1935.

<sup>112</sup> "Exhibition of British Industrial Art at Burlington House", *Journal of Royal Society of Arts*, Vol. 83, no.4287, January 1935, pp.226-227. Exhibit numbers are within parentheses in the Review.

<sup>113</sup> Chapter "Fashion and Fabrics" was written by Vogue Editor, Alison Settle, pp.109-122; Chapter XV, "Textiles and Textures" came with the nom de plume 'by Nobody, with an apology by the Editor', pp.155-164, *The Conquest of Ugliness: A Collection of Contemporary Views on the Place of Art in Industry*, Methuen, 1935.

<sup>114</sup> See Appendix II for Old Bleach Holdings in The Whitworth Gallery and Manchester Art Gallery.

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<sup>115</sup> "Museum of Textiles", *The Textile Recorder*, December 1932, press cutting in the Industrial Art Collection Files, Manchester City Art Gallery.

<sup>116</sup> One of the explanations offered during an industrial art sub-committee meeting, was the nature of the calico printing trade; the styles did not belong to the printer, permission would have to come from the manufacturer and the merchant would have to be consulted before samples were supplied. 15<sup>th</sup> January 1934, Industrial Art Sub-Committee: Textile Section. Industrial Art Collection Files, City Art Gallery Archives, Manchester.

<sup>117</sup> Jane Fraser and Liz Paul's accounts of the formation of the Industrial Art Collection at Manchester states in fact only three contributors from the Manchester-based textile firms. See endnote no.136 for full citation.

<sup>118</sup> Industrial Art Sub-Committee: Textile Section - Report on Progress, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1932.

<sup>119</sup> Industrial Art Sub-Committee: Textile Section – Five Years Plan. No date is included but is most likely to be January 1933.

<sup>120</sup> The Dorland Hall exhibition was organised by the Design and Industries Association with the support of *Country Life* magazine. According to Pevsner (1937, p.161) after Manchester, it toured Halifax, Leeds, Edinburgh, Bristol and Stoke-on-Trent as DIA exhibitions.

<sup>121</sup> The catalogue is held in the Manchester City Art Gallery Archives and contains marginalia which suggests the Manchester curator/s used it to 'check off' every item that had appeared in the Exhibition's first showing in London, June 20- July 12 1933 at Dorland Hall, Regent Street. In the margin beside Old Bleach's listed items is scribed 'see invoice for extra goods sent' indicating further lengths were paid for.

<sup>122</sup> Dowling also named Warner & Sons, Old Glamis (Donald Brothers), Turnbull & Stockdale, Foxtons [sic], Allan Walton, Marion Dorn and Edinburgh Weavers. pp. 42-43.

<sup>123</sup> Fraser and Paul, 1999, p.55.

<sup>124</sup> "Stimulation of Trade - Exhibition of Art and industry", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, October 8<sup>th</sup>, 1932, pp.39-40.

<sup>125</sup> Pevsner, 1937, p.170.

<sup>126</sup> According to the 1936 Old Bleach Catalogue, Glengarry 'is practically identical with "Braemar", shown here in conjunction with a very heavy upholstery cloth, on which it is most effective. As used on the liner "Queen Mary".' Old Bleach Archives.

<sup>127</sup> "Modern Furnishing Fabrics" shows three out of six fabric with a floral and geometrical combination, *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, 13 May, 1933; "Textiles" a picture essay focused on texture, *The Studio Yearbook of Decorative Art*, 1938, pp.139-144.

<sup>128</sup> In the article, Denby estimated a regular year's income was approximately £450.

<sup>129</sup> Inventory of Textiles for the 'Exhibition of Everyday Things', IAC papers, 18 November 1936, Manchester City Art Gallery. These six Old Bleach samples are now held in The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

<sup>130</sup> "Period and Reproduction Designs", Old Bleach Catalogue 1936, Old Bleach Archives, Randalstown.

<sup>131</sup> Exhibition Catalogue, Industrial Art Collection File, Manchester Art Gallery.

<sup>132</sup> Kuba cloth is a decorative cloth woven by the Kuba people of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Woven (by men) and embellished (by women) it is used for ceremonial and sartorial purposes.

<sup>133</sup> The Old Bleach fabrics exhibited at the original 'Everyday Things' exhibition in RIBA's headquarters in Portland Place, London were: 'Cadiz', 'Colonna', 'Cranford', 'Glenmalure', 'Glenshesk', 'Kendal', 'Lismore', 'Mecca' and 'Quarry Cloth'. These designs are discussed in Chapter 6. The whereabouts of these nine lengths is unknown. Fraser and Paul note that Lawrence Haward did buy from the 'Everyday Things' Exhibition for the Manchester IAC but these nine Old Bleach fabrics are not held in the Whitworth Gallery archives now.

<sup>134</sup> The allocated budget for the acquisition of textiles from BIF in 1934 amounted to £30 and rose to £50 in 1937. Industrial Art Sub-Committee: Textile Section Papers, Industrial Art Collection Files, City Art Gallery Archives, Manchester.

<sup>135</sup> Paul, L. "The Industrial Art Collection at Manchester City Art Gallery", *Design History Newsletter*, 1998.

<sup>136</sup> See Fraser and Paul's essays on the Industrial Art Collection in "Art, Industry and Everyday Things: Manchester City Art Gallery and Industrial Art between the Wars", *The Journal of Decorative Arts Society*, vol. 22, 1998, pp.43-57 and "A Living Tradition: Modernism and the Decorative Arts", *Modern Britain 1929-1939*, Design Museum, London, 1999, pp. 52-68.

<sup>137</sup> The Whitworth Gallery and Manchester Art Gallery hold over fifty Old Bleach artefacts. The collection is comprised mainly of their Furnishing Fabrics from the Interwar period, but also include a post war carpet sample and two small cuttings of furnishing fabrics, 'Fanad' and 'Donegal', included as exemplary weaving design in the 'Crompton Prize Fund Reference Collection 1936-1937' (both in The Whitworth) and a bedspread and tea cloths (held in Platt Hall). The collection was substantially added to in 1996, when the design historian, Lesley Jackson rescued a number of the firm's large Furnishing Fabric sample books from furnishers Leemings Ltd., Halifax and gifted them to the Whitworth.

<sup>138</sup> Subsequently Richard Thomas Webb founded Webb & Co. Ltd in Newtownards, County Down. Several interviews from the Webb & Co. are available in the Living Linen Oral History Project, Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, Cultra, County Down.

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<sup>139</sup> A collection of seventeen letters in the Old Bleach Archive chart a request in November 1945 from Norman Fitzroy Webb to the advertising agency W.S. Crawford to institute a search, in the Patents Office, to confirm whether Old Bleach was indeed the first textile company to trademark their Brand. It was confirmed they were not, but diplomatically advised, 'it can be said that the two Old Bleach registrations were among the first textile marks registered.' The research took place between November 1945 and March 1946. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>140</sup> Ashley Havinden's archive, comprising approximately 50,000 items, is held in the Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh: GMA A39/3/171-196 (these are all related to his textile designs) GMA A39/4 (promotional material for Old Bleach). See also Richard Hollis's essay in *Ashley Havinden: Advertising and the Artist*, published by the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland to accompany the exhibition *Advertising and the Artist: The Work and Collection of Ashley Havinden*, October 2003-January 2004.

<sup>141</sup> The rise in the number of magazines aimed at the female reader in 1930s Britain, over fifty by 1939, has been the subject of much scholarship. The 1990s saw a revision of earlier feminist readings of women in the Interwar era, particularly in their relationship to consumption, challenging the idea of domestic retrenchment and, particularly young, women's 'changing expectations and self-conscious "modernity"' (Bingham, 2004). These later considerations have argued against the passivity of the female reader, asserting how women used magazines to learn how to be modern. See M. Pugh, Chapter 7, "The Cult of Domesticity in the 1930s" in *Women and The Women's Movement in Britain 1914-1959*, Macmillan, 1992; Greenfield J. and C. Reid, "Women's Magazines and the Commercial Orchestration of Femininity in the 1930s: Evidence from Woman's Own", *Media History*, Vol. 4, No.2, 1998; F. Hackney, "'Use Your Hands for Happiness': Home Craft and Make-do-and-Mend in British Women's Magazines in the 1920s and 1930s", *Journal of Design History*, Vol. 19, Issue 1, March 2006.

<sup>142</sup> 'Spiralspun' linen was trademarked by Old Bleach on 28<sup>th</sup> December 1934, Registration number: 556704. Letter from R.W. Barker, Patents agent for W.S. Crawford Ltd, who carried out the trademark research for Old Bleach, 15<sup>th</sup> November 1945. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>143</sup> A historic inflation calculator estimates £7,000 in 1935 as the contemporary equivalent of £460,000.00.

<sup>144</sup> The embroidery school was managed by Mrs Alice Hoyland, the housekeeper at Mount Stewart. Little is known about Hoyland and the school, a letter from her to Edith, explaining the slow progress of the painstaking work for the Royal linen is among the papers documenting the Royal wedding gift, Londonderry Papers, PRONI: D3099/14/17.

<sup>145</sup> Various monetary contributions came from across the upper echelons of the aristocracy including The Westminsters, Lady Howard de Walden, Countess of Warwick, Duchess of Roxburgh, Marchioness of Dufferin, Lady Cunard and The Sutherlands.

<sup>146</sup> Londonderry Papers, PRONI: D3099/14/17.

<sup>147</sup> 'Spiralspun' by Old Bleach was highly twisted in both warp and weft, resulting in a 'crease-resisting' cloth that was light weight and non-bulky, but could still be woven with a fashionable tweed effect.

<sup>148</sup> See Brett Irwin's recent essay "Lady Londonderry and the Great War: Women, work and the Western Front" where he outlines the scope of Edith's social and political influence, in Terence Dooley and Christopher Ridgeway (eds.), *The Country House and the Great War: Irish and British Experiences*, Four Courts Press, Dublin, 2016, pp. 136-46. Anne de Courcy's *Society's Queen: the life of Edith, Marchioness of Londonderry*, Phoenix, 1992, is a broader biography of Edith that draws on the Londonderry Papers (now held at PRONI, D3099) and H. Montgomery Hyde's *The Londonderrys*, Hamish Hamilton, 1979, provides a family history.

<sup>149</sup> Winifred Boulter letter, 8<sup>th</sup> March 1935. PRONI: D3099/11/27/3/13.

<sup>150</sup> W.H. Webb letter to the Londonderrys, 6<sup>th</sup> March 1935. PRONI: D3099/11/27/3/10.

<sup>151</sup> *The Urbana Daily Courier*, 22 May 1935. Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections (idnc.library.illinois.edu).

<sup>152</sup> H.G. Hayes Marshall, chairing Derek Patmore's Address at the Royal Society of Arts, *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, January 5 1935.

<sup>153</sup> Felix C. Gotto's memoirs are held in the private papers of his daughter, Mrs Juliet Morley, Suffolk.

## CHAPTER SIX

### Old Bleach's Design Imperative

From December 1875, Charles James Webb, the founder of Old Bleach, registered his designs with the Patents, Designs and Trade Marks Office, establishing the precedent for the company whereby design was of such import and means of distinction, it was worth protecting.<sup>1</sup> In 1901, the firm launched a design competition (In *The Architectural Review for The Artist and Craftsman*) for damask table cloth and towel designs with a prize fund of seventy pounds with the grand promise that both 1<sup>st</sup> prizes would 'be woven with the best yarns available, and will be made the highest-class table cloth and towel in the world.'



Fig. 6.1 Old Bleach Design Competition, 1900-1901, *The Architectural Review for The Artist and Craftsman*. A total of seventeen cash prizes were available in order to attract a wide range of entries. The towel design was 'open to ladies only', most probably appealing to the home maker's amateur attempts at design, whereas the table cloth design might demand the professional male designer's workmanship. Source: *The Architectural Review for The Artist and Craftsman*, ProQuest, 2012.

Throughout company literature and publicity, design was regularly sold as a dual asset to the quality of the linen. Old Bleach steadily built its reputation on its progressive disposition to seek out new ways to improve their textiles in, flax quality and provenance, yarn and cloth structures, colour improvement in dyes and application (with hand-painting) and innovating in new designs. This chapter undertakes a closer examination of the textile designs from mainly the Interwar period. While their newly launched furnishing fabrics from the 1930s are studied in some detail, I also consider, more broadly, their damask designs and fancy linens to evaluate the company's design ethos in terms of their commitment to the modern. The British Industrial Art Movement's espousal of the modern was one where period-style design was dimly viewed and yet there were few British manufacturing companies completely wedded to what could be described as exclusively modern design. Throughout the Interwar years, the lure and popularity of period designs such as "Jaco" (Jacobean style) fabrics was too great for manufacturers to ignore, even the highly respected and pro-modern journal *The Architectural Review*, admitted, 'No large manufacturer can afford to dismiss these from his range.'<sup>2</sup> As we have seen in the last chapter, the two prominent museums with representations of Old Bleach's furnishing fabrics hold only their modern designs. In some way, this

privileging distorts how we understand Old Bleach's engagement with design, if it is only viewed as 'progressive' in strictly modern terms. In reality, the volume of modern designs from the firm is quite modest, although impactful. Time and again, the printed linens by Marion Dorn or Paul Nash (discussed later in this chapter) and woven linens by Felix Gotto are regularly used as typical of the company's furnishing fabrics output but actually represent approximately half of their furnishings designs. However, one can see why they are used; they are part of important collections, thus already validated; they are visually dramatic and of the latter designer, technically accomplished. In addition to the examination of their obviously modern designs, I review their treatment of period design as it too exemplifies an enlightened design methodology and worthy of academic scrutiny. While the Furnishing Fabrics range is the main focus of study in this chapter, the damask table cloth, towel and embroidery designs are also considered. As the mainstay of the linen trade in Ulster, they too chart design evolution, taste and the company's attempt to introduce new designs into the range. From a number of esoteric primary sources, we can piece together the very catholic taste and range Old Bleach designers drew upon to create a catalogue of commercially successful and much admired textiles; for example, the firm's design library, is an accidental trove that discloses a rich and well utilised design resource. A second aim of this chapter is to assess the significance of the textiles and evaluate Old Bleach's contribution to interwar textile history and design history. I do this by largely drawing on archival material, contemporary literature, published ephemera and grey literature made by Old Bleach's vigorous publicity programmes throughout its long history.

## Part One: Damask Cloth and Embroidery Design

### **6.1 Damask Table Cloth Designs: 'Old Bleach Damasks are Unrivalled in Design and Quality'**

The Old Bleach archive holds six fancy goods Price Lists dating from 1925 up to 1938. Compiled for retail sales departments, they include 'selling points' as emphatic statements for sales staff such as 'Old Bleach Damasks are unrivalled in design and quality' and 'they are known and advertised all over the world.' Additionally, they demonstrate the vast range of linen goods available: table damasks, towels, piece goods and hemstitched goods with many bespoke services such as hand embroidering monograms and initials (with a small insert detailing the styles available) and lace mounting. This small collection of printed literature, spanning a thirteen-year period, can help us understand the commercial and creative demands on the damask designer. In each price list, a sample number of damask cloths and towels are illustrated in black and white electros, therefore we can see the complexity in the pattern range rather than simply rely on product descriptions.<sup>3</sup> While many of the designs remain unaltered over that time, there are popular patterns, still in production from the nineteenth century and newer additions. Many of the designs are categorised according to linen type, weight and weave quality; for example, in the 1936 Price List, table cloth damask alone, were available in nineteen qualities.<sup>4</sup> Between 1925 and 1938, over one hundred damask table cloth designs had been in production. Year on year Old Bleach appeared to expand their

range of linen goods rather than rationalize it. By 1938, further new additions of union cloths, such as rayon and cotton blends, are introduced.

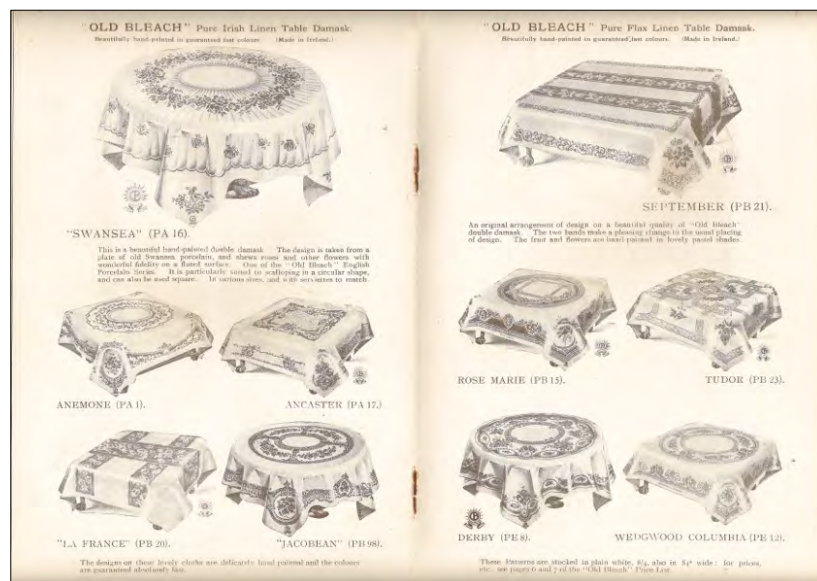


Fig. 6.2 Linen Damask Table Cloth Designs: Swansea, Anemone, Ancaster, La France, Jacobean, September, Rose Marie, Tudor, Derby and Wedgwood Columbia, Old Bleach Price List September 1929. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Many of the designs possessed both a universal and enduring appeal, as featured in Fig. 6.2 'Derby' and 'Jacobean' (bottom row, centre) along with 'Naples' and 'Wild Rose' were the only four designs to appear in each price list across thirteen years. This evidence of longevity was a defining feature of the damask design trade, it suited manufacturers to continue producing the same designs and consumers evidently continued to *favour* certain patterns. Describing 'Wild Rose' Old Bleach acknowledged, 'Some designs have the happy fate to hit exactly the public taste, and this is one of them. It is well balanced, and is shown off by the heavy quality of double damask on which it is woven.'<sup>5</sup> Not surprisingly then, there were two versions of 'Wild Rose' (A82, B82) ostensibly sharing the same design *content* and differentiated by *composition*. A82 comprises a deep border of festooned roses with roses arranged around the outside of the central panel in a squared off frame while B82's festooned border drops just off the table top and roses have been placed inside the central panel.



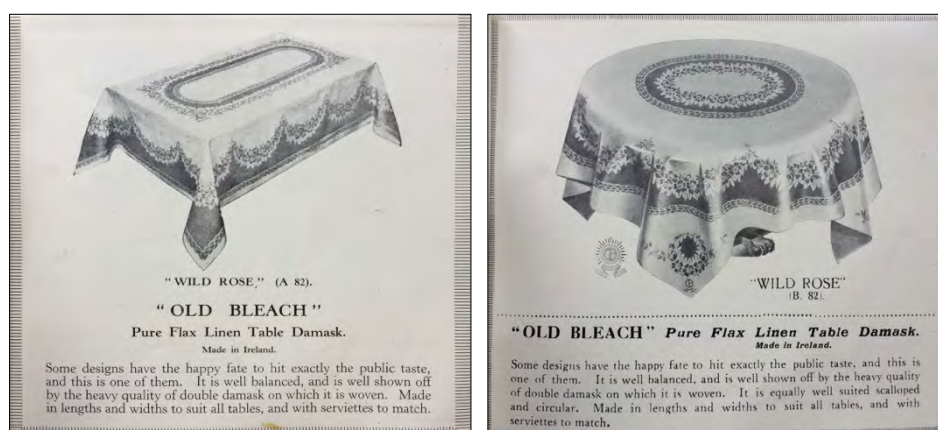


Fig. 6.3 Left: Wild Rose – A 82 Right: Wild Rose – B 82. Source: Booklet of Electros, 1935, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

Largely conservative in design, the patterns could vary from year to year, with several following the same theme, for example 'Adam' and 'Adam Period' contain similar motifs but are distinctly configured. The damask table cloth designs can be broadly classified in ten categories: Classical/Neo-Classical, 'Novel' Traditional Motifs, Decorative, Plain, Floral, Foliage, Fauna, Irish, Modern and Miscellaneous (the latter category accommodates cloth designs where no image or description was supplied in the price lists).<sup>6</sup>

## 6.2 The Enduring Pleasure in the Floral

The largest category across this interwar inventory was of floral designs with twenty-nine floral iterations including the popular 'Wild Rose', 'Anemone' and 'Swansea' (a bouquet design, see Fig 6.2). Modernists rejected the naturalistic floral motif as too bucolic and literal for their self-anointed daring metropolitan taste yet florals in the Interwar years were ubiquitous and much loved by some designers, many manufacturers and consumers alike. Keren Protheroe has defended interwar florals as 'unlikely agents of modernisation', she was referring to the design work of Minnie McLeish and Winifred Mold and it is indeed useful to take a broader look at how florals retained a steady position in the decoration of the British household (and wardrobe) during design reformers' campaigns.<sup>7</sup> Protheroe furthers her thesis that Interwar florals played an important narrative role of tradition and continuity within the context of gentle *English* conservatism. If we consider the naming of many of the Old Bleach damasks (florals included), a list of thirty-nine damask designs are explicitly named after mythic *Ye Olde England*: including historically notable Cathedral towns: Derby, Ely, Exeter, Canterbury, Gloucester, Lincoln, Salisbury and Winchester, quintessentially English porcelain: Coalport, Wedgwood and Worcester and a number of aristocratic seats including Ancaster, Shaftesbury, Syon and Burlington (in reference to the Anglo-Irish Earls of Burlington).<sup>8</sup> As discussed in Chapter 5, a strategic selling campaign was aimed at the Home Market, if Irish linen companies were to appeal to the English consumer, there was no better way than to make linen products feel familiar and patriotic. The romance of the English countryside mixed with semantic historicist gestures, even though the designs in no way demonstrated the specificity of England nor incorporated crude emblems of Englishness, were remarkably effective marketing devices.

The popularity of florals was perhaps unsurprising; the variety within the category was large. Already noted were perennial favourites, 'English' roses (wild, hedge row, blowsy peonies) anemones, clematis, daisies (in myriad large and petite forms), generic floral blossoms and sprigs, honeysuckle, lilac, lilies and poppies composed in a number of (often mixed) arrangements such as bouquets, wreaths, garlands, climbing, trailing, clusters and festoons. Again, these were generally native in origin (or at least so popular in the English imagination, that it was assumed they were native species) although there were several of more exotic sources such as East Asia, 'Wisteria' was based on the Japanese creeper and the Chinese Chrysanthemum featured in 'Sherwood'.<sup>9</sup> Compositionally the flowers were given either a 'free and naturalistic treatment'<sup>10</sup> or slightly more formal treatments organised as framing devices. The stylistic treatment varied too, from delicate daisy chains, 'Perhaps the daintiest of all the Old Bleach designs' to elaborately patterned borders densely filled with panels of mixed flowers, as in 'Rosalind', 'A magnificent design with shaded flutings running out for [sic] a wreath of mixed flowers, lilies, roses and daisies.'<sup>11</sup> All damask linen manufacturers' stock-in-trade patterns contained multifarious florals.

The surviving Old Bleach Design Library contains a number of books dedicated to the floral tradition, ranging in date from 1878 to 1950 and reflecting the centrality of floral design in the company's design repertoire. A first edition of Ralph Warner's (1928) *Dutch and Flemish Fruit and Flower Painters of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* is well thumbed but it is Thornton's *Temple of Flora* (1799-1807) that is probably the best regarded book on flowers in the library, although there is little evidence of the Old Bleach's designers' hand as the condition is too good to suggest heavy usage.<sup>12</sup> However Kurt Bartko's *1000 Motive: Dauernnd Verwendbare Entwürfe Für Kunstgewerbler Aller Berufe* from 1935 (Fig. 6.4) shows considerable handling, planches are stained and ragged suggesting regular consultation. Bartko's flowers contain a detailed graphical quality in their depiction and unusual in its coupling of flora from different geographies that would never otherwise cultivate together, a motif favoured later in the textile designs of Josef Frank at Svenskt Tenn.



Fig. 6.4 Florals within the pages of Old Bleach's Design Library. Left: Bartko's *1000 Motive*, 1935. Right: loose page from *The Artworkers' Studio*, 1928. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

The design library includes several orphaned plates and pages, with years of use that have become separated from their original texts. Fig. 6.4 also shows a loose page featuring Meissen porcelain of florals in bright colour from *The Artworker's Studio*, 1928, a high quality periodical publication of select samples of decorative art. A further popular reference tome for the Old Bleach designers was from a mid-late Victorian pattern book *Suggestions in Floral Design* by F.E. Hulme.<sup>13</sup> It comprises fifty-two chromolithographic sheets of exquisite pattern rendered by Hulme in illustration. Hulme was a teacher and amateur botanist, a master of drawing at Marlborough College at the time of publication and later (1886) Professor of freehand and geometrical drawing at King's College, London and the text contained instructional technique in a most soothing manner, "this is the simplest example possible, and that it is evident that the admission of a second and alternating unit of the introduction of colour would largely increase the number of possible variations."<sup>14</sup> These, often exotic, floral anthologies along with the many sources on the classical idiom in the Old Bleach Design Library demonstrate the manufacturing reality for Interwar textile design, where the broader public's appetite for traditional designs for the home endured in the 'progressive' face of design reform.<sup>15</sup>

### **6.3 The Lesson of Classicism**

Classical or Neo-Classical motifs were the second largest category of designs in Old Bleach's damask table cloth repertoire, with twenty-five designs listed across the six price lists. The full classical vocabulary of geometrical elements, natural forms and artificial objects was employed. Cloth designs could include motifs from all three of these categories, in Fig. 6.5 we see the diversity in articulating the classical language of ornament, where designers could re-work infinite figurative elements with distinct effect.



Fig. 6.5 'Adelphi' and 'Normanton' comprise heavier Baroque motifs with full table top design and deep borders, while 'Adam' and 'Claremont' offer lighter neo classical decorative features. Source: Old Bleach Booklet of Electros, 1935. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Taxonomies of classical design included sub-divisions of bands, free ornament, enclosed ornament, foliations, cresting borders, rosettes, spirals, undulations along with animal and human organisms and natural forms such as the laurel and olive, the vine and the ivy. All of which were co-opted into table damask design. The surviving design library reveals a range of significant primary (and now valuable) sources from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, for inspiration and instruction in the classical tradition, a folio of one hundred plates of French Baroque engravings, *Collection des Plus Belles Composition de Le Pautre*, 1880, show some design intervention from tracing paper between plates, pencil doodles, eraser crumbs and large X marks that highlight interest in a particular composition. First editions on the Adams Brothers from 1901 and 1916 are also included in the design library along with an 1890's copy of the much-admired German *Folio Moderne Decorations – Malereien* by Reinhold Feldner.<sup>16</sup>





Fig. 6.6 Top: Detail of Planche from Le Pautre (1880) with pencilled marks by Old Bleach designers. Bottom: Extensive wear in this page from *Modeme Decorations – Malereien* (1890). Source: Old Bleach Design Library, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Classical ornament was considered as socially tasteful and capable of conveying a level of connoisseurship most suited to formal occasion even within the domestic market. Both highly ornamented and restrained designs were equally popular, their ubiquity contested a declining formalism in modern society, in dining etiquette at least. Throughout the Interwar period, commentators conjectured on the popularity of classicism, the artist and designer Paul Nash, writing in *Architectural Review*, claimed, 'Robert Adam had vision...the fact this vision was not entirely original, that the Adam style was based upon Renaissance, Roman, Greek and French work, detracts in no way from its significance; rather it emphasises the particular genius of the Brothers for extracting from foreign material an essence with which they founded a style not only personal but national.'<sup>17</sup> Indeed, this universal appeal saw designs such as 'Adam' and 'Louis XVI' consistently produced throughout the company's lifetime, only falling from favour in the 1950s when

relaxing social mores banished classicism to, in this case, the linen cupboard, only to be returned to the table on high days and holidays.

For those customers, unable to choose between floral or classical motifs, the designer conflated the two to pleasing effect, Old Bleach amplified floral expression by hand-painting which further distinguished their linen goods from rival companies, as seen in the left-hand photograph of 'Clarendon', Fig 6.7.



Fig. 6.7 Left: 'Clarendon', 1935, hand painted double damask linen table cloth with floral and classical motifs of a floral bouquet amid a richly decorated classical frame with complementary looping border. Right: Page depicting floral bouquet within a neo-classical ornamental frame in Frank Lewis's *Flower Arrangements: A Book of Designs for the Designing Studio*, 1949. Source: 'Clarendon' table cloth, Collection of Author; Book, Old Bleach Design Library, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

A number of books on floral design join the Old Bleach Library in the Post War years, signalling an inexhaustible source of design and still vital consumer interest. In Fig. 6.7, on the right, Frank Lewis's *Flower Arrangements: A Book of Designs for the Designing Studio* published in 1949, reproduced a series of plates taken from a collection of designs made in the first half of the nineteenth century by a (unnamed) French designer, curated 'for those who are not lucky enough to be able to ramble around the countryside looking for "nature", I present this fount of inspiration.'<sup>18</sup> A further source of combined floral expression and classical motifs, that is in much evidence in the Old Bleach table cloth designs, came from the ceramic industry. The design library contains over a dozen sources on English china, French Faience and Italian Majolica, with the latter from 1881 but the remaining sources nearly all just predate The Great War, suggesting a fashionable interest in porcelain motifs, which given their restricted scale were skilfully contained designs and so, were easily and satisfyingly transferred to damask design. Indeed, the company refer to this relationship between cloth and its role as a host for china in the 1935 book of electros, on a design aimed at the American market, 'Lenox Autumn', it declared, 'This beautiful pattern...is taken, almost exact, from a dinner service produced by Lenox, Inc. There is something very novel and pleasant in the idea of china and table napery to match.'<sup>19</sup>



Fig. 6.8 Left: 'Lenox Autumn' double damask table cloth designed for the American Market and featured in the Irish and Scottish Damask Guild promotional campaign in the late Twenties (without its porcelain counterpart). The design was successful enough for production to continue into the late 1930s. Right: 'Lenox Autumn' Porcelain Set, still in production since 1918. Source: *Some Table Talks*, booklet on Old Bleach Table Damask designed by Ashley Havinden, Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh. Image of Lenox ware courtesy of Macy's Department Store.

Throughout these books and folios, there is considerable evidence of design suggestion made by management or the head of the design studio, Norman Fitzroy Webb, in marginalia such as "good types of landscape" and several items are marked for the designer's attention. Old Bleach routinely named their designs after their inspiration, the classical aesthetic of Wedgwood porcelain (like the Adam designs) inspired multiple iterations in table cloth designs ('Wedgwood', 'Wedgwood Columbia' and 'Wedgwood Edme') while cloth designs were also adapted from other hugely popular English and Welsh China including Coalport, Swansea, Minton (Old Willow), Worcester and Derby. The popularity was sufficient to warrant an 'Old Bleach English Porcelain Damask Series' that spanned most of the Interwar Period. The widespread interest in porcelain for the domestic market extended to continental styles, the delicacy of German Meissen, the high ornamentation of French Sèvres and the polychromy of later Rouen faience were all incorporated in to the firm's damask designs.

#### 6.4 The Decorative Cloth and the Modern Cloth

While floral and classical designs formed the majority of the company's table cloth oeuvre, decorative patterns were borrowed from a number of far reaching, often textile, sources. According to the 1935 book of electros, the damask design 'La Promenade' was copied from a piece of Point de Venise lace that told the story of a returning 'sailor brought back from the South Seas to his betrothed, a bunch of that seaweed known as "Mermaid's Lace" and that she imitated it with her needle.' Another design from the early thirties, 'San Marco' too was a textile adaptation from 'a celebrated collar of Gros Point lace belonging to a Venetian nobleman, which is now in the Cluny Museum in Paris.' The sources of both of these designs came from the extant design library. There is one dedicated book on lace, the meticulously



researched *History of Lace* by Mrs Bury Palliser (1865) that includes the Mermaid's Lace anecdote (on p.46) and an illustration of the Gros Point lace (Fig. 22, p.47).



Fig. 6.9 Left: "From the Collar of a Venetian Nobleman. Musée de Cluny", Fig. 22 in *History of Lace*, (to face p.47). Right: "San Marco" damask table cloth by Old Bleach, 1932. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

In Fig. 6.9, the Old Bleach design has further added musical instruments not part of the original source claiming, 'The motives had to be introduced to give relief.'<sup>20</sup> While not a faithful reproduction one can identify the coiled stalks and delightful lobed shapes to form a dense all-over pattern divided by fashionable plain bands running the length of the cloth. Further decorative inspiration was mined from a first edition of George Leland Hunter's *Decorative Textiles*, 1918, that includes examples of 17<sup>th</sup> Century Gros Point lace and several volumes of the Old Bleach's own embroidery journal (published in collaboration with the English thread manufacturer, James Pearsall) *The Embroideress* covered the gamut of needlework both in practical application and historical reference. Although incomplete, the design library and the price lists, as a body of evidence, demonstrate an active and intelligent curiosity in the ethnography of the cultural and natural world and how that might translate into textile design. The full set of Arthur U. Pope and Phyllis Ackerman's mighty *A Survey of Persian Art*, Vols. 1-6, (1938-1939), *Decorative Patterns of the Ancient World* by Petrie Flinders (1930) and T. Leman Hare's *The World's Greatest Paintings: One Hundred Selected Masterpieces from Famous Art Galleries in Full Colour* (1934) all show varied use and application across many designs. The design inspiration for 'Portia' in the 1929 price list claims, 'The sources of this design are both Persian and Egypto-Roman. It strikes a very modern note, as most really old designs do.' The promotional material in Fig 6.10, from *Some Table Talks*, shows the Two-Tone table cloth 'Portia' in a consciously modern table setting and dining room. The coloured cloth with a bold graphic design is accented against a pair of somewhat incongruous red canvas stacking chairs (more commonly seen in community halls and school dining rooms) and a fashionably bare sideboard. This determined effort showed how linen damask could complement the most modern of room decoration despite the fashion for bare table tops, the accompanying promotional hyperbole recalled a 'post-war craze for barbaric simplicity...the grim unfriendliness of the polished table-top, with its forlorn little mats, the strictly utilitarian serving-table, and the bare shiny walls began to pall.'<sup>21</sup> The threat to the damask table cloth industry was real and in danger of looking entirely out of touch.





Fig. 6.10 The angular and graphic design of 'Portia' is dressed in a modern context with fashionable metal furniture, plain china, uncut glassware and a bowl of fruit as the centre display. Source: *Some Table Talks*, booklet on Old Bleach Table Damask designed by Ashley Havinden, Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh.

In a concerted effort to appeal to the modern(e) consumer, a collection of new designs was launched in the late 1920s. As discussed in Chapter 5, this was largely through the Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Guild's American publicity initiative and for a time, the novelty captured the public imagination. The designs drew on a global and historical range of sources (and were named so) and many were characterised by structural devices such as grids, frames and bands with 'decorative' pattern tightly controlled within, for example 'Warsaw' was described as having been 'derived from a modernistic interpretation of Russian peasant work. The bands for the plates afford a pleasant contrast.'<sup>22</sup> These carefully worked out designs skilfully drew on old, seemingly familiar, traditional styles but with a novel approach. Like 'Warsaw', there were a number of designs that embraced the modern aesthetic in a genteel treatment, just up to date enough without limbering near anything too *Avant Garde*. Later in the mid 1930s, several designs by Old Bleach attempted to be singularly modern, without the neutralising support of classicism, flora or foliage. The designs for 'Lido' and 'Milford' were abstract, described (respectively) in company literature as 'Extremely up to date...yet simple and decorative' and 'A striking modern design. Very smart indeed. Attractive in any setting.'



Fig. 6.11 Left: 'Lido' damask design table cloth as a photographic 'Representation' with design registration number 347875, 11<sup>th</sup> February 1935, Board of Trade Design Representations; Top Right: Woven linen furnishing fabric design by Old Bleach as a photographic 'Representation' with design registration number 346082, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 1935, Board of Trade Design Representations; Bottom Right: 'Katja' by Wolf Bauer, textile design for Knoll International Ltd., 1971. Source: Old Bleach designs, Board of Trade Design Registers and Representations, The National Archives, Kew. 'Katja' textile from *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*.<sup>23</sup>

Concepts of abstraction and non-representation in art had taken root by the mid 1930s, many younger artists and designers were liberated from the scholastic diktats of the fusty art world. New art movements and styles reflected a literal and symbolic rupture with the past by fracturing what they saw; the Continental Cubists, Futurists and British Vorticists captured a world gripped by speed, movement and dynamism, often all at one time, in one artwork. By not being tied to representation allowed artists and designers alike to find a new visual language aligned to the new age. In doing so, pattern was re-imagined, often in very simple repeat or counter change that produced spectacular optical effects. This in itself was nothing new, Arabian and Asian cultures had been doing it for centuries, and the Old Bleach library attests to their command of pattern-making with many Middle Eastern and Oriental books on pattern and rug design.<sup>24</sup> The two woven textile designs from Old Bleach in Figure 6.11 are composed of a series of overlapping lined *paillettes* in counter change formation. This style gained more popularity in furnishing fabrics (as we will see later in this chapter) than damask table cloths, most likely due to contemporary architects tolerating textiles with a bold graphical visual style or texture, while the domestic consumer generally preferred conventional designs. Those architects who promulgated the modern would have vanquished the table cloth altogether and so the modern table cloth designs fell quickly out of favour, lasting only a few years. However, the legacy and continuity of modern design has endured as vigorously

as the continuity of period design from the Interwar period; Fig 6.11 also shows a much later textile design from 1971 by the German designer, Wolf Bauer for Knoll International. The mid-Sixties to early Seventies was a time of great interest in optical and kinetic art, where the surface induced an illusion of movement, but has its origins in interwar art and design experiments in abstraction.

### 6.5 Irish Designs in Irish Cloth

Perhaps most surprising in Old Bleach damask table cloth designs is the paucity of Irish themed designs. The company in fact only produced three designs (throughout the interwar period) that could be described as containing Irish tropes.<sup>25</sup> 'Kells' and 'Erin' are composed of Celtic ornamental motifs from The Book of Kells. The former is an ornate elaboration on one of the sacred volumes' pages with landscape views depicting the Round Tower of Devenish, Blarney Castle, The Rock of Cashel and Slemish Mountain while the latter design combines Celtic ornament with the Irish national emblem, the shamrock.

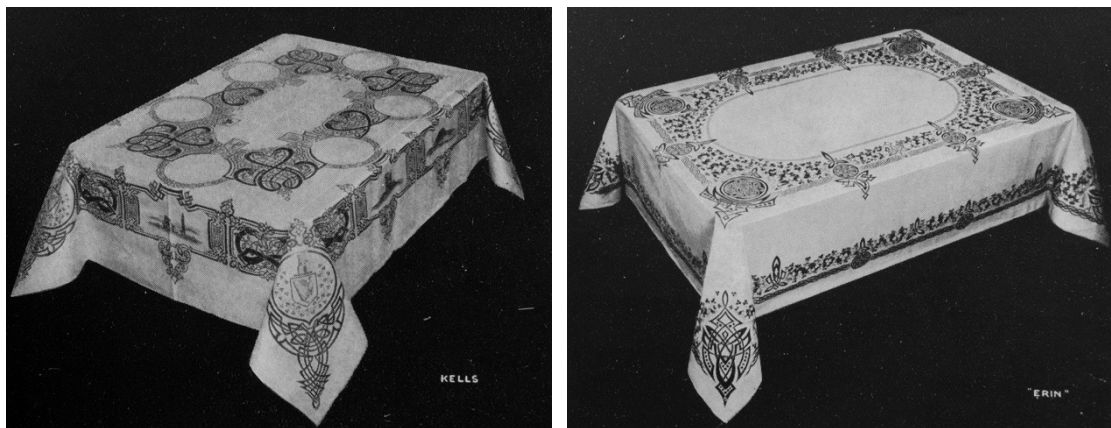


Fig. 6.12 Two of the three Irish themed table cloths by Old Bleach, both with motifs borrowed from The Book of Kells. Source: Old Bleach Book of Electros, 1935, Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown.

'Shamrock' completed this Irish trio of patterns, a subtle design of festooned shamrock countered by the annular design of the Tara brooch in each corner, it featured in every price list denoting its popularity and its production continued well into the nineteen seventies (albeit in cotton). This small percentage of Irish inspired cloth design could be interpreted in a number of ways; in business terms, as a niche theme it would appeal to a narrow market of Irish and Irish-American consumers. Additionally, in a period of partition, Irish and British identities were sorely tested and as a consequence Irish themed (decorative) products were eschewed in favour of neutral or more fashionable designs. In real terms, Old Bleach did not identify itself or position the company as a parochial producer of Irish goods. Their entire output reflects a broader ambition to satisfy a sophisticated market beyond the confines of geographical borders and cultural identities.

## 6.6 Old Bleach Towel Designs

From 1900 to 1938, Old Bleach had had in production approximately 200 discrete damask towel designs. Inevitably, many shared similar aesthetic themes with the damask table cloth designs but differed compositionally in that the towel was given an all-over or bordered design treatment. Damask towels had been in production from the beginning of the company, by 1900, a catalogue designed and cut out in the Art Nouveau style offered thirty-six towel designs. However, among its pages the company claimed a far greater number, 'Towels are a salient feature of our productions. We have at the moment over 200 different varieties and designs, to which we add as new ideas are evolved and developments arise.'<sup>26</sup>

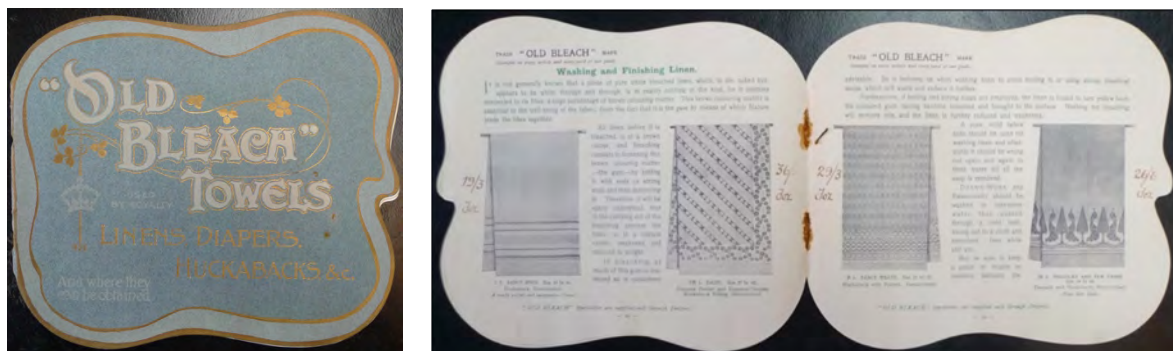


Fig. 6.13 "Old Bleach Towels" catalogue, 1900, shows 'Fancy Ends', 'Daisy', 'Fancy Weave' and 'Peacocks and Yew Trees'. Source: T.C.K. 0118, National Art Library, V & A, London.

Throughout the catalogue (and price lists), potential customers were reassured of constant royal patronage, 'They have always been used by Royalty. One of these, K30 [Shamrock Border (Diaper), very fine], has been supplied to H.M. Queen Mary.' And perhaps more brazenly, in a description of a very fine plain huckaback (H20), 'The late Queen Victoria's favourite towel.' Testimonials are further used to objectively endorse the goods, according to *Weldon's Illustrated Dressmaker*, 'The softness and purity of the real Old Bleach linen towels are indisputable. They are woven in the most beautiful patterns, and can be had in huckaback, diaper, and damask of every imaginable variety.'<sup>27</sup> The patterns were skilfully conceived and many of which utilised fashionable and highly stylised floral, foliage and fruit motifs of the Art Nouveau artists; harebell, honesty plant, poppy, water lily, laburnum and apples are recurring motifs. Art Nouveau's sinuous extended lines are featured in woven form in a number of patterns such as 'Swans and Water Lilies' ("specially selected for the Princess of Wales"), 'Honesty Plant' and in 'Peacocks and Yew Trees' (seen here in Fig. 6.13); beneath its product name and code a brief description, 'New Art Style' is supplied. This was typical of the firm to keep abreast of the newest artistic trends signalling a design aware and market conscious company and to alert the consumer of such availability.

Of the two hundred odd towel designs, five designs achieved an enduring popularity with the public. Daisy Border (all round) seen in Fig. 6.13, Floral Scroll Border, Shamrock Border (K30) and Maidenhair Fern (end border) are present in the 1900 catalogue and the six price lists, and all appear unaltered up to 1938. The latter design had been in production from the company's earliest days (from 1864) and like



the Art Nouveau designs from the turn of the twentieth century catalogue, was inspired by a middle-class fashion for, in this instance, *pteridomania*, the Victorian mania for ferns. This lengthy craze took place in both Britain and America lasting some seventy years, from 1837 to 1914, where admirers adorned every surface with fern motifs and more serious collectors built ferneries. It was no wonder then that the motif turned up in textiles along with a variety of domestic goods, from ceramic ware to cast iron garden seats.<sup>28</sup> Further sources of inspiration came from the firm's design library. In a number of texts, hand written suggestions (or instruction) are in evidence, "Roses and other flowers, try towel designs" appears in a well-thumbed copy of *Old English China* by Mrs Willoughby Hodgson (1913). All-over woven designs appeared to be more popular in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and we see less of them in the later Interwar period. By then, Old Bleach are mostly weaving bordered towels, some still with complex designs. The company also offered customers additional embellishment to woven designs, several were available plain or hand-painted while 'Plain Damask Border' (JM 8) could be ordered ready to embroider at home.

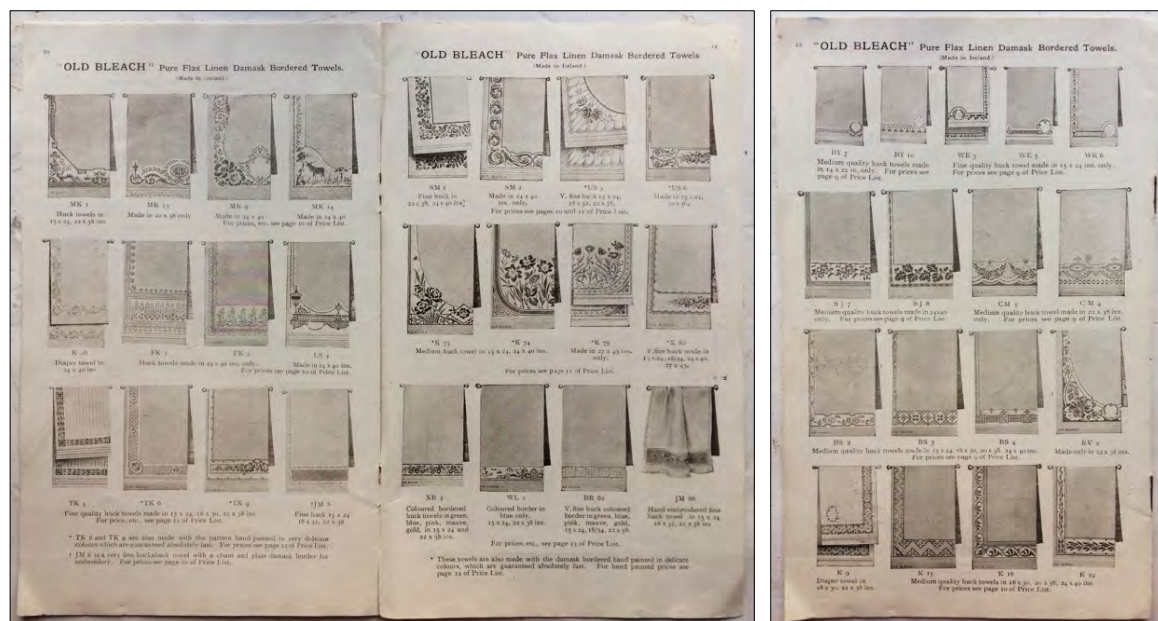


Fig. 6.14 Left: Pages 10 – 11, Right: Page 12, Old Bleach Bordered Towels, Price List, 1929. Source: Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

While many of the towel designs were modern in the sense of bearing contemporary fashionable motifs such as Oriental themed patterns in 'Willow', 'Conventional Chinese Border', 'Floral Chinese Border' and 'All Round Border of Bamboos' and several that employed geometrical pattern as in 'Geometric Border' and 'Geometric All Round Border' (seen on page 12 of the price list, in Fig. 6.13) there was a distinct absence of *moderne* towel designs. A number of very plain designs, of banded or diagonal stripes, convey a modern approach, as they espouse the principles of industrial art where, in Frank Pick's words, were 'a reasonable compromise between beauty and utility, neither overstressing beauty till it degenerates into ornament, not overstressing utility until it becomes bare and hard.'<sup>29</sup> Naturalistic plant based designs even

dominate the mid to late thirties' towel listings, for example twenty-two (out of twenty-eight) illustrated designs in the 1936 Price List are flora and or foliage arrangements, albeit confined within strict rectilinear borders.<sup>30</sup> This apparent preference for natural botanical designs in towels appears incongruous with the modern design work the company was engaged in throughout their furnishing fabric ranges and to a much lesser extent in damask table cloth design. In the furnishing fabrics range, florals are an infrequent subject although foliage treatment is plentiful and was fashionable, for example, the leaf motif. However, manufacturers produced for many markets and a number of (aesthetic and cultural) themes run consistently in Old Bleach's production, even though stylistically there is great variety.<sup>31</sup>

### 6.7 Old Bleach Embroidery Designs for Tea Cloths: The Persistence of Florals

If the towel designs were broadly botanical based, the firm's embroidery designs for tea cloths from their annually published book series adhered exclusively to florals.<sup>32</sup> From its inception in 1934, the Old Bleach Embroidery Books offered the domestic embroideress a collection of transfer designs and recommended using either Clark's Anchor stranded cotton or *Coton a Broder* thread or later in the Fifties, Pearsall's Filoselle Silk thread. The complexity of designs varied from beginner level, in designs such as 'Little Boy Blue' where 'this attractive set has been designed for those not skilled in embroidery' through to advanced Richelieu (Cut work) designs with *Broderie Anglaise*.



Fig. 6.15 Books of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs, 1950 – 1953, Richelieu work was popular in the post war period as cut-out and ladder work were decorative techniques that did not use up limited supply of thread. Source: Lisburn Museum and Irish Linen Centre.

The transfers and book of designs were published by the company and printed in Northern Ireland and available directly from them (post free or a small fee for Dominions). The early books are small and compact and from 1940, they are produced in a larger format (A5) allowing for more detail in the (black and white) photographs and (colour) printed illustrations. Every book contained approximately eight transfers and each design is afforded two pages comprising one photograph and one corner of a design in colour, a short description, method ('to work'), a variety of stitches used and which threads to use.<sup>33</sup>

What could be written as dry instruction instead is delivered in a convivial tone throughout the series, of the value of home embroidery, '...it is far better to create beauty, than merely to buy the result of professional skill and taste.'<sup>34</sup> By 1939, the 6<sup>th</sup> *Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs* attributed the popularity and success of the designs 'partly to the designs, which are the work of very skilful experts, and also to the foundation on which they are carried out. It is a mistake to think that any linen will do equally well. A few pence more a yard in neither here nor there when it is a question of colour that lasts, or linen with the quality and feel that makes the work a delight, and every article that is made from it a thing to be coveted.'<sup>35</sup> Across the designed linens by Old Bleach, the prominence of design as a fundamental and distinguishing attribute of the Company is reiterated as a dual asset (along with quality) throughout its history.

The persistence of florals in embroidered linen designs may well have been due to an unconscious tradition in embroidery twined with the Victorian custom of afternoon tea and there is little evidence to suggest classical or very modern designs were even mooted. The books regularly acknowledge readers' interest and suggestion,

We should like here to thank all those of our readers who from time to time have encouraged us with their letters and given us helpful suggestions and friendly criticisms. Many of these letters are from far distant countries; one recently received contained coloured illustrations of the flora of that part of the world in which the writer lived. We are grateful for this practical interest shown in our Embroidery Books.<sup>36</sup>

The source of floral designs was broad, and like the table cloth designs, the design library provides evidence of inspiration. 'Fragrance', 'Old English' and 'Garland' are derived from porcelain (via the frequently handled copy of Mrs Willoughby Hodgson's *Old English China*, 1913), of the latter the design description stated, 'This graceful design [which] has been adapted from an old piece of Bristol china.'<sup>37</sup> A number of germinal texts survive from the Old Bleach design library which indicate the erudition and ambition of the design studio: Waring, Mary E. (1917) *An Embroidery Pattern Book*, with the foreword by then Professor of Design at the Royal College of Art, W.R. Lethaby, who urged, 'most embroideresses [who] will begin adapting the elements given in this pattern book, and gain interest and confidence in so doing, will go forward insensibly to varying the elements themselves and to taking flowers and animals direct from nature.'<sup>38</sup> While the Old Bleach books were prescriptive in design and methodology, experienced needle workers could improvise with assorted stitches and techniques. Two further important embroidery texts published between the wars, are to be found within the design library, Nevinson, John L. (1938) *Catalogue of English Domestic Embroidery of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, London, VAM Department of Textiles published under the Board of Education Authority and Sterner, Maj, (translated into English 1939) *Homecraft in Sweden*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Stockholm, Lindbergs Tryckeriaktiebolag, 1933. Indeed, the Victoria and Albert Museum is a constant and rich source of design inspiration to the company, a cuttings book created by probably Norman Fitzroy Webb (as head of the design studio), entitled "Museums and Photographs" (n.d.) of

textile and (ceramic) pattern examples with full citation (mostly) from the museum is part of the design library. This compilation can be interpreted as an aide-mémoire and one that the company acknowledged in many design descriptions in catalogues and empirically links the company to a kinaesthetic approach to design research and thinking.



Fig. 6.16 Two pages from Old Bleach's "Museums and Photographs" cuttings book featuring embroidered cloth from the Victoria and Albert Museum. Left: "Brocade. Typical of Hindu pattern. Madras"; "Woollen Cloth, embroidered in chain-stitch with coloured silks. Sind, Bombay Presidency; about 1850." Right: "Two portions of the tail and pockets of a velvet coat, embroidered with coloured silk ribbons and silk thread. French; second half of 18<sup>th</sup> cent." Source: "Museums and Photographs" Cuttings Book, Old Bleach Design Library, Private Collection, Randalstown.

The variety of floral design was apparently limitless, as few designs are reprinted across a twenty-five-year period. When they were, Old Bleach made no apology for the popularity of some designs such as 'Dahlia and Phlox' (1944 & 1946), 'Trellis' (1944 & 1946), Rhododendron (1947 & 1951) and 'Delphinium' (1943 & 1946) and mitigated this on account of the continued paper and labour restrictions in the post war years. Notable features of the floral designs include their naturalistic appearance while the compositional treatment is arranged into an assortment of styled patterns to suit the shape of the cloth (and a circular table top) or the embroidery technique used. Florals are represented in design as both dainty and bold, from the delicacy of sweet peas, columbine, anemones and auricula to the fulsome swagger of gladioli, rhododendron, day lilies and delphinium with their 'strong stalks and graceful leaves.' Keren Protheroe has noted the common study of cottage garden flowers throughout the 1920s and 1930s, where 'a key skill for a designer was the ability to make flowers as natural as possible with a limited number of layered colours.'<sup>39</sup> Small pretty flowers are afforded a sprig or linear treatment whereas bolder florals are gathered



*en masse* in a deep corner and were particularly agreeable to Richelieu work. In contrast to the table cloth designs, there is a marked absence of roses as a single motif in the embroidery designs, they do feature in bouquet arrangements but certainly do not receive the very populist handling as per damask table cloth design. Occasionally, a confident design is given a restrained treatment in white thread on half bleach linen, as in 'English White Work' (1954) or in coloured linen with thread work in a lighter tone, seen in 'Fruit' (1939) and offering 'distinction and freshness.' However, the popular patterns were imagined in multi-coloured thread and enlivened with irregular, scalloped and buttonhole bar edges, as seen in Fig. 6.17.



Fig. 6.17 Selection of embroidery designs for tea cloths. Top left: 'Floral Emblems', (designed to celebrate the Coronation using the eleven floral emblems of the Commonwealth), 1954; Top right: 'Iris', 1952; Bottom left: 'Flowers and Foliage', 1947; Bottom right: 'Bouquet', 1939. Source: Lisburn Museum and Irish Linen Centre; 'Bouquet', *6<sup>th</sup> Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs*, Author's Collection.<sup>40</sup>

Designs are routinely described as handsome, graceful, unusual or original and even when the same flower motifs are re-used in many designs, they are configured in new ways. From ten Old Bleach Embroidery Books, over sixty designs are distinct and supply a growing popularity for embroidery, the 11<sup>th</sup> Book (1944) opened in sanguine form, 'Enthusiasm for Embroidery is steadily increasing. It is a good sign to see this, running parallel with the improvement in the war situation. Nor is it really to be wondered at, when we

remembered that war by putting an end to the production of “luxuries”, leaves the market without beautiful things as well...and with the 11<sup>th</sup> Old Bleach Book come some of the best designs yet produced.’<sup>41</sup> The modernity of the embroidery designs is amply demonstrated in the *rendering* and *arrangement* of petals and leaves and mimetic of techniques often found in modernist art and design of the period. The design composition of ‘Iris’ (fig. 6.17, top right, 1952) recalls the painterly energy of the Van Gogh’s “Irises” from 1889. The floral mass bursts from the cloth’s corner into the expanse of linen with vivid effect. While bold designs could easily appear modern, the smaller cottage garden flowers were equally modern in the minimal treatment and daring use of generous negative space, a visual device propagated in the graphic art work of Continental designers such as Herbert Bayer at The Bauhaus, who reimagined white space as equal, rather than subordinate, to its contiguous objects. In the embroidery book itself, the designed object is laid out asymmetrically and accompanied by minimal information, set in a sans serif font, most likely ‘Gill Sans’ (1928).<sup>42</sup>

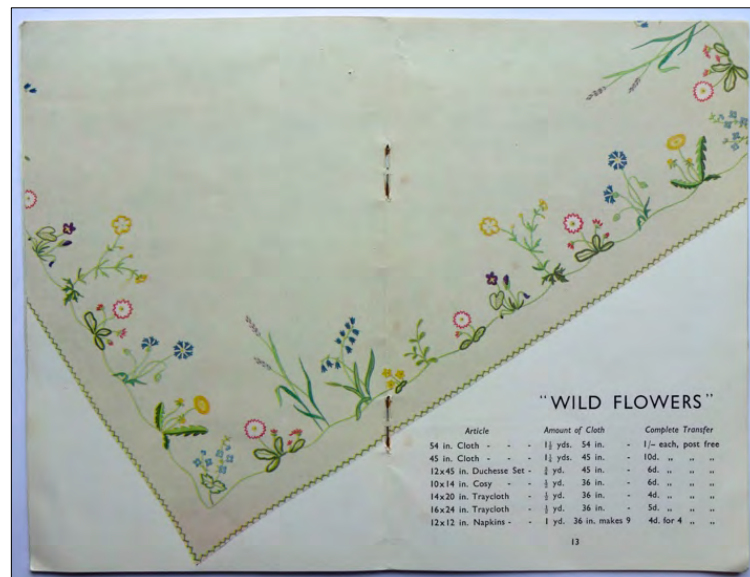


Fig. 6.18 ‘Wild Flowers’ embroidery design and its graphical layout in the 6<sup>th</sup> *Old Bleach Book of Embroidery Designs* (1939) follows a number of modernist design principles: extended use of negative space, reduced subject content, asymmetric positioning, minimal typography and sans serif font. Source: Author’s Collection.

## 6.8 The Embroideress: Old Bleach and James Pearsall & Co.

While the *Old Bleach Books of Embroidery* were compact recipes for the eager needle worker *The Embroideress* was more encyclopaedic in its interest in all kinds of decorative needlework, from its textile antecedents to contemporary design, stitches and materials.<sup>43</sup> Published quarterly as a collaboration between Old Bleach and the silk thread manufacturer James Pearsall & Co. Ltd, from 1922 to 1939, it offered a pictorial and textual education on the breadth of needle activity from around the world.<sup>44</sup> Articles included short but scholarly pieces on “Swedish Needlework and Weaving” in the Nordiska Museet, Stockholm (Vol. 5, 1931, pp. 894-897), “An Embroidered American Quilt” (Vol. 9, 1939, pp. 1640-1643) and “An Early Eighteenth Century [Northern Irish] Counterpane” (No. 19, Vol. 3, 1927, pp. 434-

436).<sup>45</sup> In addition to historical articles, principles of designing, news and reviews of competitions and exhibitions and ideas to try, the journal also embraced modern work in embroidery.<sup>46</sup> Interviews with and essays by modern embroiderers such as Marion Stoll were also featured throughout the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>47</sup> Stoll was a minority advocate for modern embroidery design, who articulated her frustration with the contemporary excessive fondness, of English needlewomen, for historicist work, 'How is it possible that such an article can still be needed now, when modern design is accepted throughout the whole civilised world?'.<sup>48</sup> She was particularly vexed by an apparent appreciation by women, of modern design in other decorative art mediums such as painting, glass, silver, pottery and other (unspecified) textiles but 'refuses almost indignantly to countenance modern embroidery'.<sup>49</sup> Stoll speculated on and cited two sources for such a paradox, the omnipresent Jacobean work created out of Victorian proselytism and relative to that, 'the static mentality of many people who, having once learnt one set of ideas, are averse to replacing it, even in part, by a new outfit'.<sup>50</sup>

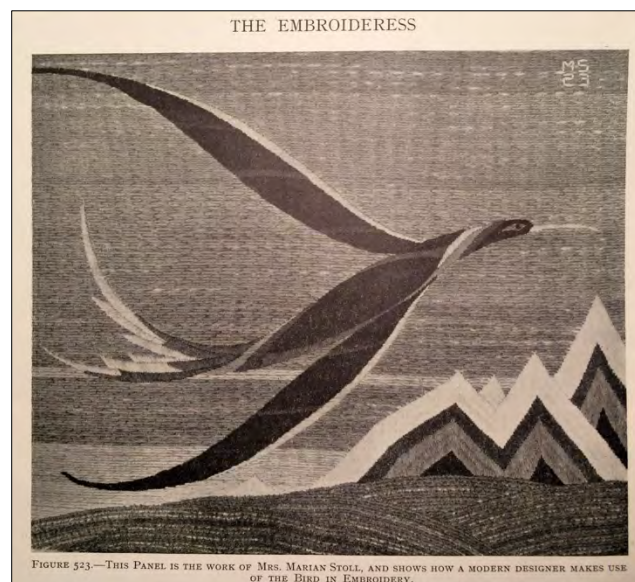


Fig. 6.19 Marion Stoll Embroidery from 1923 featured in "Birds in Embroidery", *The Embroideress*, No.17, Vol. 3, 1927, pp. 406-408. Source: Author's Collection.

Like all Modernists, she urged the reader to practice their craft in the age in which they lived thereby expanding their artistic, social and economic horizon, 'To copy old work is to deny the value of the age we live in, to deny our own right to life and to individual perception and thought; every copy of an old work is an almost insulting reproof to every modern designer. That is an attitude not only unkind, but socially and economically unsound'.<sup>51</sup> In the interests of equilibrium, the article was appended with a cautionary *Editor's Note* to Stoll's essay which appealed to readers to make their opinions known, 'This article is perhaps rather in the nature of a bombshell to some of us, and if any of our readers feel that the case for modern design *versus* traditional has not been fully stated, or would like to express a different opinion, the Editor would be very pleased to receive and publish, if suitable, communications on the subject'.<sup>52</sup>



The readership was indeed a broad constituency, but one that was, judging by photographs of room interiors and models wearing embroidered outfits with (not too) modish hairstyles and smoking cigarettes indicated an educated and middle class, i.e. the ideal Old Bleach customer.

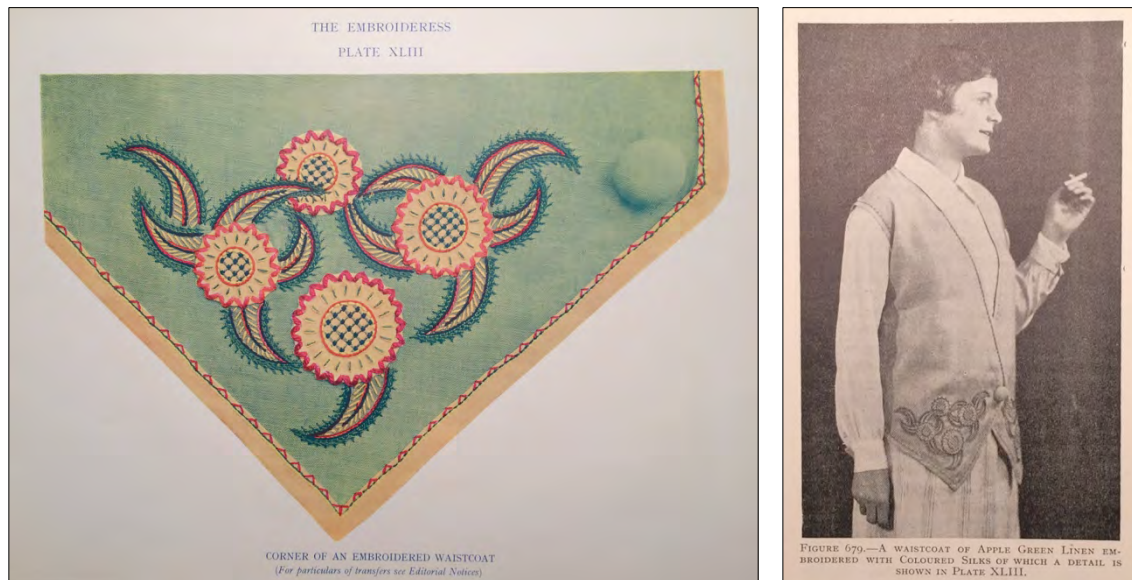


Fig. 6.20 Transfer Designs accompanied each number of *The Embroideress* and each design was worked up and photographed in colour plates along with a corresponding photograph to establish scale. In a number of instances, Old Bleach furnishing fabrics provided the background and an extra advertising opportunity. Source: *The Embroideress*, No. 22, Vol. 3, 1927, pp. 509-512, Collection of Author.

The editorial tone aimed for useful and instructive content to satisfy advanced embroideresses. Each number of the journal was accompanied by several embroidery transfers, usually designs that were deemed fashionable (Fig. 6.20), 'one of our transfers with this number is for a sleeveless waistcoat...these...are very much in favour just now, and we should strongly advise our readers to make a careful study of Miss Hager's article on the subject.'<sup>53</sup> Naturally, these should be made with Old Bleach Fadeless Coloured Linens, as Miss Hager did advise were 'now made in a wide range of charming colours' and Messrs. Pearsall's Embroidery Silks whose shades were 'specially recommended for needlework that is exposed to strong sunlight.'<sup>54</sup> *The Embroideress* was an important vehicle for Old Bleach's plain weaves but in doing so, amplified its reputation for high quality linen and design that was neither anachronistic nor too modern. It achieved a rare feat in appealing to a wide readership and it did this by its gentle but persuasive modern agenda, a regular contributor, Mary Hogarth declared,

Textiles with designs hand-blocked printed upon them or with designs painted in batique have made, lately, very considerable strides in this country in expressing the ideas of the present day. Embroidery has lagged considerably behind, due, I think, to the fact that it is not, which for a few notable exceptions, in the hands of artists. Artists like Alex Walker, Phyllis Barron, Mrs Kennington, Miss Wollard, Marion Dorn, are designing and printing very beautiful designs in textiles. In some cases where the designer is not the executant, there is close collaboration, as in Mr. Paul Nash's designs printed by Mrs Kennington.<sup>55</sup>

Hogarth captured *The Embroideress*' ethos when she continued her thesis that good stitchery could never make up for the absence of the essential qualities that make well designed art, 'Art cannot be divided into anything except good art or bad, it is not a question of present-day or past centuries.'<sup>56</sup> It was a guiding tenet behind Old Bleach's designs, best exemplified in the company's furnishing fabrics, examined in the next part of this chapter.

## 6.9 Early Days

Launched in 1932, 'Slemish' furnishing fabrics was one of the company's correctives to linen's declining markets. While it had made a number of technical and artistic innovations, such as hand-painting damask in the 1920s and 'fadeless' vat dyed plain weave linen, these alone would not slow the industry's decline. Where once the promise of quality was enough to lure and keep customers, the 1930s saw an appreciable rise in the public's interest in and expectations of the concepts of taste and choice. As discussed in Chapter 2, design reform had shown, or least striven to show, the consumer that the well-designed object could be both functional and decorative at the same time. Furnishings and furniture, while seemingly essential was a crowded and paradoxical market place. The furnishing fabrics buyer for Waring & Gillow, Mr. A. Pether, painted 'a rather doleful picture' of the trade in early 1933, 'Our trade is a luxury one, almost the first to depression and the last to recover.'<sup>57</sup> In the midst of economic gloom, to launch a luxury furnishing fabrics range seemed foolhardy but it quickly gained notice. An early company brochure promised, "'Slemish" linens are something absolutely new in furnishings. Entirely British in manufacture, and carrying all the guarantee of perfection, reliability, and style so long associated with all the famous Old Bleach Linens.'<sup>58</sup> In that one statement, they boldly claimed novelty, nailed their cultural and political colours to the mast and assured excellence in all endeavour. The brochure further reasoned the necessity for a new range of furnishing fabrics, that although linen had always been considered one of the best textiles for hangings and furnishings, 'the volume of showy foreign materials imported, and the difficulty of dyeing it satisfactorily in fast colours, have tended to keep it in the background.' Old Bleach positioned itself as 'the foremost experts in the making and dyeing of linen, have at last produced the ideal Furnishing Fabric...soft, durable, beautiful, and with colour able to withstand the strongest sun and severest washing, woven of pure flax yarn.' These were impressive if perhaps inflated claims, for example, the Scottish textile firm Donald Brothers had moved into cloth for the interior in 1896 and later defined a more design conscious direction for the company as 'Old Glamis' in 1927.<sup>59</sup> Indeed, the two firms would later be mentioned together by textile and design historians and thus viewed as contemporaneous in both period and design approaches.

The range of woven linens (all triple cloth<sup>60</sup>) included a deft mix of reversible companion cloth of solid contrasting colour, familiar and fashionable 1920s and 1930s motifs such as festoons and florals, period and assertively modern designs. 'Glenarm', 'Claggan' and 'Cranford' were designed as fabrics that could work well on their own but most effective if used to complement bolder textiles in either hangings or furniture. If the designs were new, the brochure's sales patter was not, in referring to 'Cranford' it reported 'Her Majesty the Queen hit upon this design the moment she saw it.' As a new range in the company's oeuvre, Royal endorsements could rarely be improved upon.<sup>61</sup>



Fig. 6.21 An early "Slemish" Furnishing Linens Brochure, 1932, featuring ten modern designs and one 'translation of a reproduction design'. Source: Industrial Art Collection, Manchester Art Gallery.

'Avon' and 'Lisadel' incorporated the festoon and floral respectively and the single period design featured in the brochure, 'Rimini' showed off the firm's technical ability in 'a clever translation rather than a reproduction of a beautiful piece of brocade which is thought to be of Italian manufacture of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, and is perhaps the high-water mark of excellence in that type of pattern.'<sup>62</sup> Of the three, only the latter enjoyed a lengthier appreciation, as it remained in production into the 1940s.<sup>63</sup> The remaining five designs exhibited a more modern aesthetic; 'Samoa' (also seen in Fig. 5.15, Chapter 5, p.33), 'Morello' and 'Versailles' were large scale dramatic designs with strong graphic motifs while 'Milan' featured large coiling fronds and 'Birch Bark' was composed of graduating lines of alternating colours. The more strident designs did not appear again in later catalogues and certainly did not make their way in to contemporary magazines and industrial art collections ('Samoa' excepted).



Fig. 6.22 From Left: 'Morello' (cherry blossom), 'Versailles' (flowing rhythm of cascade and fountain), 'Milan' (inspiration from Constantinople and the Near East, in the Lombard (Italian) style) and 'Birch Bark'. "Slemish" Furnishing Linens Brochure, 1932. Source: Industrial Art Collection, Manchester Art Gallery.

However, 'Milan' and 'Birch Bark' were much in favour; the former stayed in production well into the post war years and for a time, Old Bleach used the design as a ground shade for its company stationery. 'Birch Bark', described as a design 'particularly suitable where a "modern" effect is required. No one could be outraged by the simple graduated lines of alternating colours, but they have a very smart appearance...It has already proved one of the most popular in the range', was used extensively in contract work such as ocean liners, offices and hotels. It was highly versatile and could be handled in a number of ways; the stripe could be used both vertically (as seen in Fig. 6.22) and horizontally, and as Derek Patmore suggested in

*Fabrics and Colour*, as a wall covering. Its softly distorted stripe worked in innumerable settings and later (1936) spawned a 'little brother' in 'Glenariff'.<sup>64</sup>



Fig. 6.23 Left: 'Birchbark' and 'Cranford' on the S.S. Orion, Old Bleach Advertisement in *Decoration*, July-September 1935. Right: 'Birchbark' (upholstery) and 'Tiflis' (curtains) used in the redecoration of an Adam House, Harrow, Middlesex, featured in *Decoration*, March 1936. Source: Manchester Metropolitan University Library.

This early collection in some ways defined Old Bleach's design thinking, strategically creating designs that would appeal to the broadest audience, a steadfastly commercial manufacturer who maintained a close eye on what rival textile companies would also produce. This cautionary approach did not mean they were only interested in creating 'safe' designs; as shown in previous chapters, bold designs complemented subdued patterns. However, unpopular (uncommercial) designs would cease production, regardless of the critical reception by the design lobby. In an undated internal memorandum on furnishing fabrics, it stated, 'Metropolis, Creel and Cranford are being omitted from U range and two or three new designs added.'<sup>65</sup>

Within a year of launch, the V&A had approached the company expressing interest in the new fabrics and purchasing two pieces exhibited at the "British Industrial Art in Relation to the Home Exhibition", Dorland House earlier that year. 'Sperrin' and 'Rhythm' (see Figs. 3.2 in Chapter 3, p.15) were acquired for the Museum's Circulation Department. In the Spring of 1935, the Museum wrote again requesting new samples of recent designs be submitted for purchase,

We have in the collections available for loan a certain number of examples of your fabrics which have proved of great interest to students, and we are anxious to bring the stock up to date by the inclusion of some of those which have appeared during the last two years...we should be obliged if in choosing the patterns you would kindly select those which you regard as the best from the point of view of design; and in this connection it is suggested that the selection might include the example which was included in the recent Exhibition at the Royal Academy under the catalogue number 1983.<sup>66</sup>



Eleven designs were sent 'on appro' for review but only three were selected, perhaps a deflating result for Old Bleach? Nonetheless, from such a venerated institution, it was important validation in the quality of design by the firm. The aforementioned design number '1983' referred to 'Mandalay', a witty reversible design by Felix C. Gotto of shoaling fish with air bubbles on a herringbone fine linen ground.



Fig. 6. 24 'Mandalay' by Felix C. Gotto in blue and coral colourways. The coral coloured cloth is accompanied by 'Rathlin', both show the fineness of the linen weave. Source: left – Clothworkers' Centre, V&A; right – private collection of Mrs Juliet Morley.

The company's catalogue described it as ideal for bathrooms and nurseries, the seaside cottage and yachts, and in doing so, epitomised the ideal client; it quickly gained attention in the contemporary design press. The second choice, 'Tiflis', on the other hand, was described as 'having an Arabic flavour', and in a non-sequitur, 'that is to say, it is modern, in the best sense.'<sup>67</sup> Designed by 'Old Bleach Studios' this triple cloth weave was designed as a series of vertical and horizontal lines in 'Chinese yellow on an off-white background'<sup>68</sup> with a painted-on appearance; a stylistic device that recurred throughout Old Bleach's furnishing fabrics in weaves such as 'Anglesey', 'Glenavy', and 'Donegal' (the latter two seen in Figs. 5.17 and 5.22 respectively, Chapter 5) and screen printed fabrics as 'Rialto' and 'Afghan'. In 1934, Loraine Conran in an article named 'Recent Textile Design' and featuring 'Tiflis' and 'Anglesey', called the style 'painters' design'.<sup>69</sup> Later, Elizabeth Aslin suggested the painterly phase in interior decoration emerged from Bohemian artists (who also designed) like Vanessa Bell, Duncan Grant and Roger Fry in the nineteen-tens and early twenties creating a fluid aesthetic that moved towards (and later away from) abstraction in their art and design work.<sup>70</sup>



Fig. 6.25 From left: 'Tiflis', triple cloth woven linen; 'Rialto' and 'Afghan', screen printed on linen and rayon ground, (all 1935).  
Source: Photographs taken by Author: 'Tiflis' – Clothworkers' Centre, V&A; 'Rialto' – The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester; 'Afghan' – Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown.

Although all produced in 1935, the wavy effect woven in 'Tiflis' was replicated in print in 'Rialto' and 'Afghan' which had been conceived as part of a new series of hand-printed linens, '...in which the weight and texture and woven design of the ground are considered along with the printed design'.<sup>71</sup> This new series attempted to ambitiously satisfy *all* emerging areas of textile interest for the modern home; weight, texture, weave and print were united in one cloth (I return to this series of printed linens later in this chapter).

### 6.10 Design Themes: Movement

The fashionable theme of *movement* is in play across much of Old Bleach's modern furnishing fabrics. If we consider the first four designs selected by the V&A ('Rhythm', 'Sperrin', 'Mandalay' and 'Tiflis'), they all (coincidentally?) comprise gestural strokes or sense of motion that became strongly associated with modernity. I have already alluded to the zeitgeist's desire for dynamism and speed in symbolic form and Old Bleach goes some way to fulfil that. By 1938, over twenty-five modern designs elaborate on the theme either literally, with irregular stripes, chevrons and depictions of stylised waves ('Fanad' and 'Strangford') and dancing figures ('Jack Tar' and 'Joey') or through illusion. The counter change was a central technical device that enriched patterns and is used frequently to good effect in a number of designs including 'Gradus' and particularly successful in medium scale designs like 'Jack Tar' and 'Joey' (Fig. 6.26). It was also effectively used in very small all-over patterns in figured grounds as in 'Kenbane', 'Glenshesk' and Design No. 354081, that could be '...useful...as decorators are always in search of'.<sup>72</sup>





Fig. 6.26 A variety of stylistic and technical approaches were employed to convey a sense of movement in these woven designs. Top left: 'Strangford', top right: 'Fanad', bottom left: 'Joey', bottom right: Jack Tar. Source: The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester; The National Archives, Kew; Old Bleach Catalogue, 1936, Old Bleach Archive.

Amor Fenn's comprehensive *Abstract Design: a practical manual on the making of patterns for the use of students, teachers, designers and craftsmen* is among the company's design library and shows signs of regular use and suggest many of the geometric designs were *adapted* from Fenn's manual. Published in 1930, the book contained over 380 non-representative patterns from around the world, including the undulate (waved) line, the Guilloche (braided), the evolute (wave) spiral, patterns formed at several angles and many counter change pattern with variants, all of which are pronounced features in Old Bleach's furnishing fabrics. That it was procured for the company design library, along with Petrie Flinders' mighty compendium of over 3,000 patterns, *Decorative Patterns of the Ancient World* (also published in 1930) indicates a desire and imperative to engage and experiment with design upon the launch of a new range of furnishing fabrics.

A number of designs were striking in their optical playfulness; 'Breffne', 'Baldoyle', 'Cranfield' and 'Cloyne' (Fig. 6.27) are all examples that *appear* like visual algorithms and before their time, but in fact, are heavily borrowed from ancient Arabic and Asian geometric pattern. Several patterns mimicked microscopic detail of a cloth's construction (and antedates design excellence in their post war work with crystallographer Dr. Helen Megaw and the Festival Pattern Group).<sup>73</sup> In 'Baldoyle' and 'Cranfield' we are treated to the illusory behaviour of yarns, in the former, rigid tubes interlock to create vertical chevrons and in the latter, three-dimensional interlaced yarn is created in a quilted effect. 'Cloyne' with its off-set graduating curved

lines was reassuringly described by the company as 'pleasant to look at, and not in any way worrying or fidgety', while similar emphasis on the juxtaposition of straight lines with the undulate horizontal line in 'Breffne' created an arresting three-dimensional effect.



Fig. 6.27 Top left: 'Cloyne', top right: 'Baldoyle', bottom left: 'Breffne', bottom right: 'Cranfield' (wool and linen). All designs were registered with the Board of Trade between 1935 -1936. Source: 'Cloyne' and 'Breffne', Old Bleach Catalogue 1936, Old Bleach Archive; 'Baldoyle' and 'Cranfield' are photographs attached to Certificates of Design Registration held in the Old Bleach Archive.

These optical experiments were neither new nor unique to Old Bleach, Elizabeth Barber has identified the use of optical illusion in textiles in Neolithic and Bronze Age weaving and many of the firm's textile contemporaries, such as Edinburgh Weavers, Sanderson and Marianne Straub's designs for Helios, were producing textiles with similar optical results.<sup>74</sup> However, there is a boldness to Old Bleach's design that precedes the 1960's fascination with visual illusion. Furthermore, these geometric based patterns ran throughout the 1930s, suggesting a cultural appetite and ready market for dynamic modern designs.

### 6.11 Design Themes: Checks and Crossbars

The fundamental precept in weaving of interlacing warp and weft has always produced an apparently infinite range of horizontal and vertical patterns. By the end of the decade, Old Bleach were producing over thirty designs where the horizontal and or vertical is the dominant motif. Unadulterated lines, bars and bands were present in 'Clonmel' and 'Rathdrum' (Fig. 6.28), with the catalogue confidently announcing 'Everyone likes bands... these are very cunningly balanced indeed, and will always be effective.'<sup>75</sup> This tacit



acknowledgment that something as simple as bands still required *the good eye* and judgment of a skilled designer.

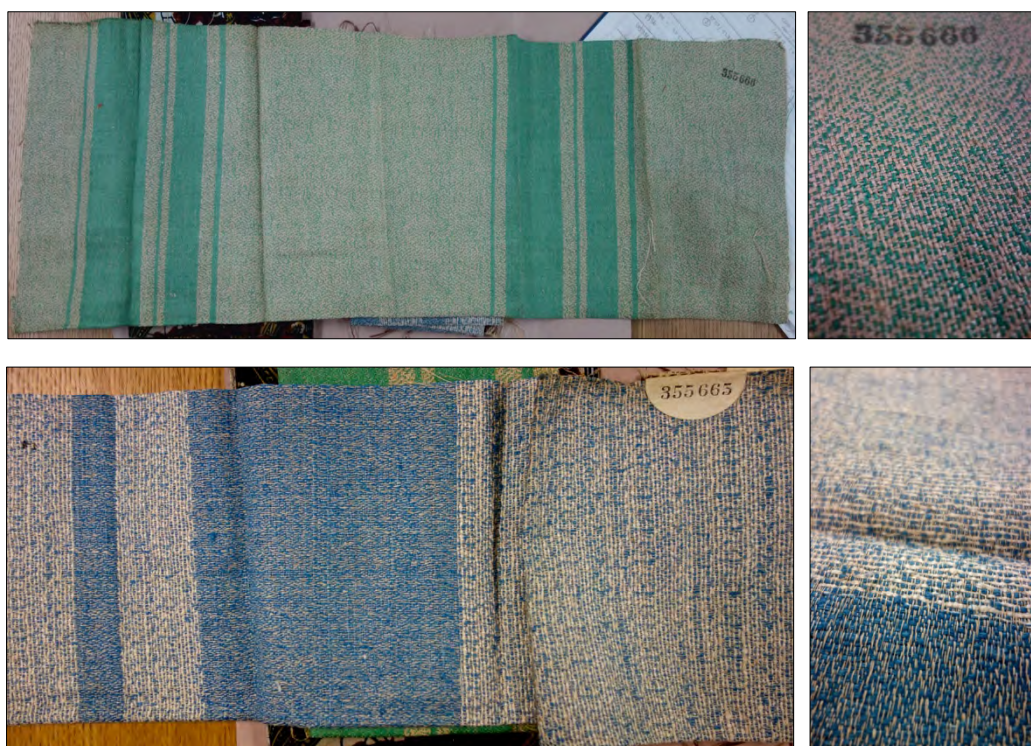


Fig. 6.28 Top: 'Clonmel' in green, with detail, design no. 355666, 13 November 1935; Bottom: 'Rathdrum' in blue, with detail, design no. 355665, 13 November 1935. Source: Board of Trade Design Representations, The National Archives, Kew.

They could be used in a number of ways, an Old Bleach advertisement published in *Punch or The London Charivari* from April 1936, shows 'Rathdrum' as the perfect companion cloth in upholstery to Marion Dorn's elegant hangings in 'Chorale', (see Fig. 4.7, Chapter 4, p.18). Both cloths were coarsely textured with heavy slubby wefts and fine warps, showing off linen's material characteristics and in-keeping with the period's fashion for texture; in February 1935, *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher* noted the increased use of linen, 'especially in the use of texture, coarse textures and pills being noticeably in favour'.<sup>76</sup> Further experiments with crossbars yielded a number of successful designs, 'Glenavy' (see Fig. 5.22, Chapter 5, p. 32) combined 'fashionable horizontal stripes with an effect of texture...as modern as can be, without being too modern'. While it is difficult to trace the origin of some designs, the reference for 'Glenavy' could well have been from natural sources, the eponymous village and river, like Randalstown, surrounded Lough Neagh and as we have seen in a number of Old Bleach designs the natural world was a constant and fertile source in designs such as 'Douros', 'Mandalay', 'Strangford' and 'Fanad'.<sup>77</sup> In 'Carrick' (top right design in Fig. 6.29, 1935) the crossbar too appears to vibrate with the aid of thin vertical lines in counter change, 'A really modern design. Horizontal bars, tied up in an ingenious way by wavy lines. It is a design for any modern room, and for all purposes.' In contrast, the horizontality of 'Cadiz' is a controlled undulate and interlaced design and one that seemed to be much admired by the contemporary design press.<sup>78</sup> The company featured it on their 1936 Furnishing Range Catalogue (alongside 'Downhill').

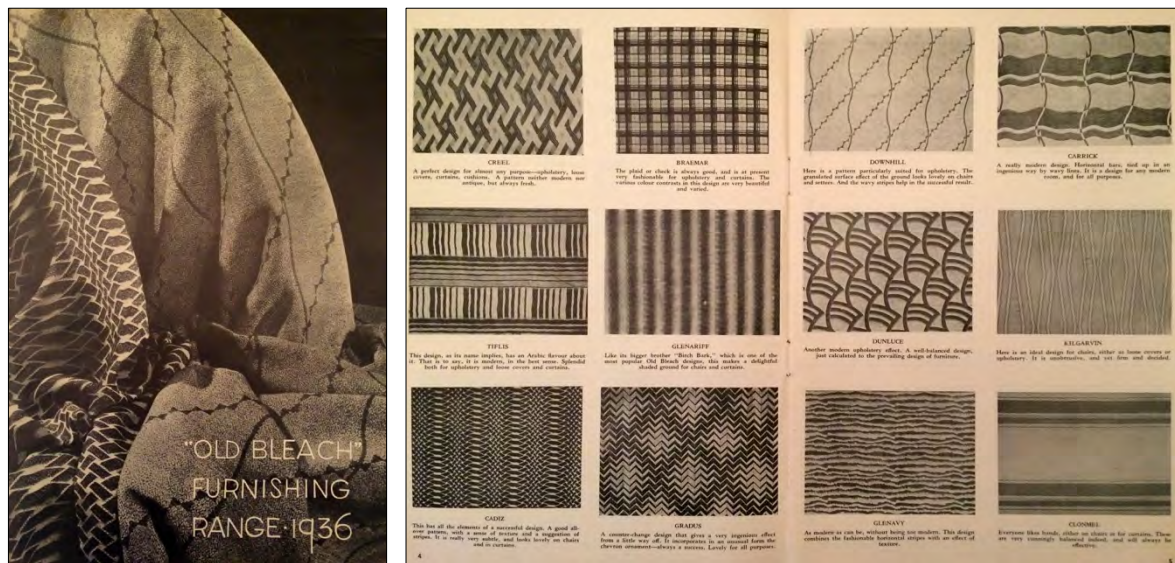


Fig. 6.29 Left: Old Bleach Furnishing Range, 1936, Catalogue Cover featuring 'Cadiz' on the left and 'Downhill'; Right: Pages four and five showing twelve woven all-linen modern designs. Top Row: 'Creel', 'Braemar', 'Downhill', 'Carrick'; Middle Row: 'Tiflis', 'Glenariff', 'Dunluce', 'Kilgarvin'; Bottom Row: 'Cadiz', 'Gradus', 'Glenavy', 'Clonmel'. Source: Old Bleach Archive.

Checks or plaids were (along with stripes and plains), as Valerie Mendes defined them, 'bread and butter' lines and although familiar, remained popular with new unexpected colour ways and texture.<sup>79</sup> They were ubiquitous throughout the pages of modern architecture journals, where the precise gridded lines harmonised with rooms and indeed accentuated the linearity of contemporary architecture and interiors. Christine Boydell has recognised 'the dominance of architectural form' in the conception of modern interiors for architects, interior decorators and textile manufacturers, further noting Roger Smithells' and S. John Wood's preference for stripes, diagonals and checks (although their book *The Modern Home* features several room settings with furnishings composed of outlandish clashing patterns and colours of checks, circles and wavy vertical lines).<sup>80</sup> Old Bleach carried a number, 'Braemar', 'Glengarry' (seen in Fig. 5.12), and 'Kilture'.

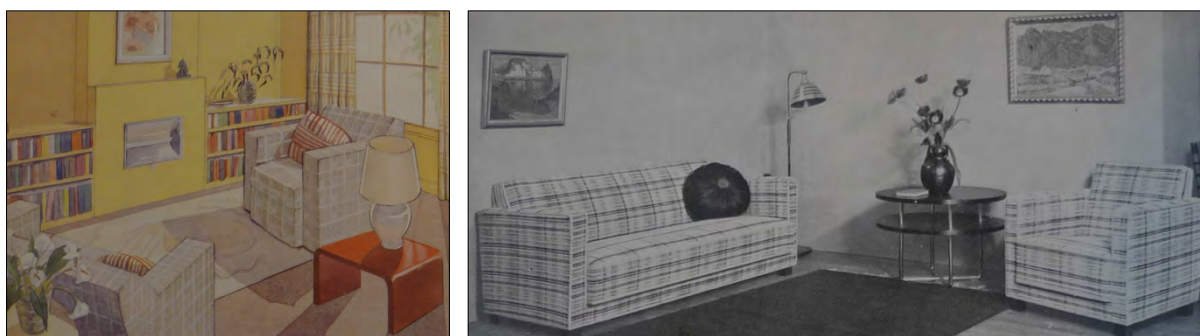


Fig. 6.30 Left: Old Bleach Illustration with 'Glengarry' upholstery (in grey and cream) and 'Tiflis' in hangings (in Chinese yellow) and cushions (rose and gold) in *Fabrics and Colour* by Derek Patmore for Old Bleach. Right: "Swedish Furniture", The Scandinavians were much admired for their manufacture of 'beautiful everyday ware'. Source: left – Ashley Havinden Archive, GMA A39 (box 33), SNGMA; right - *The Studio*, 1935, pp. 26-27.



The check cloth, although broadly believed to be Scottish in origin, was used widely and often in subdued colours as an ideal complement to an otherwise plain room. Fig. 6.30 shows an example of Swedish furniture, designed by architects (no less), Carl Malmsten and A.E. Hjorth with a similar use of plaid in an otherwise pared back aesthetic.

## 6.12 Design Themes: Texture

Plaid also had the advantage, in keeping with the fashionable interior, of adding texture to design schemes. The Old Bleach checks were coarsely woven in muted tones and showed an interest in texture, especially if the market demanded it. The company developed a series of cloths that kept up with the fashion for texture, expressed through the thickness of yarns and mixing these with finer yarns, tufting, weaving with wool wefts and linen warps.



Fig. 6.31 Left: 'Fermoy', wool and linen weave. Middle: Fringing in wool on linen ground (with 'Fermoy' and 'Glenavy'), *Decorative Art: The Studio Year Book*, 1938. Right: 'Lisburn' tufted wool on linen ground. Source: Left and Right – Clothworkers' Centre, VAM. Middle: Manchester Metropolitan University Library.

Texture as a feature of the cloth tended to remain within the modern designs. The textural element in 'Fermoy' was in the weave of dyed wool and undyed linen wefts with undyed warp, giving it a heavy but soft type of weave recommended for hangings although could be used in upholstery as well. 'Lisburn' and the fringed cloth (unidentified) were treated to a surface textural treatment. Marion Dorn had according to *The Architectural Review* (April 1933), 'originated and designed' the fringed cloth. There is no suggestion, in the company records, that Dorn designed the Old Bleach version; it is a dilute of her earlier glamorous design and it likely followed a single and momentary trend.

## 6.13 'Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach Fabrics...'

By the mid 1930s, freelance designers were securing more work, designing across the textile industry and enjoying more support from a range of organisations and initiatives such as the Society of Industrial Artists (1930) and later in 1936, the establishment of The National Register of Industrial Art Designers and The

Royal Society of Arts' Royal Design for Industry.<sup>81</sup> Late in 1935, emboldened by their commercial success and industry recognition (in the contemporary press and industry fairs and industrial art exhibitions) in furnishing fabrics, the company launched a new design initiative that introduced hand printed furnishing linens to the contemporary market. 'Designed by Modern Artists' was the first of two series that comprised a number of designs by 'the best-known' modern designers and artists and showcased several from the Old Bleach Studios.<sup>82</sup> In typically unabashed prose, the firm declared, 'This range of OLD BLEACH fabrics brings a new idea into Furnishings: Printed Linens in which the weight and texture and woven design of the ground are considered with the printed design.'<sup>83</sup> It was not quite *new*, William Foxton, Donald Bros., Edinburgh Weavers under Alec Hunter, and Allan Walton, to name a few, had been hand block printing linen in the Twenties and early Thirties.<sup>84</sup> Nonetheless, it was a new venture for Old Bleach and served as a suitable complement to their woven furnishing fabrics and expand the range in order to 'get a perfectly balanced variety in the range.'<sup>85</sup> It illustrates Old Bleach's determination to be fully competitive in progressive manufacturing; the aforementioned textile firms were renowned for their high standards in production quality and design, so the company entered a dynamic market, populated with already pioneering exemplars.

#### **6.14 Series One**

The first series comprised ten designs, five of which were by either 'The Old Bleach Studios' or in-house designer, Felix C. Gotto. The remaining five came from designers or artists who worked in germane artistic industries and regarded for their textile designs. In positioning their own stable of designers as the 'best-known' was perhaps another example of the firm over-claiming, yet it shows a conviction in the value of naming the designer; a practice possibly picked up from the V&A, who had insisted upon it during acquisitioning.<sup>86</sup> Unsurprisingly, with a variety of artistry, there is no coherent aesthetic across either series *except* in their modern treatment and in the technical printing which showed off Old Bleach's superiority in vat dyes. In both the V&A and The Whitney's holdings and the few material pieces held in the Old Bleach Archive (which incidentally, are from the first series), the colours remain bright and true. Stylistically, only two are entirely abstract (one of which is 'Afghan' see Fig. 6.25), four are modern floral iterations, two use the familiar motifs of scrolls and checks ('Rialto', discussed in section 6.11) and two are designs for the nursery.

#### **6.15 'The Old Bleach Studios'**

The designs by The Old Bleach Studios included 'Afghan', 'Penguin' and 'Winnie The Pooh'. The nursery designs are delightful; whimsical yet adroitly spaced and coloured. In the 'Pooh' cloth (Fig. 5. 22, Chapter 5, p. 32), Milne's animated characters each have a knoll to jump on or off and is unusual for a nursery cloth that manages to avoid having both a crowded composition and a saccharine content. Its elliptical treatment is highly disciplined and clever, Pooh, Tigger, Eeyore and Rabbit are rendered with great economy and (as imagined by E.H. Shepard) accuracy; Pooh and Rabbit are watchful, Eeyore is gloomily



searching for thistles and Tigger is his ebullient self. 'Penguin', despite the singular noun is in fact conceived as a waddle of penguins. Grouped as twos and threes, the penguins are arranged in ordered rows of three or pairs facing away from each other in the opposite direction (like modern day birds addorsed) or facing each other in an apparent tête-à-tête. They stand on stylised icebergs and discs of violet blue on a ground of lustrous rayon and linen. 'Winnie The Pooh' and 'Penguin' were designed by in-house designer Jean McGregor, a talented sculptor and ceramist trained at the Belfast School of Art and later the Royal College of Art.<sup>87</sup> On returning from London, she joined the Ulster Unit in 1934 with some critical success.<sup>88</sup> In the same year, no doubt hastened to a regular income, she joined Old Bleach in August 1934 on a starting salary of £125 per annum but by the following month was on the same salary as Felix C. Gotto. By February 1935, McGregor had advanced to £150 pa, overtaking Gotto's weekly wage of £10.8.4, with £12.10.0.<sup>89</sup> She was clearly an asset to the design studio although 'Winnie The Pooh' and 'Penguin' are the only two Furnishing Fabrics designs attributed to her. It may well have been that she worked *across* the broad range of linen ware, indeed her name and wage entry is listed with a number of other employees and separate from the designers in an Old Bleach salaries and wages journal. It is difficult to interpret this as no further information about departments is offered in the journal.

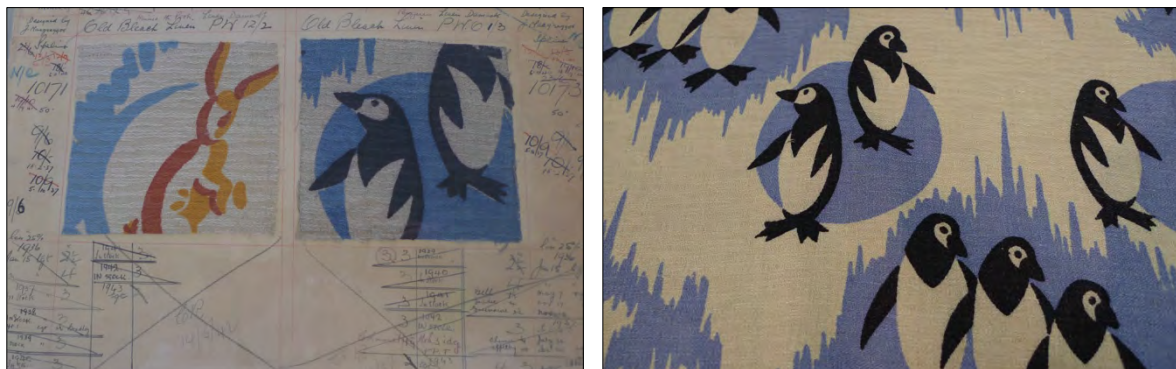


Fig. 6.32 left: Detail of 'Winnie The Pooh' and 'Penguin', fabric samples in Heal's Fabric Sample Books. Right: 'Penguin'. Both designs were printed on the same rayon/linen ground. Source: Left – Author's Photograph, AAD/1978/2/203, Archive of Art and Design, V&A, Blythe House. Right – Author's Photograph, Clothworkers' Centre, VAM, Blythe House.

Indeed, in Old Bleach literature, McGregor is not cited as the designer of these charming nursery prints, instead using the moniker 'The Old Bleach Studios'. It is only in Heal's fabric sample books, held in the V&A's Archive of Art and Design, that we see her name feature as the designer. Old Bleach owned the copyright to 'Winnie The Pooh' and the contract with A.A. Milne (dating from 29 July 1929) survives in the company archive.<sup>90</sup> The 'Penguin' design is not attributed to Milne, nor does the bird appear in the Winnie The Pooh series and it is only more recently a photograph of A. A. Milne and Christopher with a penguin came to light.<sup>91</sup> It is possible, although difficult to verify, the *source* of the idea for a penguin print came from Milne. In the 1938-1939 catalogue, Old Bleach do state the 'Winnie The Pooh' design is based on E.H. Shepard's illustrations, although Shepard included no penguin illustrations and perhaps McGregor

adapted the idea directly from Milne's storytelling or had seen the photograph which dates from around 1922 (his son was then around two years old).



Fig. 6.33 Left: Harrods Great Toy Fair featuring "'Squeak', the penguin of fine silk plush", Christmas Edition of Harrods News, 1922. Right: A.A. Milne with his son Christopher and Penguin. Source: *The Guardian* Newspaper, 19 September 2016.

The Heal's Fabric Sample books indicate both designs sold well (and in stock from 1936 to 1943), and the V&A have issued 'Penguin' by Old Bleach more recently within their Christmas card range indicating the enduring appeal of charming cartoon characters.<sup>92</sup>

## 6.16 Felix C. Gotto

Felix Christopher Gotto (1913-1994) joined Old Bleach, the family firm, in 1933, after graduating from The Slade School of Fine Art. After a brief stint at the Westminster School of Art under the artist and School Principal Walter Bayes, who Gotto claimed, 'taught me much about colour but nothing about drawing', he enrolled at the Royal Academy but in his words, 'got chucked out as on the day of selection I didn't have my drawings handy as I had taken them home. I was the only probationer not accepted and I have always thought that my work was the best in the class.'<sup>93</sup> Unperturbed, he gathered his work for interview with Professor Randolph Schwabe at The Slade, who accepted him immediately. He spent two productive and rewarding years there, leaving with a first prize in decorative design and to his disappointment, only second prize for life drawing. Having been educated in England for over ten years, living and studying in London, playing saxophone in a band and lunching on spaghetti and tomato sauce at Bertorelli's, moving back to the rural yet industrial town of Randalstown did not appear to faze him.<sup>94</sup> The firm's furnishing fabrics venture was relatively new, rapidly expanding and already garnering attention, he was set to work on new jacquard designs. In the summer of 1933, aged twenty years old, Gotto recalled,

I went into the Old Bleach Linen Company to serve my time and learn the various processes in cloth making. The designing and construction of woven and hand painted and later woven fabrics was never any problem, almost as though I had had previous experience, and the apprentice quickly became the master and I had the opportunity to design interesting constructions for various special purposes.<sup>95</sup>

His five-year apprenticeship is almost certainly the reason why Old Bleach became so well regarded for their inventive designs throughout the 1930s. 'Mandalay' (Fig. 6.23) is featured in many sources on Thirties' design and routinely dominates the results listings in any search engine for Old Bleach. There are many designs that are almost certainly by him, yet not attributed to him, for example, 'Dunluce' and 'Rathlin' (shown with Mandalay in Fig. 6.24). In the first series of 'Designed by Modern Artists', two printed designs are attributed to Gotto: 'Rialto' (Fig. 6.25) and 'Killarney' (Fig. 6.34). The latter was carried out in three printings (blue and terra-cotta, dull green and bright green), with 'Milan' as the ground fabric pattern. The promotional material described it as, 'an extremely handsome and bold design, superimposed on a woven foliage pattern on heavy cream linen...it requires to be seen in the piece to be properly appreciated.' Budding and blooming *Convolvulus* meander vertically on exaggerated stems, Gotto has flattened the flower's sepal and corolla to create a flat graphic effect, a fashionable motif in commercial art at the time, and lengthened the space between leaf and flower.<sup>96</sup>



Fig. 6.34 Left: 'Killarney' stylised floral, hand printed on woven linen ('Milan'). Right: 'Rialto', blue with fawn, popular pattern of crossbars on a half bleach linen ground. Source: left – Old Bleach Archive; right – The Whitworth Gallery.

The 'ingenious...and very striking' 'Rialto' alongside 'Killarney' neatly demonstrate Gotto's creative versatility in printed textile design. It is not clear from the Old Bleach Archive as to why Gotto, as an in-house designer, is named. The head of the design studio, Norman Fitzroy Webb's name appears occasionally and one design, 'Ventry', by senior designer J.L. Lindsay is recorded. These inconsistencies may suggest a certain discomfort felt by the company with individual authorship but it was becoming a convention and manufacturers undoubtedly benefitted from the developing esteem of having well designed goods.

### 6.17 Four 'Famous' Designers

Fabrics 'Designed by Modern Artists' promised an extra *implied* value to the cloth, one that was, as Christine Boydell has noted 'analogous to fine art'.<sup>97</sup> Indeed, fine artists were part of both furnishing fabrics Series by Old Bleach. It was a common feature of the period for artists to extend into the Industrial Arts. Bernard Adeney (1878-1966) was a painter and founding member of the London Group and head of the textile school at Central Saints Martin's College of Art and Design between 1930-1947. His designs were favoured by a number of progressive textile manufacturers such as Donald Bros and Allan Walton, himself a painter and deeply rooted in the union of the artistic tradition with industry. 'Cuzco' is a large-scale half drop repeat pattern principally composed of leaves. It is a good example of the fashionable leaf motif (a motif he seemed to excel at), with Old Bleach describing it as, 'wholly modern in feeling, although it has a suggestion of Peruvian influence – enough to justify the name.' In the example below, 'Cuzco', although large in scale, is at once delicate and robust. Adeney's leaf arrangement is densely packed but never crowded.



Fig. 6.35 'Cuzco' by Bernard Adeney, 1935. Source: Left – detail from Heal's Fabric Sample Books, Archive of Art and Design, VAM. Right - Old Bleach Hand-Printed Furnishing Linens leaflet, Old Bleach Archive.

Old Bleach launched the Series with a number of advertisements in magazines and hosted fabric parties at their London showroom or in conjunction with well-known decorators such as Duncan Miller, Derek Patmore and Bird Iles who worked closely with the company. The full-page advertisements, some of which were colour, showed a room setting (in over two thirds of the page). The rooms were both modern or period in style and followed a similar compositional format; a swathe of cloth in close-up framed one side of the illustration. Adeney's 'Cuzco' and the cloth designed by Nicholas de Molas, 'Ceres' were printed in black and white. The artist's name, in capitals, opens the copy,

BERNARD ADENEY – combines the art of the designer with the skill of the craftsman-weaver. He can visualise exactly how a design on paper will look in fabric, and it gives his work a particularly rich and satisfactory quality. Look, for instance, at the essentially decorative pattern he has created for Old Bleach. It is carried out in pure woven linen, hand-printed, which being heavy, hangs beautifully and is crease resisting...If you are interested in original fabrics, you should certainly see the Old Bleach range of designs by modern artists.<sup>98</sup>



Adeney's 'room' was a modern arrangement, with boxy armchairs in a muted companion cloth and a large 'Crittall' metal picture window overlooking the sea with coastline just in view. Large windows require large hangings and therefore a considerable volume of cloth, yet these evocative tableaux were not singularly about fabric but designed to appeal to customers who already lived with the luxury of high ceilings and internal space; these artistic cloths merely framed and enhanced the natural world beyond the room. Indeed, the design by Nicholas de Molas for Series One, 'Ceres' was inspired by the Roman goddess of agriculture and thought to be responsible for the fertility of the land. The design comprises sprigged motifs of wheat, cornflowers, butterfly and poppies. It is the most delicate of designs among this series. Old Bleach described the artist and set designer's work as,

...a designer who manages to give us the best of both worlds...he takes the traditional 'floral' pattern and re-creates it as an Old Bleach curtain fabric fit for moderns to live with! Imagine it in the clear, ripe colours of the cornfield – from which it takes its name... This Old Bleach series designed by famous modern artists should delight everyone who enjoys have really original and beautiful fabrics about the home.<sup>99</sup>

de Molas (1900-1944) was an artist, muralist and designer whose portfolio was diverse in style and clientele. He exhibited regularly in Cork Street, painted for the du Ponts, designed for the Ballet Theatre in New York and the Ballet at Convent Garden alongside contemporaries such as Oliver Messel, Doris Zinkeisen and Rex Whistler (in Noël Coward's *Cochran's 1931 Revue* among others). It was no idle boast by Old Bleach of using *famous* artists.

PUNCH, OR THE LONDON CHARIVARI—MAY 6, 1936.

**NICHOLAS de MOLAS** is a designer who manages to give us the best of both worlds. Look, for instance, how he takes the traditional 'floral' pattern and re-creates it as an Old Bleach curtain fabric fit for moderns to live with! Imagine it in the clear, ripe colours of the cornfield—from which it takes its name. What you can't imagine until you actually have it in your hand, is the beauty of the pure, hand-printed Old Bleach linen—fast to sun and washing, most reluctant to soil or crease. This Old Bleach series designed by famous modern artists should delight everyone who enjoys having really original and beautiful fabrics about the house. Remember, Old Bleach make a companion upholstery fabric to go with each. A card to us will bring you our free book "Colour Schemes" by Derek Patmore, the well-known decorator; also the current range of patterns and the name of your nearest stockist.



**OLD BLEACH FURNISHING FABRICS**

THE OLD BLEACH LINEN CO. LTD., DEPT. A. RANDALSTOWN, NORTHERN IRELAND

**modern artists design for Old Bleach fabrics...**



**PAUL NASH** is not only one of the most distinguished modern painters, he designs beautiful fabrics too. In this arresting Old Bleach curtain linen you see some of the newest work. What we cannot show you in a picture is the rich, heavy, interesting texture of the material. It is all pure woven linen—slow to soil or crease, fast to sun-light, with a lifetime of service in it. If you are furnishing or refurnishing, ask to see the new range of Old Bleach fabrics designed by modern artists. To go with each one there is an appropriate Old Bleach upholstery fabric which, if you choose it, will save you endless search and make your room complete. Any good shop will show you patterns of these companion fabrics.

• A card to us will bring you a free copy of our book "Colour Schemes" by the well-known decorator, Derek Patmore, which is full of ideas; also illustration of the current range of patterns and a list of those houses where Old Bleach Furnishing fabrics can be seen.

**THE OLD BLEACH LINEN CO. LTD.**

DEPT. B. RANDALSTOWN, NORTHERN IRELAND

Fig. 6.36 Left: Nicholas de Molas and Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics, *Punch or the London Charivari*, May 6 1936; Right: 'modern artists design for Old Bleach fabrics...' featuring 'Fugue' by Paul Nash, *Punch or the London Charivari*, June 1 1936 Source: Collection of Author.

By the mid 1930s, Paul Nash (1889-1946) was a celebrated artist, known for his landscapes and war art (in both World Wars), and arguably it was his interwar artwork that was considered ground-breaking, influenced by the Surrealists, particularly Giorgio de Chirico's haunted landscapes. Nash also advocated for the role of the artist in industry, serving as president of the Society of Industrial Artists from 1932-1934 and a member of the Board of Trade's Council of Art and Industry. It is not clear how Nash came to produce his only design, 'Fugue' for Old Bleach. Susan Lambert in *Paul Nash as Designer* affords only one sentence, thus suggesting some ambiguity over its creation, 'In 1936 he produced a tight-knit design, which belies his painter's background for the Old Bleach Linen Company.'<sup>100</sup> Regrettably, there is no surviving evidence in the company archive of a relationship with these artists, so we cannot be sure if designs were commissioned or simply bought from the designers, as was common practice then. Lambert has noted Nash's various connections with the Footprints workshop and the establishment of a small but influential (and short-lived) shop 'Modern Textiles' by Elspeth Anne Little in the mid-1920s, where designs by Marion Dorn, Enid Marx, Phyllis Barron and Dorothy Larcher were all sold there. This network of progressive artists, designers and manufacturers advanced through the Thirties, crossing paths many times over. As discussed further in this section, the Second Series of 'Modern Artists...' featured several designs for Old Bleach that bore close similarity to designs for rival manufacturers.

In the advertisement featured in Fig. 6.36, 'Fugue' is rendered in a thoroughly modern sitting room with an emphasis on horizontality in the window bars, low curved furniture, upholstered in Old Bleach's companion cloth, 'Downhill' and the latest wall mounted Ferranti Radiant electric fire. Old Bleach called the design 'a remarkable achievement, being abstract and yet remarkably decorative at the same time.'<sup>101</sup>

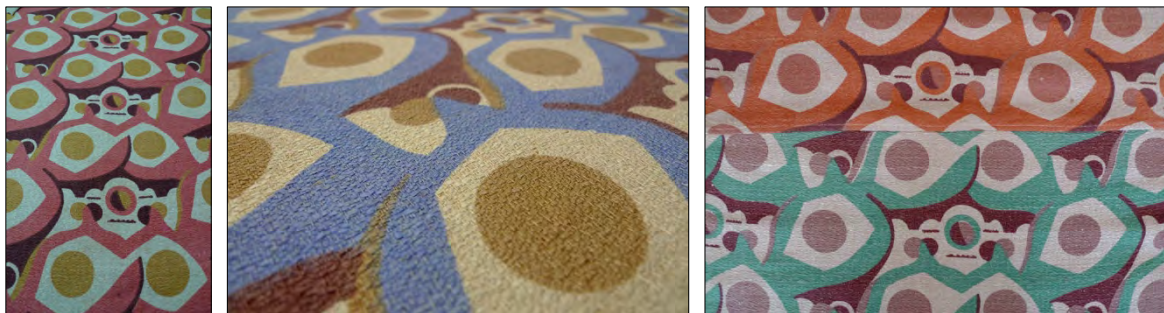


Fig. 6.37 Left: 'Fugue' in pink. Middle: 'Fugue' in blue. Right: 'Fugue' in green and terra-cotta. Source: photographs taken by author, with permission, left and middle - Clothworkers' Centre, VAM; right - The Whitworth Gallery.

This abstract design so named 'Fugue' could well have been a visual rendition of 'a contrapuntal composition in which a short melody or phrase is introduced by one part and successively taken up by others and developed by interweaving the parts' or given Nash's interest in Surrealism, 'a loss of awareness of one's identity, often coupled with flight from one's usual environment.'<sup>102</sup> Printed on heavy natural coloured 'Quarry' cloth with soft precise shades, Nash's attention to detail is well documented; Susan Lambert recounts a strained collaboration with Cresta Silks Ltd over colouring.<sup>103</sup> Old Bleach had prided

itself on innovation in vat dyeing with 'fadeless coloured linens', by 1932, they were, by way of a new process, offering 'perfect penetration and guaranteed to be 100 per cent fast.'<sup>104</sup> Their poetically named "standard" shades included Almond, Nile, Angelica, Reseda, Saxe, Egyptian, Butcher Blue, Tabac and Parma from a range of thirty five, indicating colour's importance to the company. In 'Fugue' the colouring counteracts the flat graphic surface composition of concentric shapes, made up of a disc within a pentagon within an organic ovoid. This tightly locked arrangement is reminiscent of mechanical cogs dependent on each other, but reduced to its cleanest visual language, in other words...a modernist masterpiece.

Marion Dorn's (1896-1964) contribution to the first series is stylistically opposite to Nash's, 'Chorale' was a lighter composition of offset calligraphic flourishes, fixed within columns, against large and small spots (see also Fig. 4.7, Chapter 4, p.18). The looping motif had been reasonably fashionable, *Vogue* (September 1935) featured looping scroll of metalwork on the gun port doors of the S.S. Orion (1934), the Orient Line's stylish modern passenger liner. Dorn's skill was in both pattern scale and layout, by 1936, she was an established name in English textile design circles. In an early 1938 edition of *Decoration*, the author of "The Artist and the Machine: a study of seven contemporary fabric designers" singled out her influence, 'Marion Dorn came to England some ten years ago. I think it is true to say that as a designer she has done more to establish and cultivate good contemporary design for furnishing textiles in this country than any other artist in recent years.'<sup>105</sup> She had established her own eponymously named company in 1934 and supplied designs across the industry. Dorn provided Old Bleach with more designs than any other freelance 'famous' designer, with 'Chorale' being the first of nine designs.



Fig. 6.38 Left: Three fabric swatches of 'Chorale', shown here in tones of brown, blue and gold and red (it was also available in tones of green). Middle: Photograph of the morning uniform adopted by the Wayfarers' Guild of Household Workers with bench upholstered in 'Chorale', *Good Housekeeping*, 1938. Right: 'Chorale' with 'Zodiac', also by Dorn for Old Bleach. Source: left – photograph taken by author with permission from the private collection of Pamela Evans; middle – Special Collections, Manchester Metropolitan Museum; right – The Whitworth Gallery.

'Chorale' is printed on the same rayon weft and linen warp plain weave cloth as 'Winnie The Pooh' and 'Penguin', a versatile cloth with subtle texture that hosted many of the hand-printed designs. It appeared to sell well in Heal's, although their fabric sample books only contain the design in two colour ways, green



and the red/gold, which was the more popular.<sup>106</sup> While it is difficult to accurately interpret its success, it was used frequently in room settings in the design press and advertising for design conscious furnishings companies such as Nesta and Leander and department stores like Bowman's. Her subsequent designs for Old Bleach are all stylistically distinct from each other, as are her designs for rival companies. Her creative and technical versatility extended from her early interest in batiks to print and woven fabric design and rugs. In the second series, she produced a number of designs using fashionable motifs such as the leaf (in 'Pandora') and astrological symbols (as seen in Fig. 6.38, right - 'Zodiac' with 'Chorale'). However, it was her design, 'Aircraft', for the Orient liner "Orcades" by Old Bleach that became iconic (and will be discussed further in this chapter).

The final design in the first series of 'Modern Artists...' is by Stuart Bates called, 'Aztec'. Loosely described as a 'pleasant modern transcription of a South American theme' printed on 'Mecca', a Chinese Sayagata pattern with interlocking swastika. It was a good example of a naturalistic leaf motif with a modern stylised treatment. Like 'Killarney' and 'Cuzco', the motif is a flattened two-dimensional heart shaped leaf with drooping stalk that accentuates the curved cordate leaves. More unusually, the leaf is decorated with a coloured counter change in stripes, checks and spots.



Fig. 6.39 Left: Raoul Dufy for Bianchini Férier, 1925 with gridded lines drawn by Old Bleach design staff, Planche 32, *Étoffes Imprimées et Papiers Peints*. Right: 'Aztec' by Stuart Bates for Old Bleach, 1935. Source: Planche and Fabric – Old Bleach Archive.

There seems to be little or no information on the designer Stuart Bates, like Felix Gotto and Jean McGregor, he may have been design studio staff, but all obvious sources of such information have drawn a blank. Going strictly by the design, it is redolent of a common enough motif in modern design, seen earlier in patterns from the Austrian Wiener Werkstätte and among the folios in the company design library, lay 'Planche 32' from a first edition of *Étoffes Imprimées et Papiers Peints*, by Léon Moussinac in

1924 with gridded lines drawn on by Old Bleach staff. Significantly, the design is by one of the great textile designers of the 20th Century, Raoul Dufy. There is no evidence of when these pencilled lines were drawn and it may be too much of a leap to conclude that 'Aztec' was adapted from Dufy's design. Nonetheless, the design (in blue and green) was stocked by Heal's from January 1936 to 1939 and seems to have sold very well between 1936-1938.

### **6.18 Series Two**

Building on the success of Series One, the company later in 1936, launched the second series.<sup>107</sup> This expanded collection contained two of the original designers and a further nine new names. This section considers a selection from Series Two. Felix Gotto and Marion Dorn contribute to the series again alongside a starry roll-call of contemporary artists and designers including Albert Rutherston, Eva Crofts, Ronald Grierson, Paul Mansouroff and Ashley Havinden and a number of lesser known names, Nancy Standley, Anne Cobham and Diana Donnelly. Like the first series, this is an assortment of designs that celebrate the printed linen cloth and deemed sufficiently modern and commercial to be stocked by Heal's.<sup>108</sup> The leaf motif continued to be popularly represented and several designs included floral sprig like drop or half drop repeat patterns. The second series was a curious mix of conservative 'pretty' designs and several bold designs that could sell equally well today as then.

### **6.19 Series Two: Design Themes - The Reliable Floral**

'Dianthus' by Marion Dorn, 'Valentine' by Eva Crofts, 'Prudence' by Diana Donnelly and 'Vanessa' by Old Bleach Studios were iterations of the floral or sprig motif. 'Valentine' and 'Vanessa' recalled an indefinite period for dainty motifs, the company described 'Vanessa' as a 'charming chintz-like design...adapted from one illustrated in an old book of early XIX century designs.'<sup>109</sup> There are no sources in the Old Bleach design library predating 1867, but a possible source in the library for the early nineteenth century chintz design referred to may have come from a compilation such as *The Artworkers' Studio XXVIII*, "a periodical publication of select samples of decorative art"; only loose pages remain from this edition but show evidence of regular use with marginalia and heavy wear.



Fig. 6.40 Top left: 'Valentine' by Eva Crofts. Top right: 'Prudence' by Diana Donnelly. Bottom left: 'Dianthus' by Marion Dorn. Bottom right: 'Vanessa' by Old Bleach Studios. Source: 'Valentine' – Clothworkers' Centre, VAM. 'Vanessa' – original photograph for sale online. 'Prudence' – Heal's Fabric Sample books, Archive of Art and Design, VAM. 'Dianthus' – Design Representation, Board of Trade Registers, the National Archives, Kew.

'Valentine' was a mixed floral bouquet and considered 'thoroughly up-to-date in treatment', while conventional and naturalistic in composition, it was coloured in electric shades, not exactly unnatural but not entirely believable either. The tied ribbon was a familiar leitmotif of the period, a tangible undulate line that often appeared wrapped animatedly around a bouquet or loosely meandering through a design. Old Bleach used it in several other furnishing designs such as 'Bandon', 'Moylan', 'Auburn' (seen in Fig. 2.5, Chapter 2, p. 13) and on hand-embroidered panels (in wool-work) for cushions and upholstery.<sup>110</sup> The firm was most enthused over Marion Dorn's 'Dianthus', calling it a 'particularly delightful design by the well-known artist and decorator...it has the great merit of being completely suitable for an old period room or for a modern setting. A really clever piece of work.'<sup>111</sup> For Old Bleach, that versatility to adapt to any room was most appealing. As a design its cleverness lay in its simplicity, a single blooming carnation flower in a row, with alternate blooms inverted. The flower is balanced by leaves clustered at the base of a very short stem and the medium scale avoided charges of sentimentality.<sup>112</sup> 'Prudence' was similar in scale to 'Dianthus' and composed of skilfully placed sprig motifs, spiky but yielding to one another in



curvilinear shapes. The catalogue described it thus, 'so simple, crisp and fresh, that it is just the thing for any unpretentious room.' Its further appeal lay in the *offspring* colour combinations (red with purple and yellow with green), Heal's fabric sample books suggest the red/purple combination sold considerably better than the yellow/green pattern.<sup>113</sup>

Eva Crofts' additional contribution to the second series could not have been more unlike 'Valentine'. 'Persian Rose' is a boisterous profusion of stylised blooms with extruding buds, tendrils and leaves. This large scale muscular pattern was considered 'handsome...yet so disposed in its ground of heavy linen.' Foregoing natural colouring, stems and leaves were realized as cobalt blue with buds and blooms as bright red (rather than its natural shade of strong deep pink). It was a variation on a theme and style she had developed and picked up by Donald Bros. in Dundee. Perspective is flattened and in 'Persian Rose' (and 'Chale') the blooms are *paired* and then arranged in rows of repeat, and despite the stylisation, appear to grow into and around each other.



Fig. 6.41 Left: 'Persian Rose' by Eva Crofts for Old Bleach. Middle and right: 'Chale' (1936) and 'Coopersdale' (1937) for Donald Bros. Source: left and middle - Clothworkers' Centre, VAM. Right - The Working Archive (archive awareness campaign for Scotland).

Like so many of the designs in the 'Modern Artists...' series, the ground fabric is the same as 'Penguin', 'Prudence' and 'Chorale'. Of 'Chale' (see Fig. 6.41) by Crofts for Donald Bros., Lesley Jackson has noted the 'rough texture of the cloth perfectly complements the earthy, primitive character of the pattern'.<sup>114</sup> Crofts' treatment here recalled the hand block printed *toiles de Tournon* by Raoul Dufy (before and after the Great War) and Barron and Larcher in the 1920s. It is unknown whether the freelance designers *chose* their linen ground on which to place their surface pattern. It is more likely that decision, both of an aesthetic and technical nature, would have been left to the Old Bleach design team. Across both series, five different (plain and figured) ground fabrics are used and a combination of pure linen, linen blends and pure rayon.<sup>115</sup>

## 6.20 Design Themes - The Leaf Motif

The leaf motif was one of the most familiar patterns in textile design during the Interwar years. Its appeal lay in its versatility and simplicity. It could be scaled up or down, realised in single form or layered into more complex patterns. It had narrative potential, was capable of abstraction and could be configured in two or three dimension. It could be of the 'common or garden' type or exotic. In short, the morphology of leaves had myriad possibilities for the designer and is a more common motif in the Old Bleach furnishing fabrics range than florals. In the second series, there are five designs with a dominant leaf pattern, 'Eden' by Anne Cobham, 'Arum' by C.B. Costin Nian, Felix Gotto's 'Penshurst', 'Delos' by Ashley Havinden, and 'Pandora' and 'Pandora (Ground)' from Marion Dorn. Mostly large in scale, in itself a symbol of modernity, the leaf motifs are rendered in varying degrees of detail. Anne Cobham's 'Eden' is composed of a profuse arrangement of multiple lobed star-shaped leaves in a stemmed vase set in half-drop repeat rows. We have only one illustration and description from the (photocopied) Old Bleach Catalogue from 1938-1939 to go by, which claimed, 'this bold print is carried out on a cream linen ground. It makes the freshest and handsomest curtains you could imagine.' Cobham was little known, although Lesley Jackson lists her among a number of contributors to Allan Walton's innovative textile company.<sup>116</sup> In Costin Nian's 'Arum', petiolated basal leaves form the principal motif. With 'opalescent' shades and organic in composition, the calla lily and its leaves are linked forming diagonal rows on a white rayon ground. It is a good example of a bold design and a light touch. Costin Nian produced a further design for Old Bleach around the same time. 'Granard' is a stylised treatment of an elliptic leaf with striking pastels of green and pink. Here the leaves are twisted and arranged in a repeat of three columns on 50" wide linen cloth.

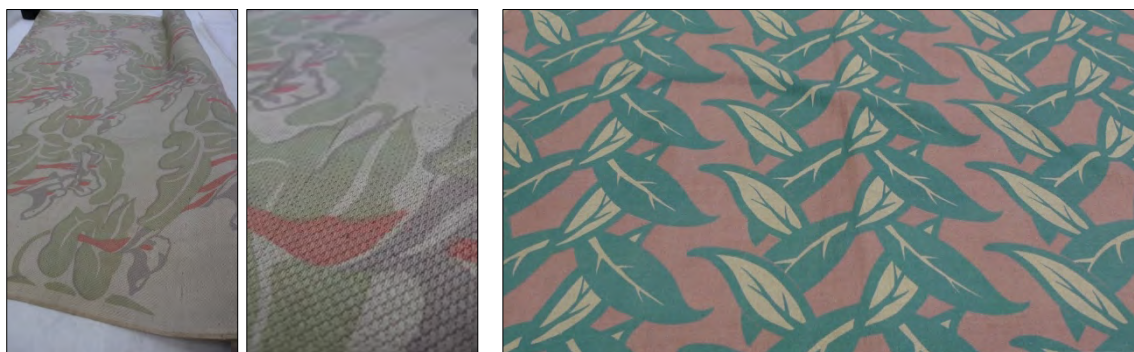


Fig. 6.42 Left: 'Arum' with detail. Right: 'Granard' by Barry Costin Nian for Old Bleach. Source: Clothworkers Centre, VAM.

Ashley Havinden and Marion Dorn took the single leaf motif and placed it in straightforward rows of repeat. Both designs are simple and it is in the scale and painterly-ness that make them so successful. Havinden had a long history with the company as its principal graphic designer and despite having a full career at W.S. Crawford Ltd., he developed a parallel reputation in painting and textile design. In 'Delos', the large leaf has the appearance of being hand-painted and like Eva Crofts, Havinden was producing a number of designs in similar styles for rival manufacturers. In Fig. 6.43, Havinden's design on the right, for Edinburgh Weavers (1938) is comparable in theme and style.<sup>117</sup> While Havinden's leaf was serrated,

Dorn's leaf treatment is elliptic, both designs switched direction on alternate rows, a standard device to give the pattern some added vitality. This vitality was amplified in 'Pandora (Ground)' with a ground of vertical leaf pattern and over printed with a horizontal leaf repeat. Old Bleach pronounced the latter, 'bold and original.'<sup>118</sup>

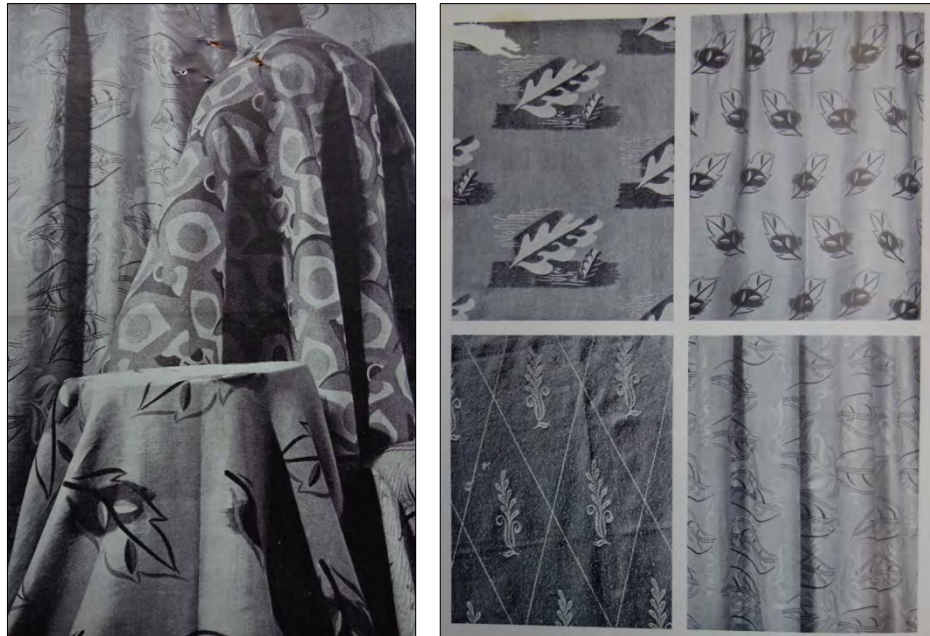


Fig. 6.43 Left: 'Delos' in the foreground, 'Pandora' in the background (separated by 'Fugue') Old Bleach Brochure, 1937. Right: 'Silvan' by Ashley for Edinburgh Weavers and 'Earlwood' Regency style design by Morton Sundour Fabrics Ltd shown with 'Delos' and 'Pandora (Ground)', *Decorative Art: The Studio Year Book*, 1938. Source: left – Author's Collection, right – National Art Library, VAM.

## 6.21 Design Themes - Scale

If the company thought 'Pandora (Ground)' was bold and original, then 'Symphony' by the artist Paul Mansouroff and 'Penshurst' by Felix Gotto were truly masterful printed designs. Large and expressive, these two designs capture a certain confidence with Old Bleach by the mid 1930s. The company quite rightly declared it 'remarkable' and called the bare stubby shapes 'conventionalized branches'. They are more redolent of antlers or coral, these denuded stumps have an other-worldly appearance, akin to the Surrealist taste for the subconscious dream scape. In fact, Mansouroff came from the Russian *avant-garde*,





Fig. 6.44 'Symphony' by Paul Mansouff for Old Bleach, screen printed linen. Source: Clothworkers' Centre, VAM.

teaching at Petrograd's State Institute of Painterly Culture, *Ginkhuk*, where he was head of the experimental department and developed several theories of 'painterly formulae' and painterly tensions'.<sup>119</sup> He emigrated to Italy then Paris in the late 1920s and was introduced, through Robert and Sonia Delaunay, to Picasso and the textile manufacturer Bianchini-Ferrier. Throughout the 1930s, he produced designs for Chanel, Lanvin, Patou and Schiaparelli.<sup>120</sup> He may have produced a whole range of designs for Old Bleach, but we can only be sure of two, 'Symphony' and a printed dress fabric (sample) purchased by the V&A in May 1935; in a reply to H.A. Kennedy, Arthur Webb (from the London office) explained, 'This is a special fabric, woven from pure flax [at Sandringham], which is practically uncrushable, due to a certain method of spinning the yarn, which is known in the trade as "Spiralspun"'.<sup>121</sup>

In some respects, 'Symphony' was rather limited in its application. For a manufacturer who sought to capture broad markets, this design was most unusual in its subject and treatment. The most probable function for designs of this scale was civic architectural projects such as cinemas and town halls, where apertures, proscenium curtains and public internal spaces required designs proportional to the buildings. Old Bleach regularly advertised in *The Architectural Review* (from the late 19th Century) and were featured in editorial coverage on the latest trends in fabric design and seemed to be favoured by architects. They secured a number of prestigious architectural commissions such as the Whitla Hall at Queen's University, Belfast and hotels across the Empire, such as The Augusta Hotel in Sicily and The Manila Hotel, Philippines. Two designs by Felix Gotto match the brio of 'Symphony'. 'Penshurst' and 'Carbury' are also large in scale and inspired by historical eras. In 'Penshurst', the pattern is, according to the catalogue, based on Jacobean crewel embroidery. The Interwar popularity of Jacobean design was possibly based on nostalgia for Empire





Fig. 6.45 'Penshurst' by Felix Gotto, left: detail of fabric sample, Heal's Fabric Sample Books. Middle: Penshurst featured in *Decorative Art: The Studio Year Book*, 1939. Right: 'Carbury', screen hand-printed linen. Source: left - Archive of Art and Design, VAM. middle - National Art Library, VAM. Right - Clothworkers' Centre, VAM.

pre-eminence, a bygone age of direct trade between Britain and Asia with an exuberant style, rich in detail and colour. Jacobean embroidery was opulent in stitch and exotic in subject matter and the Old Bleach design library contains a number of important books on needlework, among them *Tapestry Weaving in England from the Earliest Times to the End of the XVIIIth Century* by W.G. Thomson (1914) and Mary Waring's *An Embroidery Pattern Book* from 1917. Either may have featured Penshurst Place (a 14<sup>th</sup> century manor house, once owned by Henry VIII, deep in the Kent countryside) or perhaps Gotto had direct experience of its medieval history. The design itself is densely conceived, the colourings deftly judged and predates the brilliance of Josef Frank's work at Svenskt Tenn. 'Carbury' (1938) is a more straightforward design and it is the scale that takes it from a simple Baroque scroll motif into a statuesque modern interpretation from the Classical idiom. The design library contains a variety of possible sources of inspiration, from Reinhold Feldner's *Moderne Decorations – Malereien* (1890) to just published, Arthur Pope and Phyllis Ackerman's expansive six volume *A Survey of Persian Art* in 1938 and 1939.

Gotto's designs for print across both series also demonstrated his stylistic versatility and technical intelligence, he was almost certainly responsible for the majority of counter change weave patterns throughout the 1930s and his printed designs indicate a sureness with colour, pattern and composition. He was sufficiently proud of his work to send a range of fabric samples to his alma mater, The Slade School of Fine Art in 1934. In a letter warmly thanking Gotto for the box of fabrics (and a sketch), the lecturer and artist Frank Ormrod enthused, 'They are a credit to the Slade and I shall take every opportunity of letting people know who designed them. I am sure the Professor [Schwabe] will be very pleased when I tell him you have kindly sent them for the Slade.'<sup>122</sup> That Gotto further retained this letter, found among his personal papers, also indicates a tacit pride in his creative work. His daughter persuaded him to write his memoir, in which his time at Old Bleach is thinly drawn. He was expected to return to Old Bleach after his war effort but declined in favour of a life in England. In 1945, he continued his design

work, first working under John Vinycomb at Heaton Tabb & Co. Ltd in Wilsden, moving to a rival West Yorkshire company, Firth's at Heckmondwike to 1949, and later, after a period in Australia (designing for Michael Naim's Linoleum Company in Sydney), spent five years designing for Roosen Silks Ltd (Argyll Street, London) in the mid to late Fifties. Yet it seemed his occupation as a designer played only a small role in an otherwise rich and interesting life, that included a lifelong enthusiasm for sailing and a satisfying and profitable time as a pig farmer. However, he did reflect,

Looking back, I wonder what beautiful work I might have gone on to do if I had had more initiative and drive. Opportunity is said to be a fine thing and I invariably found established industry to be very conservative and often lacking in imagination. Other than in the production of artificial fibres little progress has been made during the last 50 years. I dream of so many beautiful things and somewhere there must be a future wide open for someone with vision.<sup>123</sup>

Despite the ambivalence of a career in design, Gotto did register as a qualified designer for industry on the National Register of Industrial Art Designers in January 1938. He had no need to if choosing to remain at Old Bleach and there may well have been plans afoot to move, but interrupted by war. According to his memoirs, the firm's internal familial politics were enough to vanquish him to seek out a life elsewhere. Furthermore, the Ulster textile industry was too hidebound and design (as discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis) was not of a progressive bent, it was little wonder then that his talent and personality became restless.

## **6.22 Marion Dorn's 'Aircraft', 'Zodiac' and 'The Ulster Group'**

Together with 'Mandalay' by Felix Gotto, 'Aircraft' by Dorn are the two best known Old Bleach furnishing fabrics. Featured in myriad contemporary and recent textile and design publications, 'Aircraft' is an arrangement of stylised birds.<sup>124</sup> Designed by Dorn in conjunction with Brian O'Rorke specially for the new Orient liner S.S. Orcades, it was used principally in the first-class lounge in a colourway of maroon, coral and blue printed on fawn Quarry cloth of linen and rayon. Old Bleach's trade advertising made much of linen's natural characteristics that were 'fast to sea air, sunlight and washing, and slower to soil and crease than any other in the world', featuring frequently in shipping trade journals such as *The Shipping World*, *Shipbuilding and Shipping Record*, *Syren and Shipping Illustrated* and *Fairplay*.<sup>125</sup> A review in *The Shipping World* described the collaboration between Dorn, O'Rorke and Old Bleach with loose covers specially dyed to match the maroon in the printed cloth along with a complementary small spot design of the blue of the print. This creative union produced a coherence where 'the whole lounge appeared to be the work of one hand throughout instead of a "gather up" of odd fabrics of different textures and colours.'<sup>126</sup> The lack of a consistent design vocabulary had been one of the more outspoken criticisms of British liner design, particularly in the strident bid to showcase Great British manufacturing in the RMS Queen Mary (1934).



Fig. 6.46 Left: 'Aircraft' in blues, green and yellow on linen and rayon ground. Right: 'Aircraft' upholstered chairs in the first-class lounge on the S.S. Orcades as featured in the liner's review in *The Shipping World*, August 25, 1937. Source: Left – Clothworkers' Centre, VAM. Right – Press cuttings file, Old Bleach Archive.

'Aircraft' was admired both by the design community and the design conscious consumer. It featured in many Industrial Art exhibitions during the 1930s (see Chapter 2, p.20) and was stocked by Heal's from 1938 to 1943 in two colourways (pastel pink/duck egg blue; dark brown/bright orange/peach). Old Bleach described it thus, 'This brilliant pattern based on flying pigeons is a remarkable achievement by Marion Dorn; in five printings and the loveliest shades.' Birds in flight was a concept Dorn had already played with in earlier designs, such as 'Birds', a hand screen print for Warner and Sons Ltd, 'Cyprus' for Donald Bros. (both from 1936), and later in 'Avis' for Edinburgh Weavers.<sup>127</sup> However, in the Old Bleach iteration, the birds are large darting silhouettes and coupled. Despite their flattened and freakish anatomy, the pattern became symbolic of a palatable British abstraction.



Fig. 6.47 Left: 'Rostrevor', woven linen, 1935. Right: 'Richhill' (foreground right of photograph), hand painted linen and rayon furnishing fabric shown with 'Le Gourmet' by Donald Bros. and 'Madeira Brocade' by Scottish Textile Weavers. Source: left – design representation, Board of Trade, the National Archives, Kew. Right – "Design in Fabrics: design and decoration", *The Studio*, vol. 18, July-December, 1939, pp.164-169.

Stylised birds in flight was another popular motif in interwar textile design, their winged sense of movement and organic form capable of reduction was wholly compatible with a modern design language. Many designers utilised the plasticity of the avian theme and Old Bleach carried out a number of patterns with the motif, in 'Rostrevor' (1935) and 'Richhill' (1939). The former pattern had a particularly enduring appeal, still being used into the Fifties, it featured as bedcovers in the first-class cabin of Cunard's RMS 'Caronia' (1947) and reviewed in *Syren and Shipping Illustrated*, September 6, 1951. The latter was one of the hand painted furnishing fabrics by the company. This range, which included 'Savernake' (linen and wool) and 'Yangste' (linen and rayon), was expensive and laborious to produce, and had limited interest, although 'Savernake' was used extensively on ocean liners and 'Yangste', an oriental inspired design, was stocked in Heal's from 1938 to 1943, but did not sell particularly well.

Dorn produced two further printed designs for Old Bleach, 'Zodiac' and a trio of designs with scenes from Irish life named 'The Ulster Group'. 'Zodiac' (see Fig. 6.38 for illustration) comprised the astrological symbols in an overlaid arrangement. This bold fussy design was noted in the contemporary press as typical of a departure from earlier softer shades, "the present trend, as indicated by contemporary production, shows that colours have been strengthened; they are sharp and clear by comparison with the pastel shades for which there was a vogue two of three years ago."<sup>128</sup> Astrological symbols had been the subject of a number of designs such as 'Constellations' by Paul Rodier in 1928 and Zodiac jacket by Elsa Schiaparelli in 1937, and were fashionable around this time, *The Irish Textile Journal* in February 1936 reported several novelty effects introduced on a linen range in Paris including signs of the Zodiac (along with small elephants, butterfly motifs and the Eiffel Tower). In addition, Dorn had designed her first manufactured wallpaper, 'Constellation' in 1938 for Coles, she too continued the theme when she returned to the United States in 1940 with a similar wallpaper design for Bassett & Vollum also named 'Zodiac'.<sup>129</sup> The two 'Zodiac' designs have much in common, both are printed with six astrological signs and overprinted with six remaining signs in bold outline. Stylistically they are given the same treatment and two of the signs, the charging bull of Taurus and the sea-goat of Capricorn are virtually identical. The distinction between the two designs lies in the colouring and composition. In the Old Bleach version, the ground print is comprised of three colours and overprinted in black outline, while the Bassett & Vollum design is printed on a dramatic deep green (almost black) ground with the six signs in brilliant multi-colour and overprinted in white outline. Compositionally, the linen fabric pattern is arranged in regular vertical columns and rendered simply whereas the wallpaper pattern signs are offset and delineated with more detail. Designers frequently developed favourite themes and reworked existing designs to appeal to new markets.

If 'Zodiac' had a universal appeal, 'The Ulster Group' was a more provincial themed trio of designs named individually as 'Antrim', 'Enniskillen' and 'Ulster'. This set made a further departure for Dorn as they were distinctly painterly in treatment and it is unclear whether she conceived the designs from first hand, documentary material or simply her imagination, although the latter two are more likely. The three printed



designs comprised imagined scenes and themes from Irish life: the round tower surrounded by clumps of shamrock, Irish harp, Irish cottage complete with spinning wheel, donkeys carrying Colleens and baskets of peat and a horse and cart. These clichéd tropes did not escape the beady eye of Peter Floud, Keeper of Circulation at the V&A, who tartly remarked on an additional array of potential Old Bleach textile designs joining the collection, 'large and fairly interesting selection. Several designs pre-war or adaptations of them – 3 extremely bad designs by Marion Dorn on Irish themes for American market.'<sup>130</sup> Needless to say, they did not join the museum's Circulation Department but were featured in the contemporary press, appealing to consumers who were perhaps less design conscious and more attracted by the romantic narrative of Irish peasant life.<sup>131</sup>



Fig. 6.48 'The Ulster Group'. Top left: Curtains and cushions in the harp fabric called 'Ulster' (screen printed rayon) in the first-class lounge, S.S. Orcades. Top right: press cutting featuring 'Enniskillen' with scenes of Irish life, 1949. Bottom left: the trio, with 'Antrim' (round tower) shown in the London showroom by manager Frank Fisher. Bottom right: colour image of 'Ulster'. Source: black and white photographs - Press Cuttings book, Old Bleach Archive; colour image – *Textiles by Britain*, Grace Lovat Fraser, 1948, plate III.

So too were they employed in the first-class lounge on the SS Orcades, selected no doubt by the exacting eye of Brian O'Rorke, but to principally serve the UK-Australia-New Zealand route, whose passengers may well have been sentimental about the auld sod.<sup>132</sup> They were the last designs Dorn would produce for Old Bleach before her return in 1940 to the United States.

### 6.23 Old Bleach's Period and Reproduction Designs

For Old Bleach screen printing was 'an adaptable form of production', offering the manufacturer swift responses to fashions and with less financial outlay.<sup>133</sup> However, their lines in period and reproduction designs were mostly woven in pure linen, wool and linen and to a lesser extent, linen and rayon on, according to Felix Gotto's memoirs, 'beautiful old French looms.'<sup>134</sup> In their catalogue, the company claimed, 'Old Bleach have special opportunities for getting the very best models for their range of period designs. Where possible their reproductions are exact, and no alternations of really historical pieces are permitted unless it is made necessary by the translation from one fabric to another.'<sup>135</sup> In 1936, the range of period and reproduction designs totalled eleven and expanding to thirty by 1938, equating to just over 20% of their furnishing fabrics production.<sup>136</sup> Their provenance varied from Italian silks and brocade, French brocatelle, American brocade, Dutch and German damask, to more exotic Turkish, Spanish and Moorish tapestries and English embroidery, covering a broad chronology, from the 14<sup>th</sup> to the 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.



Fig. 6.49 A page from George Leland Hunter (1918) *Decorative Textiles*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Philadelphia and London, J.B. Lippincott Company. Source: Old Bleach design library, Old Bleach Archive.

A rich and constant source for the company's design studio was a first edition of Alan Cole's *Ornament in European Silks* from 1899.<sup>137</sup> Cole's book was a history of pattern devices in silks from the sixth century to the eighteenth century and illustrated with one 169 black and white plates derived from the South Kensington Museum (V&A) and Messrs. Debenham and Freebody, who commissioned and published (with B.T. Batsford) the book. The preface stated that the central aim of the book 'should be educational, that it should be fully illustrated, and rendered as far as possible a handy book of reference for the designer of patterns and ornaments based on typical precedents, for the silk manufacturer, and the amateur.'<sup>138</sup> Despite the varying sizes of plates and lack of colour, *The Spectator* commended the high quality of the printed illustrations and certainly the edition in the Old Bleach design library shows extensive use, with yellowed tape holding pages together, marginalia and multiple pencilled grid lines indicating designers

regularly worked from the illustrated patterns.<sup>139</sup> In fact, there are a number of patterns translated or faithfully reproduced from the book by Old Bleach.

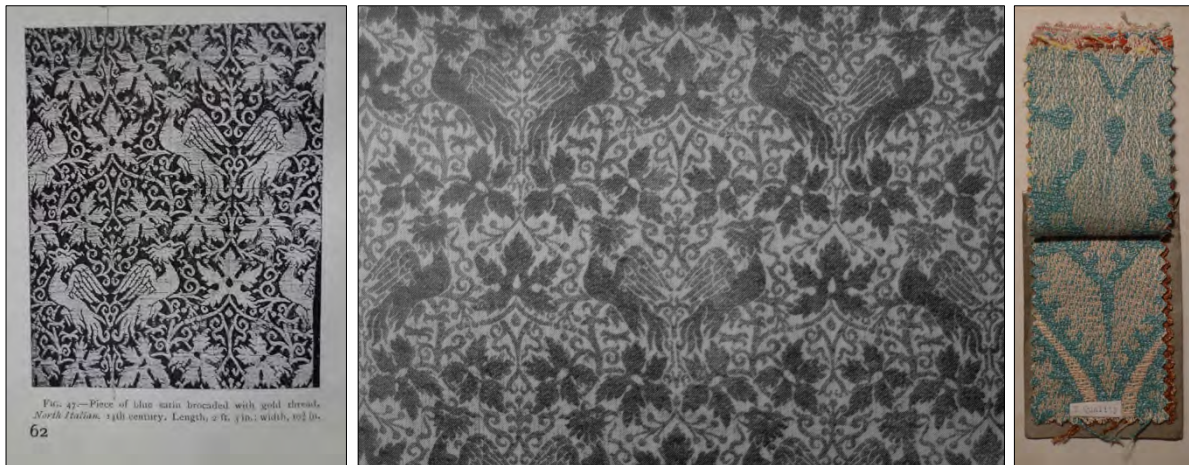


Fig. 6.50 Left: "Piece of blue satin brocaded with gold thread. North Italian. 14<sup>th</sup> century. Length, 2ft. 3 in.; width, 10 3/8 in.", Alan Cole, *Ornament in European Silks*, Fig. 47, p. 62. Middle: 'Como' by Old Bleach, Old Bleach Catalogue, 1936. Right: rear of 'Como' in green linen (with 'Smyrna' below), Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics, pocket sample booklet. Source: left – Old Bleach design library. Middle – Old Bleach Archive. Right: Collection of Pamela Evans.

'Como' is introduced in the 1936 catalogue as '...a lovely medieval design. It is in a lovely weight of upholstery cloth. Just the right thing for those who want to get away from excessive modernity'. Offering relief from the modern world had been provided in the nineteenth century by William Morris and the Arts and Crafts Movement with some success and the appetite for reproduction design demonstrated the appetite for continuity in tradition well into the 20th century. The cloth featured in Cole, Fig. 47, is a rich blue satin brocade with gold thread and the unit of pattern is 'a symmetrical arrangement of fantastic birds, vine leaves and curving stems.'<sup>140</sup> Cole suggested the birds could be remotely related to a traditional device in Chinese ornament representing the mystical bird "fonghoang" [sic], and that collateral evidence indicated it was in vogue during the mid 1300s.<sup>141</sup> We have no way of determining *why* Old Bleach chose particular designs, Cole's book is full of 'high-water mark of excellence' in historical design and clearly they saw no technical obstacle in translating those silk patterns into linen designs. They did favour designs between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, which demonstrated symmetrical and all-over patterns with several recurring devices such as *regardant addorsed* animals, crowns, interstices, urns, cones, stylized palmette motifs, fruit and radiations of leaves and blossoms.<sup>142</sup>



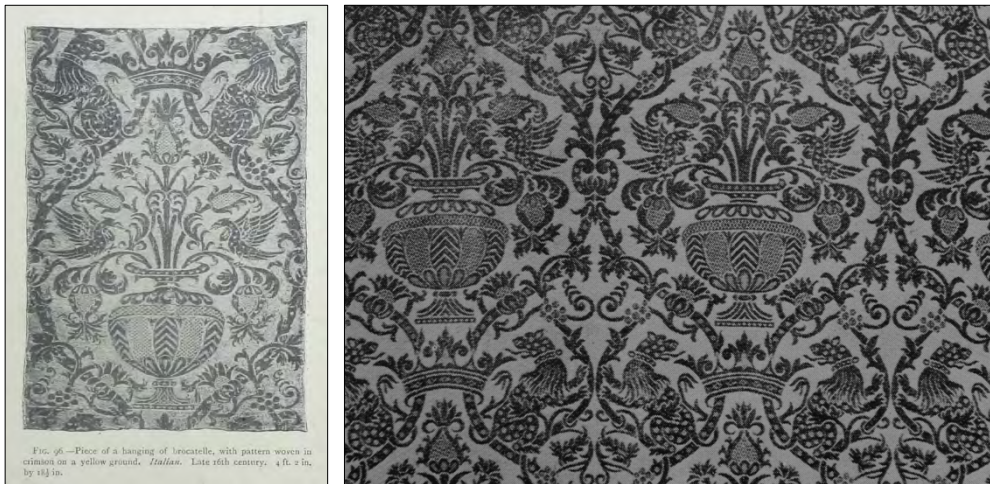


Fig. 6.51 "Piece of a hanging of brocatelle, with pattern woven in crimson on a yellow ground. Italian. Late 16<sup>th</sup> century. 4ft. 2 in. by 18½ in.", Alan Cole, *Ornament in European Silks*, Fig. 96, p.114. Right: photograph of 'Padua' by Old Bleach, Old Bleach Furnishings Catalogue, 1936. Source: left – Old Bleach design library. Right – Old Bleach Archive.

In 'Padua' not only did the company reproduce the pattern but clearly read Cole's accompanying text where he used the iconography to help identify the date and origin of the piece, 'The collared leopard almost takes one back to the 14<sup>th</sup> century; but the gadrooned vase, which is a reflex of Italian pottery fashionable at the time, brings one back to the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>143</sup> The Old Bleach Catalogue, 1936, described it in the most conversational tone, 'Here you have what must be one of the handsomest reproduction designs in existence. It is an exact copy of a brocade of the late sixteenth century, although the leopards suggest an earlier date.' The pattern contains several devices common in many historical textiles, such as an ogival frame of slender bands knitted together by crowns, Cole suggested it 'represents a good class of stuff for regular trade purposes in the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> century.'<sup>144</sup> There are a further four designs from Cole that are included in the Old Bleach illustrated catalogues from 1936 and 1938-1939 and many pencilled grid lines, where other silk designs have inspired (perhaps later) the design studio.<sup>145</sup> There are a number of paintings included in Cole's text, used as historical reference for textile patterns. Several contain a distinctive lobed leaf shape that appears in some Old Bleach's interwar designs.<sup>146</sup>



Fig. 6.52 Left: "FIG. 106 - Painting by Cornelius de Vos (about 1620), of his two daughters." Right: Second hanging cloth from the left, of large lobed leaves, positioned between 'Kilture', a linen plaid, and the coiled repeating line of 'Kinsale', Old Bleach Furnishing Stand, British Industries Fair (BIF), 1947. Source: left - *Ornament in Silk* by Alan Cole, p.121; right - Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

The painting by the 17<sup>th</sup> century Flemish painter Cornelius de Vos of his two children featured in Cole, p. 121, denotes a small lobed leaf motif on the child's dress and in the margin of the page, a basic sketch of the leaf is hand-drawn by one of the studio's designers.<sup>147</sup> It is possible the motif was adapted and the scale enlarged for a cloth design seen in the photograph taken at the British Industries Fair, on the right of Fig. 6.51. It shares the same character of the lobed leaf form and direction and would have been straightforward to replicate. Old Bleach's iteration is arranged in vertical repeating columns, a recurring device used in a number of their modern designs such as 'Dingle' and 'Lisburn'.



Fig. 6.52 Left: 'Granada' furnishing fabric in linen, from the Old Bleach Catalogue, 1938-1939. Right: Moorish silk tapestry, Collection of VAM, museum number: I757-1892. Source: Left - Old Bleach Archive. Right - Clothworkers' Centre, VAM, photograph taken by author with permission.

According to the 1938-1939 catalogue, 'Granada' is an 'admirable upholstery design taken from a piece of silk tapestry of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. It is Moorish. The original is in the Victoria and Albert Museum, South

Kensington.' The museum does hold a small tapestry remnant that fits the description, of woven gold and silk, probably from Granada, with a diaper pattern of two repeating 8 point stars separated by geometrical devices (see Fig. 6.52). While not obviously identical, the upper 3 pointed stars are remarkably close to what Old Bleach may have adapted and put into an all-over repeating pattern in rows. The general effect is a dense interlocking arrangement in a medium scale design, that is not quite historically accurate but a historicist interpretation for period style rooms. What these period and reproduction designs demonstrate was a receptive market to skilled artistic and technical historicism. Like the acclaimed decorator, Herman Schrigner, Old Bleach 'blended the centuries and the nations' in their period design repertoire.<sup>148</sup>

## Summary

This chapter examined the textile designs from mainly the interwar period. Scholarly knowledge of the company's output is generally of the furnishing fabrics in a modern style, derived from the collections of two venerated institutions, the V&A and the Manchester Art Gallery (and later the Whitworth Gallery). While we are fortunate in having these collections preserve Ulster linen, they have somewhat distorted our view that Old Bleach was strictly engaged with modern design to the exclusion of their remaining output, which as I have shown in the first part of the chapter was often conventional in style and content but still well designed. One of the aims of this chapter was to assess the lesser known fancy linens in order to evaluate whether design was selectively or hierarchically employed. Examining the breadth of the company's design then helps create a fuller knowledge of enlightened design methods, liberal taste and an implemented design policy; buoyant from a good financial post Great War period the company determinedly embarked on, '...a progressive policy with regard new designs and merchandise was being pursued successfully, and the factory, bleaching, dyeing and needlework departments were being developed in a way that was creditable to all concerned.'<sup>149</sup>

A second aim of the chapter was to assess the significance of the textiles and evaluate this contribution to textile history and design history. I did this by using a number of archival sources, contemporary literature (from the company design library and industry reception) and employed content analysis to quantitatively measure designs by theme and style. This method indicated detailed design production within the fancy linens. In damask production, one of the more bruising criticisms against manufacturers was the longevity of designs, reluctant to change patterns with any frequency meant the damask market did not hold many surprises. I established a taxonomy of Old Bleach patterns, where designs fell into (broadly) ten categories with floral and classical motifs as the most popular, both the antithesis of *The Modern Movement* and produced simultaneously with the company's most strident modern designs for furnishing fabrics. Many of the damask designs were named after quintessentially English references, strategically aiming for the home market. This suggested progressive tendencies in manufacturing were usually supported with 'bread and butter' lines, although this was common practice across all textile manufacturing and is a point hitherto made by textile historians. Design did help linen manufacturers

become more in tune with the market, yet as this chapter suggests, Old Bleach continued to *add* to their fancy linens lines rather than streamline the range.

There is evidence Old Bleach participated in the production of modern damask tablecloth but found the demand too slight, in doing so this tacitly acknowledged the damask consumer and furnishing fabrics customer were likely to be mutually exclusive markets. Those interested in 'being modern' viewed the etiquette of a cloth covered table as antithetical to modernist creed. Indeed, the question of 'being modern' was never far from the centre of debates on industrial art, the review of the Exhibition of British Industrial Art at Burlington House, in 1935, summarised the textiles as such,

In general, there is a lively up-to-dateness about the designs, though what "modern" would mean in connection with patterns for textiles it might be hard to define. If we must call the more abstract designs "modern", what word are we to use for the eminently twentieth century derivations from the fruitful classical types? Modern people themselves somehow manage to be modern without having a third leg, or a single eye in the middle of their chins.<sup>150</sup>

Old Bleach saw no contradiction in producing more for as many markets as it could serve. This in itself suggests their continued progressiveness came out of a bid for survival in a contracting industry. Even with a seemingly unwieldy range, good design and good quality were interdependent and maintained. In both towel and embroidery designs (more so than table cloth design), the company demonstrated their awareness of and interest in the newest artistic trends in art and culture, although remained *modern* rather than *avant garde*. The most probable reason for this was cost. High quality double damask table cloths were a relatively costly outlay, whereas towels were small fancy items and embroidered goods lent themselves to experimental efforts.

In Part 2 of this chapter, I examined the furnishing fabrics produced by the firm from 1932. Still in the grip of a worldwide recession, it seemed reckless and destined for collapse. Yet, it became hugely profitable for the company, both in financial and reputational terms. I have identified a number of key factors that consolidated their name for progressive and well thought out modern design. Their desire to situate themselves as comparable with several English and Scottish textile rivals was a survival strategy and perhaps a unilateral one. Many of the Ulster linen firms had not developed their design studios sufficiently to move into the furnishing fabrics market, instead diversifying by way of fibre and fabric blends and arguably hastening the demise of the local linen trade. The British Industrial Art Movement proved irresistible to Old Bleach, the impetus and platform it offered, aided manufacturers in difficult trading conditions. It raised their profile through the contemporary press and exposed a newly educated public on the benefits of well-designed goods. However, despite being part of many industrial art exhibitions and respected collections, Old Bleach never incorporated their endorsements of their designs into their sales material. Nonetheless, the act of *gifting* their fabrics to museums tacitly connoted its importance to the firm.

Undoubtedly, the Old Bleach designers were of a high calibre, Norman Fitzroy Webb had trained at The Royal College of Art from 1909-1913 and there is some evidence he was briefly employed at W.S. Crawford's advertising agency (which helps explain Old Bleach's long connection with the agency) and Felix C. Gotto graduated from The Slade School of Fine Art in 1933.<sup>151</sup> Other members of the design studio were also talented, J.L. Lindsay was with the firm from the 1930s before leaving (or retiring) in the mid 1950s and Jean McGregor also came from the London art school system. A further example of their progressive design bent was in the *method* and *promotion* of using well-known designers of the period. They set up two 'series' or collections of designs from a medley of artists and designers. Each series had no unifying design feature other than the clever copy produced by W.S. Crawford's agency, 'modern artists design for...Old Bleach fabrics' and the linen on which it was printed. Many textile companies bought in freelance designs or collaborated with designers and Old Bleach was by no means unusual, they were however more adept at promoting the alliances.

The origin of design inspiration was also considered in this chapter. In addition to a pool of first-rate designers, the array of sources, manifest in the company design library, from books and folios on ceramics (mainly fine china), historical and contemporary textiles, pattern, architectural motifs and museum pieces all indicate Old Bleach's dogmatic interest in design of a superior character. The high mark of design excellence was sought from wide-ranging examples as the Adam Brothers, Wedgwood, Meissen, Sèvres, Gros Point lace, museum quality specimens and contemporary innovation from Sonia Delaunay, Serge Gladky and Raoul Dufy. Several of the books and folios show heavy wear, thus indicating regular use. Of course, it is worth acknowledging the wear is not from a specific period but accrued over a long-time frame and the handwriting in the margins is varied from copperplate script to a modern, more legible, style. In the company furnishing fabrics catalogue from 1938-1939, the preface declared, 'In designing, Old Bleach Furnishings neglect no source of inspiration. Beside their own studio working closely with the technical side of the production, they are in touch with the best historical models through museums and publication, and also with all the best-known and most modern decorative designers of the day.' I have shown *how* this collection of sources was heavily and creatively utilised and in doing so, helps us understand how the company designed at such volume, it also consolidates the contribution they have made to the design history of Ulster's linen industry and more widely, Britain's textile history.

Old Bleach's design pedigree was superlative and they were *exceptional* for their design work in the context of the Ulster linen industry, discussed in previous chapters. However, they were *comparable* set against a number of English and Scottish textile companies, such as Edinburgh Weavers, Turnbull and Stockdale, Allan Walton, Donald Brothers, Foxton and Warner's. This chapter has shown how they were inventive and quickly responsive to trends, showing a highly creative interpretation of artistic fashions of

the day. They did this by technical virtuosity, astute awareness of shifting markets and outstanding designers. The 1930s saw a flourishing culture of good design, where Old Bleach swiftly found its place.



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<sup>1</sup> The Trades Mark Registration Act was passed in August 1875. Initially the designs were registered in the name of Charles James Webb, by the following year, the registrations are in The Webb Brothers' name and by 1883, the proprietor of the designs is listed as The Old Bleach Linen Company. Board of Trade Registers, The National Archives, BT44/30.

<sup>2</sup> "Fabrics in Interior Decoration" a Review by James MacGibbon, *The Architectural Review Supplement*, October 1939, pp.175-182.

<sup>3</sup> Illustrations (up to mid-thirties) and Electros (images made from a dry photocopying technique from mid 1930s) were available from Old Bleach's Service Department of the popular designs in damasks and towels along with seasonal folders, display cards and other sales aids.

<sup>4</sup> The qualities included heavy, medium, medium fine, fine and very fine with further quality categorisation such as bleached damask, hand-painted white damask, 'Permatone' Coloured (old ivory) damask, hand-painted 'Permatone' damask, rayon and linen damask, hand-painted rayon and linen damask and coloured Two-Tone damask.

<sup>5</sup> "Illustrations of the Various Old Bleach Designs" booklet accompanying 1929 Old Bleach Price List. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection.

<sup>6</sup> This taxonomy is not entirely strict, as inevitably some patterns fall across two or more categories, for example I have classed 'Shamrock' as Irish but could also be classified under foliage, likewise 'Orange Blossom' is a floral but the pattern is predominantly foliage and so, is classified as such. Many designs comprise florals with classical motifs so I have tended to categorise these as 'Novel' traditional motifs.

<sup>7</sup> Keren Protheroe, "Blotch and Bloom: the printed floral and modernity in the textile designs of Winifred Mold and Minnie McLeish 1910-1929", PhD thesis, Kingston University, 2012. See also Protheroe, K. *Petal Power: Floral Fashion and Women Designers at the Silver Studio 1910-1920*, MoDA, Middlesex, 2011.

<sup>8</sup> The designs named after respected porcelain companies originated from Old Bleach's 'English Porcelain Damask Series' and also included 'Old Willow' and the best-selling damask design 'Derby'.

<sup>9</sup> Despite huge fashionable popularity of the Chrysanthemum in the 1930s, Old Bleach only produced one design featuring the flower, 'Sherwood', 1935. The evidence suggests roses (in many varieties) were considerably more classic (enduring) and better sellers.

<sup>10</sup> Here Old Bleach describes their Honeysuckle pattern, claiming it as a 'best seller' yet there is no mention of it in any of the six price lists, from 1925 – 1938, and it only features in the booklet of electros, 1935.

<sup>11</sup> Old Bleach Price List, 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1936. Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown.

<sup>12</sup> According to The Public Domain Review, *The Temple of Flora* is 'considered by many to be the greatest of all flower books.'

<sup>13</sup> Hulme, F.E. (1878) *Suggestions in Floral Design*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, Paris and New York, Cassell, Petter and Galpin, achieved a recent market value of £895.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid, p.28.

<sup>15</sup> Several floral book additions were made to the design Library in the Post War years: Lewis, Frank, (1949) *Flower Arrangements: a book of designs for the Designing Studio*, Leigh-on-Sea, Frank Lewis and Grant, Maurice, H. (1950) *The Twelve Months of Flowers: Jacob van Huysum 1687-1740*, Leigh-on-Sea, Frank Lewis. Both showing evidence of regular use.

<sup>16</sup> The Books on the Adams Brothers include: Adam, Robert and James, (1901) *The Decorative Work of Robert and James Adam*, 1st edition, London, B.T. Batsford and Swarbrick, John. (1916) *Robert Adam and his Brothers: their lives, work and influence on English Architecture, Decoration and Furniture*, London, B. T. Batsford. The *Collection des Plus Belles Composition de Lepautre* was first published in 1854, the Old Bleach edition is dated 1880, it is quite conceivable it was purchased at that time. Both the 1880's edition and the German folio by Reinhold Feldner have a current market value of approximately €500.

<sup>17</sup> Paul Nash, "Modern English Furnishing", *Architectural Review*, January 1930, pp.43-44 quoted in "A Living Tradition: Modernism and the Decorative Arts" by Jane Fraser and Liz Paul, in *Modern Britain 1929-1939*, pp.52-68.

<sup>18</sup> Introduction by Frank Lewis, the book contains no further text other than the short introduction. It was published strictly as a visual design aid. A further book on botanical paintings by Maurice H. Grant, published in 1950 by Frank Lewis, is also included in the design library, *The Twelve Months of Flowers: Jacob van Huysum 1687-1740*.

<sup>19</sup> Lenox Inc. was founded as a ceramic art studio rather than a factory, originally named 'Ceramic Art Company' in Pennsylvania, 1899. 'Lenox Autumn' has been in continuous production since 1918, The American department store Macy's describe it as 'heirloom-quality ivory bone china.'

<sup>20</sup> Old Bleach Book of Electros, 1935. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

<sup>21</sup> *Some Table Talks*, booklet on Old Bleach Table Damask, pp.6-7, designed by Ashley Havinden for W.S. Crawfords Ltd., Ashley Havinden Archive, SNGMA, Edinburgh.

<sup>22</sup> Presumably the naming of the cloth 'Warsaw' and its inspiration of Russian peasant work referred to 19<sup>th</sup> century Russian rule of Poland. November 1918 marked Poland's independence.

<sup>23</sup> 'Katja' textile design (1971) by Wolf Bauer is featured in "Furnishings and Industrial Textiles 1914-2000", by Mary Schoeser, *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles*, Vol.1, edited by D.T. Jenkins, Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.1075-1100.



<sup>24</sup> The Old Bleach library also includes first editions of Larkin, T. J. (1906) *A Collection of Antique Chinese Rugs*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, T.J. Larkin; Neugebauer, Rudolf and Julius Orendi, (1909) *Handbuch des Orientalischen Teppichkunde*, Leipzig, Verlag von Karl W. Hiersemann; C. Scribner's Sons Ltd and Bossert, H. TH. (1937) *Das Ornament Werk*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Berlin, Ernst Wasmuth GMBH and the art historian, Wilhelm Bode's standard and influential work on classical oriental carpets, *Monographien des Kunstgewerbes*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Leipzig, Seemann, (1920).

<sup>25</sup> There is one further damask cloth design by Old Bleach identified in The Board of Trade Design Registers that could be described as a modern interpretation of Celtic tropes but not strictly Irish in motif or composition. It is composed of an unusual all-over tile pattern of light interlocking figures of eight with, what appears to be, an insect within alternate tiles. Fashionable bands (for place settings) and a plain central panel complete the design. Design Registration No. 347413, BT53/124 (register) BT52/4948 (box of representations), 11<sup>TH</sup> February 1935, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>26</sup> Varieties included plain hemmed huck towels, hemstitched plain huck towels, hemstitched plain huck coloured towels, hemstitched damask bordered towels, hand embroidered initials for towels, hemstitched damask bordered towels, roller towels, hemstitched hand-painted damask bordered towels, hemstitched applique towels, hand embroidered hemstitched towels, hemstitched hand-painted damask bordered towels with coloured hems, hemstitched fancy coloured towels, hemstitched Diaper towels and figured hucks. "Old Bleach Towels" Catalogue, 1900, p.9., T.C.K. 0118, National Art Library, V & A, London.

<sup>27</sup> "Old Bleach Towels" Catalogue, 1900, p.9., T.C.K. 0118, National Art Library, V & A, London.

<sup>28</sup> See Sarah Whittingham's *Fern Fever: The Story of Pteridomania*, 2012 and Peter Boyd's essay "Pteridomania - the Victorian Passion for Ferns", *Antique Collecting*, Vol. 28, 1993(a).

<sup>29</sup> Frank Pick in Pevsner, *An Enquiry into Industrial Art in England*, 1937, pp.285-6.

<sup>30</sup> The remaining six illustrated towel designs are in the Neo-Classical idiom.

<sup>31</sup> Of the 145 designs featured in the 1938-1939 Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics Catalogue, 67 are overtly modern, while the remaining 78 designs are a mix of period and reproduction, decorative or plain and figured patterns. Photocopied catalogue courtesy of Frances Pritchard, The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester.

<sup>32</sup> Fruit and occasional insects and birds feature in a number of designs but in support of floral arrangements.

<sup>33</sup> Stitches were illustrated and included detached chain or lazy-daisy, satin, buttonhole, French knot, stem, eyelet hole, herringbone edge, double back stitch, chain stitch, fly stitch, Roumanian [sic] stitch, buttonhole bars, couched trellis and alternative edgings.

<sup>34</sup> Foreword, *11<sup>th</sup> Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs*, 1944. (Author's Collection).

<sup>35</sup> Foreword, *6<sup>th</sup> Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs*, 1939. (Author's Collection).

<sup>36</sup> Foreword, *17<sup>th</sup> Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs*, 1950. (Source: Lisburn Museum and Irish Linen Centre).

<sup>37</sup> 'Garland' embroidery design, *11<sup>th</sup> Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs*, 1944. (Author's Collection).

<sup>38</sup> Foreword by W.R. Lethaby, pp. v-vi, Waring, Mary E. (1917) *An Embroidery Pattern Book*, London, Sir Isaac Pitman. Old Bleach Design Library, Private Collection, Randalstown.

<sup>39</sup> Protheroe, K. *Petal Power: Floral Fashion and Women Designers at The Silver Studio 1910-1940*, Museum of Domestic Design and Architecture (MoDA), p.9.

<sup>40</sup> Rose, thistle, daffodil and shamrock represented The British Isles, maple leaf for Canada, wattle for Australia, fern leaf for New Zealand, gladioli for South Africa, lotus flower for India, jute berries for Pakistan and cinnamon for Ceylon (Sri Lanka). *21<sup>st</sup> Old Bleach Book of Embroidery Designs*, 1954, pp.14-15.

<sup>41</sup> Sixty designs do not include re-issued designs. Books 6, 10, 11 and 13 are held by the author and Books 14, 17, 18, 19, 20 and 21 are held in the Lisburn Museum and Irish Linen Centre.

<sup>42</sup> The Old Bleach Books of Embroidery Designs were almost certainly designed in London, by W.S. Crawford & Co., and published and printed in Northern Ireland. The *11<sup>th</sup> Book of Old Bleach Embroidery Designs* (1944) uses on its cover, the 'Ashley' font, designed by Ashley Havinden.

<sup>43</sup> The journal was edited from Old Bleach's London office, in Wakefield House, Cheapside and later in the mid-thirties, shrewdly moving to Maidstone House, 26 Berners Street (Fitzrovia), the home of prestigious cabinet makers, upholsterers and furnishing companies. This clustering of furniture business activity is the subject of a paper by C. Edwards, (2011) "Tottenham Court Road: the changing fortunes of London's furniture street 1850-1950", *The London Journal*, 36 (2), pp.140-160. Available at <https://dspace.lboro.ac.uk/2134/9466>

<sup>44</sup> James Pearsall & Co. Ltd business records are held at The National Archives, Kew, (NRA 26751 Pearsall & Co).

<sup>45</sup> The latter example was "made somewhere in Northern Ireland, presumably by two sisters Elizabeth and Isabella Foster, in the year 1738." At the time of the published article it was owned by a Mrs Brace who had lent it to the Victoria and Albert Museum and on view in 1927, readers are urged to go and see it.

<sup>46</sup> From 1927, *The Embroideress* also offered postal courses "sent to any part of the world". Each lesson was sent out with a sheet of detailed instructions, one free transfer of the design set, a sample of the embroidery showing the colours and principal stitches to be completed and the student was "entitled to free advice and criticism from the Postal Course Editor...those taking the course are encouraged to express their originality in any way that is in keeping with the type of work set." Vol. 9, 1939, p.vi.

- <sup>47</sup> Stoll (1879-1961) is one of many overlooked female textile artists of the Interwar period and deserving of more scholarly attention. Mary Schoeser acknowledges her contribution to modern embroidery in *Textiles: The Art of Mankind*, 2012, p.309. See also [http://www.estherfitzgerald.com/14\\_research/14\\_07.html](http://www.estherfitzgerald.com/14_research/14_07.html)
- <sup>48</sup> Marian Stoll, "Modern Design in Embroidery", *The Embroideress*, No. 28, Vol. 4, 1929, p.653.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Ibid., p.654
- <sup>51</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>52</sup> Ibid., p.655.
- <sup>53</sup> "Editorial Notices", *The Embroideress*, No. 22, Vol. 3, 1927, p.iii. (Collection of Author).
- <sup>54</sup> "Sleeveless Waistcoats" by Dorothea Hager, *The Embroideress*, No. 22, Vol. 3, 1927, pp.509-512.
- <sup>55</sup> "Modern Needlework in the Embroiderers' Guild Exhibition", Walker Galleries, Bond Street, January 26 – February 9, 1927, Review by Mary Hogarth, *The Embroideress*, No. 21, Vol. 3, 1927, pp.482-485.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibid. p.484. Hogarth's book *Modern Embroidery* was later published by The Studio in 1933, in which she opened with the declarative statement, "Modern Embroidery should be the invention of to-day in design, and should express this age. The technique should be governed by the design.", Introduction, p.9.
- <sup>57</sup> "Furnishing Textiles – II" subtitled 'a continuation of the summary of a paper given at the textile Institute. Mr. Pether now deals with the technical and artistic aspects of textiles.', *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, April 8 1933, pp.34-36.
- <sup>58</sup> Old Bleach "Slemish" Furnishing Linens brochure, 1932, featuring 'Avon', 'Birch Bark', 'Claggan', 'Cranford', 'Glenarm', 'Lisadel', 'Milan', 'Morello', 'Rimini', 'Samoa' and 'Versailles'. Industrial Art Collection Archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- <sup>59</sup> See Helen Douglas's PhD thesis 'Emergence of Donald Brothers as Manufacturers of Decorative Cloth: the feel for rugged texture', 1997 (University of Edinburgh). Douglas's thesis examines the firm's formative years in furnishing fabrics, from 1896-1914. Available here: <https://www.era.lib.ed.ac.uk/handle/1842/9675>. The archive of Donald Bros. is held at the Scottish borders campus (Galashiels), Heriot Watt University.
- <sup>60</sup> Triple cloth has two wefts and one warp.
- <sup>61</sup> Throughout the contemporary local press, Northern Ireland's linen firms' royal connections were regularly reported upon. At large trade fairs, like the 'British Industries Fair', at White City and Olympia, it was scrupulously noted which stands members of the Royal Family stopped at and more importantly, bought or ordered linen articles.
- <sup>62</sup> Old Bleach "Slemish" Furnishing Linens brochure, 1932. Industrial Art Collection Archive, Manchester City Art Gallery.
- <sup>63</sup> 'Rimini' is featured in an early 'Slemish' furnishings brochure, 1932, and two surviving furnishing fabric catalogues, from 1936 and 1938-1939 and is mentioned in notes from the 1943 Summer School notes, Old Bleach Archive.
- <sup>64</sup> Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics catalogue, 1936, Old Bleach Archive.
- <sup>65</sup> This loose page in the Old Bleach Archive, is a two-sided typed internal memorandum that outlines, updates and reviews furnishing fabrics and fancy goods. It is undated but is probably c. 1937-1938.
- <sup>66</sup> Letter from H.A. Kennedy to Old Bleach, 18<sup>th</sup> April 1935. MA/1/0 181, Nominal File, V&A Registry, Archive of Art and Design.
- <sup>67</sup> 'Old Bleach Furnishing Range' catalogue, 1936. Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.
- <sup>68</sup> Description of 'Tiflis' by Derek Patmore in *Fabrics and Colour* (n.d. – probably 1935), published by Old Bleach, designed and produced by W.S. Crawford Ltd.
- <sup>69</sup> Conran, L. "Recent Textile Design", *Architectural Review Supplement*, Nov 1 1934, p.183.
- <sup>70</sup> Aslin, E. "Changing Taste and Influences, English Design 1900-1940", *Journal 1, Journal of the Decorative Arts Society*, 1978, pp.3-13.
- <sup>71</sup> "Old Bleach Hand-Printed Furnishing Linens: Designed by Modern Artists" Pamphlet, 1935, Old Bleach Archive.
- <sup>72</sup> Registered design no. 354081 does not appear in any of Old Bleach catalogues or pricelists nor the contemporary design press. Very small patterns tended not be quite so photogenically interesting and probably ignored by the press. However, they were indispensable as complementary fabrics to more flamboyant schemes. By 1938, the furnishings catalogue included over twenty-five plain or figured grounds.
- <sup>73</sup> Dr. Helen Megaw of Birkbeck College, London, recognised the potential design source in X-ray crystallography in early 1946. She approached the Design Research Unit with the idea of developing a range of products capable of showcasing Britain's advances in the Arts and Science and conceived by the Festival Pattern Group for display at the Festival of Britain in 1951. Old Bleach were among a number of progressive manufacturers invited to join the project in November 1949, producing a number of designs in linen and linen blends with limited production: China Clay 8.6 (table linen), China Clay 8.6 (furnishing fabric), Orthoclase 8.29 (furnishing fabric) and Hydrargillite 8.33 (furnishing fabric). See L. Jackson, *From Atoms to Patterns: Crystal structure designs from the 1951 Festival of Britain*, 2008, pp.76-77.
- <sup>74</sup> Barber (in reference to the archaeological work of Karl Schladow, 1937) describes alternating s-spun and z-spun yarns ("shadow striping") to create optical effects in the Borum Eshøj belt in the first millennium B.C. Barber, E.J.W. (1991) *Prehistoric Textiles: The Development of Cloth in the Neolithic and Bronze Ages with Special Reference to The Aegean*, Princeton University Press, pp.176-180.

- <sup>75</sup> Old Bleach Furnishings Range Catalogue, 1936, Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown.
- <sup>76</sup> *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, February 9, 1935.
- <sup>77</sup> The majority of the modern, decorative, plain and figured furnishing fabrics by Old Bleach are named after towns and villages in Ireland.
- <sup>78</sup> Over fifty-five furnishing fabric designs were registered with the Board of Trade in 1935, including 'Carrick' and 'Cadiz'.
- <sup>79</sup> Mendes, in Parry, L. et al, *British Textiles: 1700 to the Present*, p.349.
- <sup>80</sup> Boydell, "Textiles in the Modern Home" in *Disentangling Textiles*, 2002, p.87.
- <sup>81</sup> On the role and status of the free-lance design, see Boydell's essay "Free-lance Textile Design in the 1930s: an Improving Prospect?", *Journal of Design History*, vol.8, No.1, 1995, pp.27-42; For a summary of institutional design support see Michael Farr's *Design in British Industry*, Part II, "Design Organizations: Publicity and Propaganda", 1955, pp.189-248.
- <sup>82</sup> The designs for the first series were registered with the Board of Trade in November 1935 across a two-week period, BT53/124, Design Registers, The National Archives, Kew.
- <sup>83</sup> Old Bleach Hand-Printed Furnishing Linens leaflet, Old Bleach Archive, 1935.
- <sup>84</sup> See Lesley Jackson's *Twentieth Century Pattern Design* (2002) for an excellent survey of textile and wallpaper pioneers.
- <sup>85</sup> Old Bleach Hand-Printed Furnishing Linens leaflet, Old Bleach Archive, 1935.
- <sup>86</sup> Shirley Wainwright had noted the practice of naming designers in an article, "Modern Printed Textiles" for *The Studio*, November 1926, pp.394-400.
- <sup>87</sup> Emma McVeigh has written a short profile on McGregor (1908-1994) in the online *Dictionary of Ulster Biography* and discusses her sculptural work more fully in her PhD thesis, *Regionalism, Modernism and Identity: Sculpture in Northern Ireland 1921-1951*, Ulster University, 2012.
- <sup>88</sup> McGregor exhibited ceramics and sculpture with Unit One in The Locksley Hall, Belfast in December 1934, outselling all other exhibiting artists.
- <sup>89</sup> Old Bleach Salaries and Wages Journal, the Wages entries run from July 1934 – May 1935 and the Salaries entries from November 1934 - May 1944, Old Bleach Archive.
- <sup>90</sup> The contract was for 'reproduction on Nursery Cloth' with 'the illustrations for the said Nursey Cloth are provided by E. H. Shepard, by arrangement with the Author, and without cost to the Publishers.' Four of Milne's Pooh series: *When We Were Young*, *Winnie The Pooh*, *Now We Are Six* and *The House at Pooh Corner* were cited in the contract. The only other application of Milne's work by Old Bleach may have a design of rabbits (based on the character Rabbit, from *Winnie The Pooh*, 1926) for appliqued hangings in a room setting. Old Bleach Archive.
- <sup>91</sup> A penguin has now been incorporated into the Pooh series, to celebrate the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the bear's first literary appearance. The author Brian Sibley has created the new character in "Winter", in which Pooh meets a penguin, *The Best Bear in all the World*, 2016.
- <sup>92</sup> The seasonal cards, using 'Penguin', were issued by the V&A c. 2012 and 2016. The 'Winnie The Pooh' design is not held by the V&A and the copyright does not expire until 2027.
- <sup>93</sup> I am indebted to Felix's daughter, Juliet Morley, who generously granted me unrestricted access to his papers (Suffolk). In his later years, she had persuaded her father to write his memoirs which he affectionately named "Dear Juliet".
- <sup>94</sup> Bertorelli's, founded in 1913, is still serving (no longer exotic) Italian fare in Charlotte Street, Fitzrovia. In an evocative description in his memoirs, Gotto recalls his student days in London, where he worked hard throughout the week at art school, played 'rugger', swam in the Serpentine and 'sat in the gods at the Victoria Palace on Saturday nights.'
- <sup>95</sup> "Dear Juliet", Felix C. Gotto's unpublished memoirs, Private Collection of Mrs Juliet Morley, Suffolk.
- <sup>96</sup> *Convolvulus* appeared much later in 'Morning Glory', 18<sup>th</sup> *Old Bleach Book of Embroidery Designs*, 1951.
- <sup>97</sup> Boydell, 1995, p.32.
- <sup>98</sup> 'Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics' featuring 'Cuzco' by Bernard Adeney, Advertisement, *Modern Publicity*, January 1 1936, p.54.
- <sup>99</sup> 'Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics' featuring 'Ceres' by Nicolas de Molas, Advertisement, *Punch or the London Charivari*, May, 1936, (Author's Collection).
- <sup>100</sup> Lambert, p.8.
- <sup>101</sup> Old Bleach Hand-Printed Furnishing Linens leaflet, Old Bleach Archive, 1935.
- <sup>102</sup> Both definitions for fugue are taken from Oxford English Dictionary.
- <sup>103</sup> Lambert, p.8.
- <sup>104</sup> Price List for 1936, Old Bleach Linen Company, Old Bleach Archive.
- <sup>105</sup> Apart from Dorn, the other celebrated designers included Ben Nicolson, Hans Aufseeser, Alec Hunter, Ashley Havinden, Norma Jean Campbell and Riette Moore, "The Artist and the Machine: A study of seven contemporary fabric designers" *Decoration*, January-March, 1938.
- <sup>106</sup> Heal's Fabric Sample Books: Cretonnes and taffetas, AAD/1978/2/203, Archive of Art and Design, Blythe House, VAM.

<sup>107</sup> The designs for the Second Series are registered with the Board of Trade across seven weeks in October, November and December 1936, BT53/125, Design Registers, The National Archives, Kew.

<sup>108</sup> There is some (slender) evidence the 'Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach' range was stocked by John Lewis, 'Aircraft' by Marion Dorn was featured in their 150 years' celebration book by Jonathan Glancey (2014). Unfortunately, the archives were destroyed by an oil bomb in 1940. I am grateful to Judy Faraday from the JLP Archive for this information.

<sup>109</sup> "Old Bleach Hand Printed Furnishing Fabrics Designed by Well-Known Modern Artists", Old Bleach Catalogue, 1938-1939. A photocopy of this catalogue was given to me by Frances Pritchard at The Whitworth Gallery, Manchester. It may have come into The Whitworth's possession via Christine Boydell or Lesley Jackson, on the cover a small sticker suggests its original owner was Professor Astrid Sampe (1909-2002), who was the textile designer associated with Nordiska Kompaniet, Stockholm, with whom Old Bleach did business. She had completed her training at the Royal College of Art, London but had begun her career at Nordiska Kompaniet in 1937 so may have received this catalogue at its time of publication.

<sup>110</sup> 'Bandon' was a linen woven bow design in a half drop repeat on a lattice-work ground, the warp is undyed with dyed brown and undyed wefts (held in The Whitworth Gallery Collection). 'Moylan' was a Regency design with a single branch of hay and ribbon festoon (Old Bleach Furnishings Catalogue 1938-1939).

<sup>111</sup> Old Bleach Furnishings Catalogue 1938-1939, p.29, photocopy, collection of author (see also endnote 108).

<sup>112</sup> 'Dianthus' was registered, by Old Bleach, with the Board of Trade along with 'Pandora (Ground)', 13 November 1936.

<sup>113</sup> Both colourways were stocked from January 1937 to 1944. Heal's Fabric Sample Books, AAD/2-1978, Archive of Art and Design, VAM.

<sup>114</sup> Jackson, 2002, p.79.

<sup>115</sup> In the 1938-1939 company catalogue, over twenty plain or figured grounds (and a number of 'decorative designs such as 'Milan') were listed and all suitable for printing on.

<sup>116</sup> Jackson, 2002, p.81.

<sup>117</sup> GMA A39, Ashley Havinden Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

<sup>118</sup> Old Bleach Furnishings Catalogue 1938-1939, p.25.

<sup>119</sup> Mansouroff was also known as Pavel Andreevitch Mansurov.

<sup>120</sup> See *Artists Textiles in Britain 1945-1970*, 2003, pp.15-16. I am also grateful to Frances Pritchard who alerted me to the chapter "Russian Émigré Fashion Illustrators and Fabric Designers" in *Beauty in Exile: The Artists, Models and Nobility Who Fled the Russian Revolution and Influenced the World of Fashion* by A. Vassiliev, 2000.

<sup>121</sup> Letter from Arthur Webb to H.A. Kennedy, 28<sup>th</sup> May 1935. Old Bleach Museum Registry File, MA/1/0 181, Archive of Art and Design, VAM.

<sup>122</sup> The box of fabrics sent to The Slade by Gotto may have survived. Currently, the college archives are not accessible (for consultation) as a process of deaccessioning items (of no archival value) is being undertaken. I have recommended the fabrics are retained (if found) as exemplars of good modern textile design. My thanks to Robert Winckworth, UCL Records Office, Gower Street, London.

<sup>123</sup> "Dear Juliet", Felix C. Gotto's unpublished memoirs, Private Collection of Mrs Juliet Morley, Suffolk.

<sup>124</sup> The pattern 'Aircraft' by Dorn was used more recently on a Modern Virago Classic book cover, *84 Charing Cross Road* by Helene Hanff, 2008. Eight books had been relaunched with new covers featuring designs by women textile designers, 'to celebrate trailblazing women in both literature and art.' The publisher continues to add to the collection of classic titles and covers with textile designs by the likes of Celia Birtwell and Neisha Crosland. [www.virago.co.uk](http://www.virago.co.uk)

<sup>125</sup> The company archive holds a press cuttings file, 'Old Bleach Representation in the Trade Press', with many examples of Ocean liner commissions.

<sup>126</sup> "Furnishing of the New Orient Liner 'Orcades'", *The Shipping World*, August 25, 1937.

<sup>127</sup> Boydell, 1996, "The Decorative Imperative: Marion Dorn's Textiles and Modernism", *Journal of the Decorative Arts Society*, vol. 19, pp. 31-40.

<sup>128</sup> "Design in Fabrics", *The Studio Yearbook*, Vol. 118, July-Dec 1939, pp.164-169.

<sup>129</sup> Dorn's 'Zodiac' for Old Bleach is held in both The Whitworth Gallery (red/natural/beige overprint in black outline) and VAM (turquoise/coral/natural overprinted in black outline). Dorn's 'Zodiac' for Bassett and Vellum is held in the Cooper Hewitt, Smithsonian design Museum, New York, who also hold a later version in mono-colour, 1942. <https://www.cooperhewitt.org/2013/05/07/marion-dorns-zodiac/>

<sup>130</sup> Internal Memorandum, Circulation Department, VAM, October 1947. Nominal File, V&A Registry, Archive of Art and Design, MA/1/0 181.

<sup>131</sup> 'Ulster' appeared to bemuse a number of publishers who printed the Irish harp upside down, as in Grace Lovat Fraser's *Textiles by Britain* (1948) and *Ideal Home* magazine, June, 1949 (in the Old Bleach Press Cuttings book).

<sup>132</sup> The auld sod is vernacular for one's native country.

<sup>133</sup> "Old Bleach at Your Service: a decorative history", a concise illustrated history of the company, published booklet by Old Bleach, 1946, p.18.

<sup>134</sup> "Dear Juliet", Felix C. Gotto's unpublished memoirs, Private Collection of Mrs Juliet Morley, Suffolk.

<sup>135</sup> Old Bleach Furnishings catalogue, 1938-1939, p.11.

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<sup>136</sup> 1938-1939 Furnishings catalogue contains 145 designs: 67 modern (42 by Old Bleach Studio + 25 'Modern Artists design for Old Bleach'), 16 period/reproduction, 16 decorative, 19 plain and figured, 16 wool and linen, 11 linen and rayon. Many of the decorative and fabric blends are of period or reproduction design.

<sup>137</sup> A digital edition is available here: <https://archive.org/details/ornamentineurope00cole>

<sup>138</sup> Cole, p.vii.

<sup>139</sup> *The Spectator*, 24 June, 1899, p.13.

<sup>140</sup> Cole, p.62.

<sup>141</sup> A fenghuang is considered a Chinese phoenix in western culture.

<sup>142</sup> Regardant addorsed is a device where animals are oriented back to back and looking backwards to each other. The animals can also be regardant or addorsed. Interstices are spaces between motifs and a palmette motif is derived from a fan shaped palm tree said to be of Egyptian origin.

<sup>143</sup> Cole, p.113. A gadroon is an ornamental notching or carving of a rounded moulding.

<sup>144</sup> Cole, p.114.

<sup>145</sup> Those designs are 'Antwerp', 'Verona' and 'Cortina', exact copies of the original patterns shown in Cole and 'Rimini' is described by the company as 'a clever translation rather than a reproduction.

<sup>146</sup> To date, I have been unable to trace this design's name.

<sup>147</sup> The painting of his son, Jan Baptist and daughter, Magdalena now belongs in the collection of the Staatliche Museen, Berlin.

<sup>148</sup> "Strong Criticism of the Modern Designer", *The Cabinet Maker and Complete House Furnisher*, August 11, 1934, p.210.

<sup>149</sup> Chairman's Report, Old Bleach Linen Company, 7 August 1928, from the Company Minute Books, Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

<sup>150</sup> "Exhibition of British Industrial Art at Burlington House", *Journal of Royal Society of Art*, Vol. 83, no.4287, January 1935, pp.226-227.

<sup>151</sup> There is some suggestion in a number of the company records where Norman Fitzroy Webb's occupation is described as an architect. He may well have trained under the pupillage system as there is no record of him having taken the Royal Institute of British Architects examinations. In addition, the archives and collections manager, Neil Parkinson, at The Royal College of Art confirmed Webb's dates of registration from 1909 to 1913. Webb was aged 28 by his graduation, so he may have trained in some type of architectural practice prior to attending the RCA.

## CONCLUSION

The original aim of this thesis was to investigate, synthesise and evaluate the contribution the Old Bleach Linen Company made to the Industrial Art Movement during the Interwar period. However, it quickly became apparent that in order to do so, a broader contextual knowledge of the Ulster linen industry and its attitude to and application of design was necessary in order to understand how a relatively modest sized linen company from County Antrim joined a stable of progressive British textile manufacturers who exemplified the competitive importance of good design. This had not been attempted before. In doing so, it revealed a manufacturing industry increasingly dependent on design but largely trivialised it. While this dependency was no different to other UK textile regions, the impetus of the British Industrial Art Movement was being felt elsewhere. The subject of design in Ulster's linen trade has received, until now, little critical attention by textile historians and even less so by design historians. In this thesis, I have done two things: create new knowledge about the role and status of textile design in Ulster's Interwar linen industry and deepen extant knowledge of a progressive textile company, Old Bleach Linen Company, by situating them in a local, national and transnational design context. Not only do these dual intersecting design narratives add value and complexity to the history of Irish linen and indeed Ulster's artistic pulse, they offer a fresh perspective in how linen might be further interrogated. An additional aim for this research is to help build a foundational knowledge of textile design in Ulster. I have identified myriad themes and issues that have yet to be explored properly, I consider several of these in the epilogue (see pp. 260-262). It is hoped this and future work can inspire upcoming scholars to develop the canon and contribute to giving Northern Ireland's industrial design heritage and legacy the recognition it deserves.

There is no doubt, most of Ulster's linen companies, who manufactured fancy goods, did have design studios. Many were small, staffed by perhaps only one or two qualified designers (albeit with apprentices) with the main task of adapting and or reproducing existing designs. Original designs tended to be restricted to important commissions and tenders, e.g. banqueting and ceremonial cloths and ocean liners, and many were bought from freelance designers or design studios, usually from London and Paris. What was distinctly lacking in Northern Ireland was a vibrant design culture. I have shown, in Chapter 2, an inchoate artistic community of artists and writers, who too had struggled for broader acceptance and support. There was even less cultural space for design and an absence of forthright energetic personalities like Manchester's A.P. Simon and the visionary Frank Pick of London Passenger Transport. Instead, as discussed in Chapter 1, Ulster's linen men worried over real and testing threats to the industry as flax supply, tariffs, global contraction in the market, old competing textile rivals and new competing (natural and synthetic) fibres. Of the latter, the local trade journal, *The Linen Trade Circular*, issued what seemed like weekly reminders of industry provocations, of which "Can Ramie Oust Flax?"<sup>1</sup> was typical, and further informed of new fabrics that looked like linen but were not, such as kapok, solintex and sodolin.<sup>2</sup>

However, there were pockets of enlightened manufacturers who did value the role of design, many of whom produced quality linens for the Empire. Old Bleach was not the only Ulster linen firm represented in Industrial Art exhibitions of the 1930s. Local trade news reported as many as ten other manufacturers contributing to the 'National Exhibition of Art in Industry' in London in 1935, but Old Bleach were *consistently* represented in design reform initiatives in a number of other ways.<sup>3</sup> The Victoria and Albert Museum bought fabric lengths for their Circulation Department, The Design and Industries Association (DIA) held glass slide examples of their designs for touring lectures and the contemporary design press regularly featured Old Bleach alongside progressive textile firms like Allan Walton Textiles, Edinburgh Weavers and Old Glamis by Donald Bros. Furthermore, Old Bleach were also distinct from their industry countrymen in their unabashed approach to promotion, noted by *The Linen Trade Circular* in an article on the dress exhibition at Londonderry House in 1935, 'Old Bleach do not believe in hiding their new linens under a bushel, and they have launched their latest non-creasing "Spiralspun" fabrics in a strikingly effective manner.'<sup>4</sup> Chapter 5 demonstrated how Old Bleach exploited all avenues of publicity and promotion and in doing so, were amply rewarded with an elevated reputation, critical reception and good sales. Even in global financial crises, the company continued to invest in maintaining a high-profile market presence.

Yet this research, in both its macro and micro levels, has revealed a number of anomalies. Despite, the company's ethos, design as an attribute rarely featured *prominently or singularly* throughout their publicity. Instead, it was hitched to the concept of quality, when perhaps it should have replaced it with a modern design driven message in tune with the changing tastes of the consumer market, that made fine linen look precariously out of touch. In that respect, it was no different to the rest of the linen trade, although many of its local rivals traded on the 'Irishness' of linen, an audacious and unchallenged claim that remained geographically and politically ambiguous. My findings suggest Old Bleach carried an ambivalence in regard to its origins and cultural identity, favouring a robust Anglo-Irish character, seeking out kinship in a sophisticated national and international market and one that was less attentive to the local provincial market. Therefore, a related anomaly demonstrated the lack of 'forthright personalities' in the head of the Old Bleach design studio, Norman Fitzroy (Roy) Webb, while a panel member of the Industrial Art Committee *never* discussed, during committee service, Old Bleach's position on and reputation for design in the broader industrial art context. It seemed a peculiar omission given their commitment to and expertise in design *and* their knowledge of the machinations of industrial art propaganda. There is no available evidence to indicate Webb was particularly interested in improving the civic role and status of design in Ulster and even the Committee's constituency pointed to a paucity of industrial artists and design reformers which undoubtedly affected the influence of the Report's outcomes.



Even though Old Bleach understood the value of design and were discerning about their senior designers' training (ex-London), they were still comparable to other linen manufacturers who generally did not invest in the training or advancement of the work's designers which then contributed to maintaining the low status of the provincial designer. Apart from Felix C. Gotto as a family member of the firm, the design staff were paid standard rates. Across the industry, it pointed to a dispiriting trivialization of design and yet a blind faith in continental design. Companion Chapters 3 and 4 scrutinized the first official enquiry in to the position of industrial art in Northern Ireland. The evidence revealed the provincial attitudes to design; with witnesses who believed there was no real need to fully train textile designers as demand was met from outside and further argued they benefitted from external influences that ensured competitiveness and commerciality. Roland Nugent, as chair of the Industrial Art Committee, detected one glaring deficiency in the local trades, 'Part of the trouble is a lack of artistic knowledge in the higher ranks of industry' and believed some art based training for managers would initiate artistic policy.<sup>5</sup> Norman Fitzroy Webb, at the same meeting, also noted a distinction between an artistic manufacturer and those with little or no creative impulse. The Report of the Committee on Industrial Art concluded manufacturers were 'naturally diffident' in all matters artistic.<sup>6</sup> That diffidence may also have evolved from the lack of structural support for design innovation. Linen companies were inclined to support technical innovation, with the proper backing of the Linen Industrial Research Association (LIRA). There were no design reform bodies such as the DIA and even the local College of Art was pronounced 'unprogressive'.<sup>7</sup>

Out of such putative parochialism, Old Bleach did manage to produce some of the most outstanding examples of textile design that would still stand up to critical scrutiny today, some 80 years on. In Chapter 6, I critically synthesised and evaluated their design output across the main ranges: damask table cloths, towel designs, embroidery designs and their celebrated furnishing fabrics. I chose to examine all of these for two reasons; to establish a design methodology and to assess if Modernity had cross pollinated in to fancy linens. The findings suggest designs in fancy linens were current and aware of modish styles but largely conservative in character and certainly not *avant garde*. This close examination of fancy linens also demonstrated their capacity for a wide range of design inspiration provided (principally) by the company design library. Discovering this resource was undoubtedly the crux in understanding how design studios originate, adapt and develop design ideas. In this body of evidence, one can detect the ambition of the company and the willingness to invest in expensive pochoir folios by artistic luminaries as Sonia Delaunay and encyclopaedic volumes such as Pope and Ackerman's *A Survey of Persian Art, Vols. 1-6* from 1938-39. This privately held primary material has been an enlightening privilege to work from and has helped build a fuller and more precise sense of a geographically provincial textile manufacturer, but one with a distinctly transnational outlook and au courant with design developments. Importantly, it shows Old Bleach's *comprehensive* attitude to the concept and implementation of 'good design' across the whole company, from packaging, stationery, publicity and linen goods.

In Part 2 of the final chapter, I considered the company's diversification into furnishing fabrics in the early 1930s.<sup>8</sup> The technical virtuosity was by then assured and their designs quickly caught the attention of discerning museums and retailers. I have discussed a range of their furnishing fabrics that were typical of the popular themes and motifs from the period and why they were selected for industrial art exhibitions and collections. They tended to be bold in composition and style and it is plausible, the furnishing fabrics range allowed their first-rate designers creative freedom to produce for a more sophisticated clientele. The market for fancy linens was considerably more conservative than the greater scope for furnishing fabrics. And it is in this cleave, that we better understand why perhaps the furnishing fabrics are virtually unknown in Ulster. It further points to an industry whose attitude to design was largely dismissive and in practice, persistently atomistic. Gathering the information and knowledge of Old Bleach from such a diversity of sources has amplified *why* we know so little about the character of provincial design. The aim of this thesis was to find the secret life of design in Ulster's interwar linen industry, it was there, albeit in remnants.

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<sup>1</sup> This front-page article reported ramie was 4 times stronger than hemp, 8 times stronger than linen, 12 times stronger than cotton and 24 times stronger than silk. "Can Ramie Oust flax?", *The Linen Trade Circular*, 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1935.

<sup>2</sup> Kapok is cotton like floss made from cellulose and lignin, also known as Java cotton, samauma or ceipa; Solintex was a new fabric that looked like linen but was really wool, 1934; Sodolin was a mix of hemp and flax made popular in Italy (*International Textiles*, 11 July 1934)

<sup>3</sup> The ten firms exhibiting in addition to Old Bleach were: Ballymena Manufacturing Co. Ltd, Broadway Damask Co., Ltd, John Shaw Brown and Sons Ltd., Dicksons & Co. (Dungannon), Ltd., William Ewart & Son Ltd., Ireland Brothers, Limited, Irish Linen Mills, Ltd., Samuel Lamont & Sons, Ltd., J. N. Richardson, Sons & Owden, Ltd., and Stevenson & Son, Ltd.

<sup>4</sup> "Old Bleach Enterprise", *The Linen Trade Circular*, 8<sup>th</sup> February, 1935.

<sup>5</sup> Roland Nugent during the evidence of F.C. Stone, p.15.

<sup>6</sup> *The Report of the Committee on Industrial Art*, pp.16-17.

<sup>7</sup> Industrial Art Committee, Minutes of Meeting held on 1<sup>st</sup> February, 1935, PRONI: COM/26.

<sup>8</sup> The company's move into fashion oriented dress linens will be an area for future study, see epilogue.

## EPILOGUE

### **Critical Reflection and Future Work**

In the absence of orderly catalogued archives, the researcher of Northern Ireland's industrial design heritage and legacy turns to sleuthing. The multi method and interdisciplinary approach employed in this thesis was a pragmatic response to seeking out the secret life of design in Ulster's interwar linen industry. Much of it was secreted in contemporary newspapers and journals, recordings of oral testimony, Governmental papers, personal letters and unexpurgated cuttings albums. It hid in private homes, dark attic rooms and languished in filing cabinets and dusty shelves in the basements of museums. This source material will continue to materially reside in those liminal spaces but the information and knowledge gathered together here for the first time, shows an industry's nascent understanding and gradual engagement with design as 'an improving prospect.'<sup>1</sup> The thesis also expands our awareness of the significance of Old Bleach's contribution to textile history. I have shown, through a number of key sources from the accidental trove, the company archive, how active and ambitious they were in their commitment to well-designed linen goods.

### **Linen and the American Market**

Notwithstanding, there is still an inordinate amount of research to do. If anything, the research has shown me how much more there is to consider. The core research question, 'why do we know so little about design in Ulster's linen industry?' continues to need asking. The textile journals alone chart a number of potentially stimulating areas for research. I am particularly interested in the American market for Irish Linen and intend to develop this into a larger project. The market for linen across the pond was immense and no doubt the industry relied heavily on its preservation yet intelligence filtering through the trade press indicated designs were not moving swiftly enough with the (American) times. Given the pre-eminence of the US market, it is worth investigating why then, they were not prescribing what they wanted and why Irish linen manufacturers did not provide it. This equilibrium of demand and supply became increasingly precarious in the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the detriment of the linen trade. On a more domestic and artefactual level, a small travelling sales case of Irish linen from the 1920s was deposited with the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum several years ago. This case was sold to American women who then travelled throughout counties and states selling high quality linen door to door. It was the brainchild of a linen sales agent in Belfast in cooperation with a couple of Ulster linen manufacturers. The story of this modest sales case is one of transatlantic ambition and entrepreneurialism. I wish to trace this object's adventure in the linen trade and what it might tell us about small town America's consumption of Irish linen.

### **Linen Design Database**

Examining the Board of Trade Design Registers at The National Archives, Kew, has produced a compact inventory of Ulster's linen manufacturers engaged in design. Further research into these companies will

supplement the findings in this thesis and contribute to the fuller and more complex picture of the type and quality of design in the trade. In the longer view, I am aiming for a digital database of Ulster's textile history, that is widely accessible to those with a genealogical, community and or scholarly interest in industrial history. Notable among the design registrations were handkerchief designs, by firms who evidently believed it vital to protect their designs and indicates the (once) prominent market of an everyday item. Even by the 1930s, when *Kleenex* had persuaded consumers not 'to put a cold in your pocket', Irish handkerchief manufacturers were still registering patterns and thus still manufacturing. Cultural histories of the handkerchief have been undertaken but little substantive enquiry has considered this simple cloth square from a design perspective and quantified its economic significance to the linen trade.

### **Linen and Fashion**

By the 1930s, a number of progressive Irish linen companies, many of whom were alert to the growing awareness and demand for good design, diversified into dress linen manufacture. The contemporary linen trade press, with titles such as "Linen on the Paris Fashion Map" demonstrated an exponential trade interest in Fashion.<sup>2</sup> This is an additional potentially rich area for study, particularly in the context of new fibres and stiff rivalry from cotton. The Irish Linen Guild co-opted fashion tomes such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* to promote linen's stylish attributes and convince the affluent consumer of linen's new crease resisting properties. It was a shrewd manoeuvre, as fine linen production was expensive, a variety of firms took aim at Couture. As seen in my introduction (Fig. 0.3), Old Bleach produced for Chanel and a number of French couturiers. A further conduit for the promotion of linen innovation in a fashion context, was in society circles. As discussed in Chapter 5 of this thesis, Lady Londonderry's patronage of the Ulster linen industry was energetic and opened up an otherwise arcane refined clientele. This network is worth closer examination as superior quality linen was a popular choice for royal wedding gifts and the era of new vat dyes too brought royal patronage of fashionable coloured linen, that influenced mass market tastes. These too are all themes that remain unwritten and show how the industry used design and trends to remain competitive.

### **Textile Designers in Northern Ireland**

The character of textile designers is another issue worth further investigation. The designer R.J. Woods, in his capacity as member of the Industrial Art Committee, alluded to his training by continental designers.<sup>3</sup> This would have taken place in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century and these designers had come to Belfast from well-regarded textile centres such as Plauen and Krefeld in Germany. Establishing this information can contribute to broadening our understanding of design activity in Ulster. Later, in the 1930s, saw a small influx of textile émigrés, who with the support of the New Industries (Development) Act (NI) from 1932 (grants) and later in 1937 (loans). They brought considerable textile expertise to Northern Ireland and yet their work is largely forgotten. To date, there is some (published) knowledge of their

economic contribution to the textile trades here, but little is known about their outstanding design work.<sup>4</sup> I am also very interested in the even more secret life of female textile designers in Northern Ireland. From the Old Bleach records, there are women recorded in the design department and Jean McGregor was named. There is further evidence of women's design role in the linen industry and this line of enquiry could potentially map to existing studies of women in design across Ireland and Great Britain.<sup>5</sup>

### **Old Bleach Linen Company (1864-2000)**

It would be remiss of me to exclude Old Bleach from this plan of future research. The thesis has only really considered the company's output from the Interwar years, undeniably their heyday. Their formative years demonstrated an interest in distinguished damask design and their post war design work charted the volatility of the British textile industry. In the immediate post war years, they further diversified into carpet making and the company press cuttings albums show how good design remained an imperative for them, they bought rights to William Morris patterns and the Bauhaus-trained Margaret Leichner designed a small collection of textured woven linen in the late 1960s. This company deserves a full appraisal and while this is challenging, without a more comprehensive archive, it is possible to construct a reliable design history using an interdisciplinary approach. This research would complement the work already undertaken in the thesis and further deepen our knowledge of the secret life of design in Ulster's linen industry.

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<sup>1</sup> This 'forecast' is presumptuously borrowed from the title of Boydell's essay, "Freelance Textile Design in the 1930s: An Improving Prospect?", 1994.

<sup>2</sup> *The Linen Trade Circular*, 1934.

<sup>3</sup> Chapter 4, endnote 47.

<sup>4</sup> Philip Ollerenshaw has written extensively on the economic and business history of Northern Ireland.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 4, endnote 58, that acknowledges germinal study in this area.

Appendix I: OLD BLEACH MUSEUM HOLDINGS – The Victoria and Albert Museum (compiled according to accession to the museum)

|    | Museum/ Accession No. | OB name      | weave | print | date | description  | notes  |
|----|-----------------------|--------------|-------|-------|------|--|--|
| 1  | T.491-1934            | Sperrin      | *     |       | 1933 | Undulate waves and chevron   | Designed by N.F. Webb  |
| 2  | T.491-1934            | Rhythm       | *     |       | 1933 | Bands of medium sized alternating black and cream offset squares, creating optical movement. | Designed by N.F. Webb<br>Not classified under Old Bleach on the V&A online catalogue |
| 3  | CIRC.223-1935         | Mandalay     | *     |       | 1935 | Shoaling fish in blue/silver   | Designed by Felix C. Gotto   |
| 4  | CIRC.224-1935         | Tiflis       | *     |       | 1935 | Brown and yellow woven linen   | Entered twice on the V&A online catalogue  |
| 5  | CIRC.113-1937         | Valentine    |       | *     | 1936 | Dainty bouquet in electric shades  | Designed by Eva Crofts   |
| 6  | CIRC.114-1937         | Ross         | *     |       | 1936 | Small broken chevron pattern on a ground of plain linen weave.                               | Old Bleach   |
| 7  | CIRC.115-1937         | Tara         | *     |       | 1934 | Small lattice design – small version of Cranford   | Old Bleach   |
| 8  | CIRC.116-1937         | Fermoy       | *     |       | 1936 | Rhythmic trees. Dyed wool and undyed linen wefts with linen warp.                            | Remains unnamed on the V&A online catalogue  |
| 9  | CIRC.117-1937         | Persian Rose |       | *     | 1936 | Bold flat two-dimensional pattern – similar to Chale by Crofts for Donald Bros.              | Designed by Eva Crofts   |
| 10 | CIRC.151A-1937        | Penguin      |       | *     | 1936 | Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach   | Designed by Old Bleach Studio  |
| 11 | CIRC.238-1939         | Ventry       | *     |       | 1936 | Brown and cream counter change pattern   | Designed by J.L. Lindsay (OB)  |
| 12 | CIRC.239-1939         | Carbury      |       | *     | 1936 | Rust red coloured large interlocked scrolls printed design on buff coloured ground.          | Designed by Felix C. Gotto (OB)  |
| 13 | CIRC.240-1939         | Arum         |       | *     | 1936 | Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach   | Designed by C.B. Costin Nian   |
| 14 | CIRC.241-1939         | Aircraft     |       | *     | 1936 | Designed for S.S. Orcades, Brian O'Rorke   | Designed by Marion Dorn  |
| 15 | CIRC.242-1939         | Waterford    | *     |       | 1936 | Maritime themed – whimsical pattern  | Designed by Felix C. Gotto   |
| 16 | CIRC.243-1939         | Dingle       | *     |       | 1938 | Linen and rayon – does not seem to exist on VAM's listings                                   | Designed by Felix C. Gotto (MA/1/0 181)  |

|    |   |                                      |   |   |      |   |   |
|----|---|--------------------------------------|---|---|------|---|---|
| 17 | CIRC.245-1939                                     | Granard                              |   | * | 1936 | Large green and pink leaves   | Designed by C.B. Costin Nian  |
| 18 | CIRC.246-1939                                     | Foynes                               |   | * | 1936 | Blue lobed vertical shapes, overlaid with stylised green fronds and purple flowers.                       | Designed by Nancy Standley  |
| 19 | CIRC.249-1939                                     | Symphony                             |   | * | 1936 | Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach  | Designed by Paul Mansouroff   |
| 20 | CIRC.251-1939                                     | Lisburn                              |   | * | 1938 | Maroon, tufted, undulate line with stylised offcut twigs  | Designed by Felix C. Gotto  |
| 21 | CIRC.316-1939                                     | Zodiac                               |   | * | 1936 | Astrological symbols overprinted each other in pale blue  | Designed by Marion Dorn   |
|    |   |                                      |   |   |      |   |   |
| 22 | CIRC.200-1947<br>CIRC.200A-1947<br>CIRC.200B-1947 | unnamed                              |   |   | 1938 | Stylised single lobed fronds coming off a branch section - woven  | 'Mourne' or 'Dingle' probably designed by Felix C. Gotto              |
| 23 | CIRC.201-1947<br>CIRC.201A-1947<br>CIRC.201B-1947 | Lisburn                              |   |   | 1938 | Appears to be some error in the naming of this cloth  | Designed by Felix C. Gotto  |
| 24 | CIRC.202-1947<br>CIRC.202A-1947<br>CIRC.202B-1947 | Unnamed on VAM website: 'Rathmullan' | * |   | 1938 | Thin stripes dissected by counter change stylised leaf shapes – similar in design principle to 'Nerissa'. | Designed by Felix C. Gotto  |
| 25 | CIRC.203-1947<br>CIRC.203A-1947<br>CIRC.203B-1947 | Samara                               |   | * | 1938 | Linen and wool – woven, Russian in origin   | Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics 1938-1939 catalogue                     |
|    |   |                                      |   |   |      |   |   |
| 26 | CIRC.64-1952<br>CIRC.64-1952<br>CIRC.64-1952      | Hydrargillite 8.33                   | * |   | 1951 | Faithful copy of hydrargillite diagram (atomic structure of aluminium hydroxide)                          | Festival Pattern Group (FPG 48)                                       |
| 27 | CIRC.65-1952<br>CIRC.65A-1952<br>CIRC.65B-1952    | Orthoclase 8.29                      | * |   | 1951 | Connecting triangles and circles  | Festival Pattern Group (FPG 47)                                       |
|    |   |                                      |   |   |      |   |   |
| 28 | CIRC.415-1954                                     | Penguin                              |   | * | 1936 | Groups of two and three stylised penguins   | Modern Artists Design for Old Bleach<br>Designed by Old Bleach Studio |
|    | CIRC.416-1954                                     | unnamed                              | * |   | 1936 | 'clouds/mountains' Japanese in style  | Designed by Old Bleach Studio<br>Could be 'Mourne'                    |



|    |                                 |       |   |   |         |   |  |
|----|---------------------------------|-------|---|---|---------|---|--|
| 29 | T.198-1960                      | Fugue |   | * | 1936    | Vibrant abstract flat pattern with pronounced shapes – has a fried egg appearance   | Gift of Mrs Paul Nash  |
|    | CIRC.462-1962<br>CIRC.462A-1962 | Fugue |   | * | 1936    | Vibrant abstract flat pattern with pronounced shapes – has a fried egg appearance   | CIRC.462A is entered twice on the VAM online catalogue   |
| 30 | CIRC.71-1968                    |       | * |   | 1951    | China 8.6 table mat   | Old Bleach Linen Company   |
| 31 | T.367-1977                      |       | * |   | 1951    | Hydrargillite 8.3   | Old Bleach Linen Company<br>Gift of Dr. Helen Megaw  |
| 32 | T.117:1, 2-1992                 |       | * |   | 1951    | China clay curtains   | Old Bleach. Gift of Girton College, Cambridge. A spare pair were gifted to the Irish Linen Centre and Lisburn Museum |
|    | T.225-1999                      |       | * |   | 1929-30 | Folded sample card of six permanent half bleach linen swatches  | Old Bleach Linen Company   |
|    | T.226:1-1999                    |       | * |   | 1929-30 | Sample of blue linen, 6.5cm x 6.5 cm  | Old Bleach Linen Company   |
|    | T.226:2-1999                    |       | * |   | 1929-30 | Sample card of 28 coloured linen swatches   | Old Bleach 'As Gay as Spring Flowers' – also held in MoDA.   |
|    | T.226:3-1999                    |       | * |   | 1929-30 | Sample card of 34 coloured linen swatches   | Old Bleach for Gorrings Ltd, 1929-1930.  |
|    | ANOMALIES                       |       |   |   |         |   |  |
| 33 | CIRC.225-1935                   |       |   | * | 1935    | Dress fabric - Letter from Old Bleach to V&A, describing the fabric as made from Spiralspun and designed by Paul Mansouff (V&A Registry – MA/1/0 181) | Selected by VAM for Circulation Dept. Not on VAM 'Search the Collections' website.                                   |

Appendix II: OLD BLEACH MUSEUM HOLDINGS – The Whitworth Gallery & Manchester Art Gallery (compiled according to accession to the museum, with some descriptions supplied by The Whitworth)

|    | Museum/<br>Accession<br>No. | OB name       | weave | print | date | description   | notes  |
|----|-----------------------------|---------------|-------|-------|------|---|--|
| 1  | 1934.645                    | EC II         | *     |       | 1934 | Spiky fronds  | Green and maroon                                     |
| 2  | 1934.646                    | Corrib        | *     |       | 1934 | Coarse weave, multi layered motifs, complex mix of pattern – ground of large striped leaves overlaid with 'bouquet' of small spotted heart shaped leaves & lotus style flower | Red & grey/green                                     |
| 3  | 1934.647                    | Samoa         | *     |       | 1934 | Large complex pattern of exotic leaves overlaid on a chevron pattern on a marl ground   | black & marl grey                                    |
| 4  | 1934.648                    | Glengarry     | *     |       | 1934 | Plaid/check   | Grey, black, ecru                                    |
|    |                             |               |       |       |      |   |  |
| 5  | 1935.88                     | bedspread     | *     |       | 1935 | Linen damask, blue floral pattern   | Platt Hall   |
| 6  | 1935.89                     | Tea cloth     | *     |       | 1935 | Linen tea cloth, grey   | Platt Hall   |
| 7  | 1935.90                     | Tea cloth     | *     |       | 1935 | Linen tea cloth, embroidered sprigs in grey and yellow  | Platt Hall   |
|    |                             |               |       |       |      |   |  |
| 8  | 1936.343.1<br>1936.343.2    | Glenavy       | *     |       | 1936 | Fashionable wavy horizontal stripes with rough edges  | Colourway: Sand<br>See also T.1996.266               |
| 9  | 1936.344                    | Winnie-T-Pooh |       | *     | 1936 | Winnie-T-Pooh, Eeyore, Tigger and Piglet  | Green & yellow with dark brown accents               |
| 10 | 1936.345                    | Ferrard       | *     |       | 1936 | Complex, striking collage, decoupage effect of a number of motifs: chevron, horizontal multi stripe, floral & leaf – similar in composition to 'Kendal'                       | Gold, variety of very fine weaves                    |
| 11 | 1936.346                    | Jack Tar      | *     |       | 1936 | Bold graphic style of dancing sailors wearing full sailor suit in counter change, one hand behind the back & the other in front, repeated in rows.                            | Gold, very fine weave.<br>Designed by Felix C. Gotto |
| 12 | 1936.347                    | Charolette    | *     |       | 1936 | Regency design of roundels and tassels  | Red, ecru  |
| 13 | 1936.348                    | Kilgarvin     | *     |       | 1936 | Subtle pattern with some optical movement from vertical angular lines that appear to move in and out.   | Brown, ecru  |
|    |                             |               |       |       |      |   |  |
| 14 | 1939.199                    | Kenilworth    | *     |       | 1938 | Embroidered wool on to 'Stamboul' period design   | Designed by Felix C. Gotto                           |

|    |  |          |   |   |          |   |  |
|----|--|----------|---|---|----------|---|--|
| 15 | 1939.200   | Prunella | * |   | nd       | Embroidered florals on rayon and linen  | Designed by Felix C. Gotto                         |
| 16 | 1939.201   | Zodiac   |   | * | 1936     | Astrological symbols with overprint. Red colourway  | Designed by Marion Dorn                            |
|    |  |          |   |   |          |   |  |
| 17 | 1940.516   | Foynes   |   | * | 1936     | Blue lobed vertical shapes, overlaid with stylised green fronds and purple flowers.   | Designed by Nancy Standley                         |
| 20 | 1940.517   | Aircraft |   | * | 1937     | Darting stylised birds  | Designed by Marion Dorn                            |
|    |  |          |   |   |          |   |  |
| 21 | 1987.41.1<br>1987.41.2<br>1987.41.3<br>1987.41.4 | Fugue    |   | * | 1936     | Vibrant abstract flat pattern with pronounced shapes – almost has a fried egg appearance, particularly in the orange/brown/yellow colourway | Designed by Paul Nash                              |
|    |  |          |   |   |          |   |  |
| 22 | T.1992.35.1                                      |          | * |   | 1951     | Curtain with china clay crystal pattern (Festival Pattern Group)  | Gift of Girton College via VAM, 1992.              |
| 23 | T.1992.35.2                                      |          | * |   | 1951     | Curtain with china clay crystal pattern (Festival Pattern Group)  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 24 | T.1996.256                                       | Chorale  |   | * | 1936     | Calligraphic script in columns with background spots  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 25 | T.1996.257                                       | Rialto   |   | * | 1936     | Offset crossbars  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 26 | T.1996.258                                       | Bandon   | * |   | 1938     | Pattern of rows of ribbons tied in bows on a latticework ground, half drop repeat. Woven with undyed warp and dyed brown and undyed wefts   | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 27 | T.1996.259                                       | Sperrin  | * |   | 1933     | Undulate waves in a variety of textured weaves  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 28 | T.1996.260                                       | Cherokee | * |   | Post war | Reminiscent of wrought ironwork, bold geometrical pattern   | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 29 | T.1996.261                                       | Clonmel  | * |   | nd       | Horizontal bands, thick and thin  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 30 | T.1996.262                                       | Raphoe   | * |   | nd       | 'Shaded' (in the weave) thick horizontal S shapes interlocked on a tiny chevron ground  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 31 | T.1996.263                                       | Glandore | * |   | nd       | Controlled identical wavy diagonal lines  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 32 | T.1996.264                                       | Ross     | * |   | 1936     | 'charming little chevron-like pattern', very fine weave, in light weight  | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 33 | T.1996.265                                       | Kildare  | * |   | nd       | Rows of horizontal feathers   | Gift of Lesley Jackson                             |
| 34 | T.1996.266                                       | Glenavy  | * |   | 1936     | Fashionable wavy horizontal stripes with rough edges  | Gift of Lesley Jackson<br>Colourway: reddish brown |

|    |            |            |   |  |          |  |   |
|----|------------|------------|---|--|----------|--|---|
| 35 | T.1996.267 | Strangford | * |  | 1936     | Characterful, small waves or reminiscent of the Celtic triple spiral symbol (spiral of life)             | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 36 | T.1996.268 | Moyacullen | * |  | 1938     | Multi coloured lobed foliage   | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 37 | T.1996.269 | Bannow     | * |  | 1938     | Alternative rows on a ground of stylized floral sprigs, pomegranate & oak.                               | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 38 | T.1996.270 | unnamed    | * |  | nd       | Stylised leaf, alternating rows on a ground of small geese-eyed lozenges, cream warp/burgundy weft       | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 39 | T.1996.271 | unnamed    | * |  | nd       | "  | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 40 | T.1996.272 | Tarbert    | * |  | nd       | Medium herringbone & chevron   | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 41 | T.1996.273 | Knockbreda | * |  | nd       | Criss crossing lines, intersecting lattice (or trellis) work   | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 42 | T.1996.274 | Columbia   | * |  | Post war | Rows of Z shaped motifs with curling serifs linked by small lozenges diagonally disposed                 | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 43 | T.1996.275 | Georgia    | * |  | Post war | Geometric pattern of lozenge stripes enclosing quatrefoils, alternating with rows of ½ section sexfoils. | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 44 | T.1996.276 | Woodvale   | * |  | Post war | Alternated stylized leaves on bands of chevrons  | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 45 | T.1996.277 | Carnlea    | * |  | Post war | Stripes of alternate facing stylized leaves in tiny chevrons (8 leaves on each frond)                    | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 46 | T.1996.278 | Merville   |   |  | 1952     | 5 rows of stylized leaves and branches at different angles   | Gift of Lesley Jackson. Merville features as a carpet design by Old Bleach in House & Garden, 1952. Press cuttings book, Old Bleach Archive, Randalstown. |
| 47 | T.1996.279 | Brookvale  | * |  | nd       | Pattern of wavy diagonal lines – smaller pattern to Glenavy (which is horizontal in orientation)         | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 48 | T.1996.280 | Lennoxvale | * |  | Post war | Geometric pattern of grid/squares  | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 49 | T.1996.281 | Knocklyd   | * |  | nd       | bold geometric pattern of large chevrons narrowing to apex   | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 50 | T.1996.282 | Burren     | * |  | nd       | Lattice of small lozenges with vertical ladder like intersecting stripes                                 | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 51 | T.1996.283 | Belfast    | * |  | nd       | Pattern of wavy diagonal lines – smaller pattern to Glenavy (which is horizontal in orientation)         | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |
| 52 | T.1996.284 | Moneyrod   | * |  | nd       | Large vertical flower & leaf scroll in alternating rows  | Gift of Lesley Jackson  |

|    |              |                     |   |  |               |  |  |
|----|--------------|---------------------|---|--|---------------|--|--|
| 53 | T.1996.285   | Derrynane/<br>Moate | * |  | nd            | Diagonal sprays of stylized flowers (carnations)<br>alternating rows | Gift of Lesley Jackson   |
|    |              |                     |   |  |               |  |  |
| 54 | T.2003.537   |                     | * |  | Post<br>War   | Carpet Sample  | Gift – untraced  |
| 55 | T.2003.614.1 | Donegal &<br>Fanad  | * |  | 1936-<br>1937 | Crompton Prize Fund Reference Collection No.18                       | Includes two Old Bleach furnishing<br>fabrics samples: Fanad and Donegal |
| 56 | T.2003.614.2 | Donegal &<br>Fanad  | * |  | 1936-<br>1937 | Crompton Prize Fund Reference Collection No.18                       | Duplicate  |

Appendix III: OLD BLEACH MUSEUM HOLDINGS - The Irish Linen Centre & Lisburn Museum Collection

| Accession No. | Object Name        | Description  | Date  |
|---------------|--------------------|--|-------|
| 1992.5        | Tablecloth, Damask | Hand painted leaves & flowers stamped Old Bleach                         | 1950s |
| 1992.86       | Curtains           | Festival of Britain pattern  | 1951  |
| 1994.23       | Napkins, Linen     | Set of six, colour, machine spoke stitched edges                         | nd    |
| 1995.5        | Table set, boxed   | Winchester pattern tablecloth & napkins                                  | 1930s |
| 1995.34       | Bed set, boxed     | Bolster & pillowcases plain white linen covered buttons                  | nd    |
| 1995.37       | Tray cloth, boxed  | Ecrú with hand painted floral sprays damask                              | nd    |
| 1995.46       | Salesman's Sampler | Pillowcases & tablecloths  | 1939  |
| 1995.47       | Towel, Linen       | White, diaper  | 1926  |
| 1995.48       | Pillowcase         | White, mitred corners  | nd    |
| 1995.49       | Pillowcase         | White  | nd    |
| 1995.50       | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck  | 1926  |
| 1995.50.2     | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck with coloured stitching                                      | 1926  |
| 1995.50.3     | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck with coloured stitching                                      | 1926  |
| 1995.50.4     | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck with coloured stitching                                      | 1926  |
| 1995.51       | Hand Towel, linen  | Plain weave, blue  | 1957  |
| 1995.52       | Hand Towel, linen  | White, linen diaper embroidered flight of three geese                    | 1953  |
| 1995.53       | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck, Festival of Britain   | 1951  |
| 1995.53.1     | Hand Towel, linen  | Red, white & blue motif  | 1951  |
| 1995.53.2     | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck  | 1951  |
| 1995.54       | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck, embroidered, coronation souvenir                            | 1954  |
| 1995.54.2     | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck, embroidered, Scots Guard                                    | nd    |
| 1995.54.3     | Hand Towel, linen  | White huck, embroidered, Beefeater                                       | nd    |
| 1995.55       | Hand Towel, linen  | White, huck  | 1926  |
| 1995.56       | Hand Towel, linen  | Peach, coloured machine embroidered four horses pulling coronation coach | 1953  |
| 1995.57       | Hand Towel, linen  | White, machine embroidered four horses pulling coronation coach          | 1953  |
| 1995.58       | Hand Towel, linen  | Peach  | 1950  |
| 1995.59       | Tea Napkin, linen  | Plain weave, ecru with embroidered tropical fish                         | nd    |
| 1995.59.1-6   | Tea Napkins, linen | Plain weave, ecru with embroidered tropical fish                         | nd    |
| 1995.60       | Glass Towel, linen | White, green and mustard stripes   | 1958  |
| 1995.60.2     | Glass Towel, linen | White, green and mustard stripes   | 1958  |
| 1995.60.3     | Hand Towel, linen  | Damask with circular wreaths and acanthus leaves                         | nd    |

|           |                     |   |         |
|-----------|---------------------|---|---------|
| 1995.60.4 | Hand Towel, linen   | Damask with circular wreaths and acanthus leaves                                      | nd      |
| 1995.61   | Napkin, damask      | White, Floral circular wreath with similar border and embroidered monogram A.D.       | nd      |
| 1995.62   | Napkin, damask      | White, four napkins for exhibition at Londonderry House various designs & monograms   | 1935    |
| 1995.63   | Hand Towel, linen   | Huck & Damask   | nd      |
| 1995.64   | Hand Towel, linen   | Damask, yellow  | nd      |
| 1995.64.2 | Hand Towel, linen   | Damask, yellow, hand embroidered CHB crowned  | nd      |
| 1995.65   | Hand Towel, linen   | Pink with white slub weft   | nd      |
| 1995.65.1 | Hand Towel, linen   | Pale green  | nd      |
| 1995.66.1 | Table Mat, linen    | Damask off white with zig zag design for VIP dining room Festival of Britain          | 1951    |
| 1995.66.2 | Napkin, damask      | White linen, machine stitched design based on snowflake, Festival of Britain          | 1951    |
| 1995.66.3 | Napkin, damask      | White linen, machine stitched design based on snowflake, Festival of Britain          | 1951    |
| 1995.67   | Tray Cloth & Napkin | Plain weave, mint green   | nd      |
| 1995.67.2 | Napkin              | Linen, hand hemmed stitched to give square design sent to Ikosha-Koniha for stitching | nd      |
| 1995.70   | Tray cloth, damask  | Cream coloured with hand painted flowers Moonglow                                     | nd      |
| 1995.71   | Supper Cloth        | Coronation design, stitching Elizabeth II   | 1953    |
| 1995.72   | Supper Cloth        | Stone coloured, Coronation with rose, daffodil, thistle and shamrock in corners       | 1953    |
| 1995.73   | Supper Cloth        | Plain weave, ecru floral design   | nd      |
| 1995.74   | Napkin, linen       | Plain weave, edged with bright green binding.   | nd      |
| 1995.75.1 | Tray cloth, linen   | Plain weave, stone coloured with floral motif   | nd      |
| 1995.75.2 | Tray cloth, linen   | Plain weave, ecru hand hemmed floral border yellow flowers                            | nd      |
| 1995.76   | Laundry Bag         | Plain weave, blue and white stripe  | nd      |
| 1995.77   | Shoe Bag            | Plain weave, yellow   | nd      |
| 1995.78   | Tea Cosy            | Plain weave, yellow   | nd      |
| 1995.79   | Hand Towel          | Rainbow colour box set  | nd      |
| 1995.80   | Supper Cloth        | White, plain weave crease resistant   | 1935    |
| 1995.81   | Sample, linen       | Plain weave 'Spiralspun' dress weight   | 1935    |
| 1995.82   | Sample, embroidery  | Cream coloured design used for bedroom curtains                                       | 1940s   |
| 1995.83   | Sample, linen       | Pattern used for New Zealand Navigation Company                                       | 1940/50 |
| 1995.84   | Hand Towel, sample  | Linen hand embroidered sample design gardening  | 1938    |
| 1995.85.1 | Sample Linen        | Plain weave stone coloured design showing stallholder                                 | 1938    |
| 1995.85.2 | Sample Linen        | Plain weave stone coloured design showing stallholder                                 | 1938    |
| 1995.85.3 | Sample Linen        | Plain weave stone coloured design showing stallholder                                 | 1938    |
| 1995.85.4 | Sample Linen        | Plain weave stone coloured design showing stallholder                                 | 1938    |
| 1995.86   | Sample, linen       | Plain weave ecru  | 1934    |



|            |                       |   |      |
|------------|-----------------------|---|------|
| 1995.87    | Sample, linen         | Plain weave stone coloured hand embroidered motif         | nd   |
| 1995.88    | Sample, linen         | Plain weave stone coloured hand embroidered motif flowers | nd   |
| 1995.89    | Sample, linen         | Plain weave stone coloured embroidered floral bouquet     | nd   |
| 1995.90.1  | Sample, linen         | Huck Hand Towel pastel pink                               | nd   |
| 1995.90.2  | Sample, linen         | Huck Hand Towel Pink yellow and blue                      | nd   |
| 1995.90.3  | Sample, linen         | Huck Hand Towel Pink yellow and blue                      | nd   |
| 1995.90.4  | Sample, linen         | Huck Hand Towel Pink yellow and blue                      | nd   |
| 1995.91    | Hand Towel            | Cambric pale pink   | nd   |
| 1995.92    | Tea Towel             | Plain weave various printed scenes                        | nd   |
| 1995.93    | Sketch Book           | F.R. Webb, Randalstown                                    | nd   |
| 1995.94    | Glass Cloth, linen    | Plain weave   | nd   |
| 1995.95    | Tea Cosy, Linen       | Plain weave, white  | 1955 |
| 1995.96    | Tea Cosy Linen        | Plain weave, stone coloured                               | 1956 |
| 1995.100   | Sample, linen         | Collection 'C' quality embroidery linen                   | nd   |
| 1995.101   | Hand Towel, linen     | Huck, pale pink designs in back stitch initial R          | nd   |
| 1995.102   | Samples x 9, linen    | Huck, samples in various pastel colours                   | nd   |
| 1995.103.1 | Doily, damask         | Hand crochet, white borders                               | nd   |
| 1995.103.2 | Doily, damask         | Hand crochet, white borders                               | nd   |
| 1995.103.3 | Doily, damask         | Hand crochet, white borders                               | nd   |
| 1995.103.4 | Doily, damask         | Hand crochet, white borders                               | nd   |
| 1995.104.1 | Samples               | Linen collection of embroidery samples                    | 1956 |
| 1995.104.2 | Samples               | Linen collection of embroidery samples                    | 1956 |
| 1995.104.3 | Sample, linen         | Plain weave blue stitched border                          | nd   |
| 1995.104.4 | Samples               | Linen Twill weave transfer for hand embroidery            | nd   |
| 1995.104.5 | Samples               | Six samples of cross stitch                               | nd   |
| 1995.104.6 | Sample, linen         | Three small sample pieces                                 | nd   |
| 1995.104.7 | Tea Cosy, linen       | Hand hemmed linen, ecru                                   | 1960 |
| 1995.104.8 | Runner, linen         | White satin weave machine embroidered flowers & birds     | nd   |
| 1995.105   | Samples               | Four embroidery designs                                   | nd   |
| 1995.106   | Tablecloth, miniature | Damask tablecloth GVR crown & shamrocks                   | 1920 |
| 1995.107   | Napkin, miniature     | Boxed damask napkin shamrock borders                      | 1920 |
| 1995.108   | Bed sheet, miniature  | Boxed linen bed sheet hand embroidered GRI monogram       | 1920 |
| 1995.109   | Pillowcase, miniature | Plain white weave hand embroidered GRI monogram           | 1920 |
| 1995.110.1 | Towel, miniature      | Turkey off white lavender stripe GRI in red embroidery    | 1920 |

|            |                        |   |      |
|------------|------------------------|---|------|
| 1995.110.2 | Towel, miniature       | Turkey off white lavender stripe GRI in red embroidery                            | 1920 |
| 1995.110.3 | Towel, miniature       | Turkey off white lavender stripe GRI in red embroidery                            | 1920 |
| 1995.111.1 | Towel, miniature       | Turkey off white lavender stripe GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end    | 1920 |
| 1995.111.2 | Towel, miniature       | Turkey off white lavender stripe GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end    | 1920 |
| 1995.111.3 | Towel, miniature       | Turkey off white lavender stripe GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end    | 1920 |
| 1995.112.1 | Towel, miniature       | White GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end                               | 1920 |
| 1995.112.2 | Towel, miniature       | White GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end                               | 1920 |
| 1995.113.1 | Towel, miniature       | White GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end                               | 1920 |
| 1995.113.2 | Towel, miniature       | White GRI in red embroidery servants woven each end                               | 1920 |
| 1995.114   | Tray cloth, miniature  | White linen plain weave   | 1920 |
| 1995.115   | Tray cloth miniature   | White linen plain weave   | 1920 |
| 1995.116.1 | Napkins, miniature     | White diaper servants Set of 6  | 1920 |
| 1995.116.2 | Napkins, miniature     | White diaper servants Set of 6  | 1920 |
| 1995.116.3 | Napkins, miniature     | White diaper servants Set of 6  | 1920 |
| 1995.116.4 | Napkins, miniature     | White diaper servants Set of 6  | 1920 |
| 1995.116.5 | Napkins, miniature     | White diaper servants Set of 6  | 1920 |
| 1995.116.6 | Napkins, miniature     | White diaper servants Set of 6  | 1920 |
| 1995.117.1 | Dishcloth, miniature   | Knitted in garter stitch GRI embroidered in red                                   | 1920 |
| 1995.117.2 | Dishcloth, miniature   | Knitted in garter stitch GRI embroidered in red                                   | 1920 |
| 1995.117.3 | Dishcloth, miniature   | Knitted in garter stitch GRI embroidered in red                                   | 1920 |
| 1995.118   | Duster, miniature      | Flannelette cream coloured buttonhole stitched GRI embroidered                    | 1920 |
| 1995.119   | Glass Cloth, miniature | Linen plain weave red/white GRI embroidered                                       | 1920 |
| 1995.120   | Napkin, miniature      | White, damask   | 1920 |
| 1995.123.1 | Towel Miniature        | Boxed linen huck white embroidered GRI in red                                     | 1920 |
| 1995.123.2 | Towel Miniature        | Boxed linen huck white embroidered GRI in red                                     | 1920 |
| 1995.123.3 | Towel Miniature        | Boxed linen huck white embroidered GRI in red                                     | 1920 |
| 1995.123.4 | Towel Miniature        | Boxed linen huck white embroidered GRI in red                                     | 1920 |
| 1995.124.1 | Towel, miniature       | Boxed Linen huck white  | 1920 |
| 1995.124.2 | Towel, miniature       | Boxed Linen huck white  | 1920 |
| 1995.124.3 | Towel, miniature       | Boxed Linen huck white  | 1920 |
| 1995.125.1 | Towel, miniature       | Boxed Linen huck white  | 1920 |
| 1995.125.2 | Towel, miniature       | Boxed Linen huck white  | 1920 |
| 1995.125.3 | Towel, miniature       | Boxed Linen huck white  | 1920 |
| 1995.126   | Tablecloth, miniature  | Damask white banqueting central star enclosing a cross laurel wreath two with GVR | 1920 |

|          |                       |  |       |
|----------|-----------------------|--|-------|
| 1995.127 | Tablecloth, miniature | Damask tablecloth white GVR crown & shamrocks  | 1920  |
| 1995.128 | Napkins, miniature    | Damask white GVR crown & shamrocks   | 1920  |
| 2003.85  | Supper Cloth          | Shirley Poppies worked from an Old Bleach design   | nd    |
| 2004.330 | Sample, embroidery    | Willow pattern sample from supplement 'Modern Home' Old Bleach linen                             | 1929  |
| 2012.74  | Salesman's Case       | Old Bleach Linen fabric samples and promotional materials [sic] (Old Bleach and Ireland Brothers | 1920s |
| 2012.85  | Sample Book           | Old Bleach coloured Pure Flax Linens   | nd    |
| 2012.92  | Sample, linen         | Watteau pattern with Fleur-de-Lis Old Bleach trademark [sic] - Ireland Brothers                  | nd    |
| 2012.93  | Sample, linen         | Indian pattern with Fleur-de-Lis Old Bleach trademark [sic] - Ireland Brothers                   | nd    |
| 2012.94  | Sample, linen         | Ancient Egyptian pattern with Fleur-de-Lis Old Bleach trademark [sic] - Ireland Brothers         | nd    |
| 2012.229 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing different cheeses  | nd    |
| 2012.230 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing different measures   | nd    |
| 2012.232 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing rabbits  | nd    |
| 2012.233 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing heron standing in reeds by the river   | nd    |
| 2012.234 | Tea Towel, linen      | Floral design  | nd    |
| 2012.235 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing various fruit and fruit basket   | nd    |
| 2012.236 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing wine making  | nd    |
| 2012.237 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing mushrooms  | nd    |
| 2012.238 | Tea Towel, linen      | Floral pattern (red)   | nd    |
| 2012.239 | Tea Towel, linen      | Floral pattern (brown)   | nd    |
| 2012.240 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing various vegetables   | nd    |
| 2012.241 | Tea Towel, linen      | Showing wild birds   | nd    |
| 2013.212 | Pillowcases           | Pair, boxed, green floral trimming   | nd    |
| 2013.213 | Pillowcases           | Pair, boxed, blue band and coloured embroidered flowers  | nd    |
| 2013.214 | Bed sheets            | Pair, boxed, plain bed sheets embroidered with yellow flowers                                    | nd    |
| 2013.223 | Table centre, linen   | Green linen table centre with green embroidered star   | nd    |
| 2016.48  | Tablecloth, linen     | Double Damask white  | nd    |

## GLOSSARY

**Brocade** An elaborate and richly figured fabric woven on a Jacquard loom using satin weave. The warp float give a raised appearance. Originally woven in silk, but now can be made with man-made fibres, with additional silver or gold threads. Was first produced in China. Light weight brocade is used for apparel and heavier weights for furnishings. A brocatine is a brocade with a raised pattern imitating embroidery. Latin: brocare meaning to figure.

**Brocatelle** Similar to but heavier than brocade. The pattern, woven with two or more wefts with extra binder warp, in high relief on a Jacquard loom.

**Cambric** a soft, white, closely woven, cotton or linen or blended fabric that has been calendared on the right side to give it a slight gloss. Cambric is used extensively for handkerchiefs.

**Cellulose** a carbohydrate polymer found in organic woody substances of most vegetation. The basic raw material in the production of rayon and acetate fibres. Cotton is 96% cellulose.

**Crash** a course fabric with a rough, irregular surface made from thick, uneven yarns.

**Cretonne** Heavy cotton very similar in appearance to linen.

**Diaper** a linen or cotton fabric with a woven pattern of small, constantly repeated figures, as diamonds.

**Dowlas** a plain cloth, similar to sheeting but coarser.

**Half Bleach linen** the more linen is bleached the weaker it becomes. Half bleach & three quarter bleach are stronger linens.

**Hollands** A plain-weave cotton or linen fabric that is heavily sized and is often given oil treatment to make it opaque. The fabric is used for curtains and shades. (also, known as 'shadecloth').

**Lawn** a light, thin cloth made of carded or combed yarns, this fabric is given a crease- resistant, crisp finish. Lawn is crisper than voile but not as crisp as organdy.

**Line** long and strong fibre used for finer linen products as table damask and dress linens.

**Piece goods** Cloth sold in long lengths.

**Tow** short and broken fibre suitable for medium & coarser linens, used for toweling, crashes and luncheon sets.

**Tenter** pulled the linen tightly on to a tenter frame to stretch and dry the cloth, to help correct the grain and straighten the weft and warp threads.

**Ticking** A durable, closely woven fabric used for covering box springs, mattresses, and pillows. Ticking may be woven in a plain, satin, or twill weave, usually with strong warp yarns and soft filling yarns.

**Triple cloth** a cloth with two wefts and one warp.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

### Explanatory Note

The bibliography is arranged according to a number of disciplines and sources that best reflect the methodology used to construct the thesis. As John Walker (1988, p.xx) has noted, 'Design...occurs at a point of intersections or mediations between spheres, that is between art and industry, creativity and commerce, manufacturers and consumers.' The early chapters have drawn on scholarship from a number of germane historical perspectives such as Irish and British economic and business history and social and cultural history. The later chapters are informed by sources more obviously related to design history and textile history. However, the greater part of the bibliography is taken up by primary source material (much of which is unpublished), including the contemporary publications from the general and trade press, unexpurgated papers of the Linen Industry Research Association (LIRA), multifarious government records held at PRONI, related archives throughout the United Kingdom such as the Archive of Art and Design (VAM) and a number of private collections, hitherto inaccessible, including the private papers of Felix C. Gotto and the major source of new evidence from the Old Bleach Archive.

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Symonds E.E. "Fashion: key to Linen Sales", *The Linen Trade Circular*, January 20 1934, p.1-2.

Simon, A. P. "Textiles and Modern Dress", *DIA Quarterly Journal*, July 1928.

## **Societies/Institutions/Organizations**

### Local

Randalstown Historical Society

Neillsbrook Community Development Group, Randalstown

Linen Industry Research Association (LIRA), Lambeg, est. 1919

Irish Linen Trade Directory (Belfast: Irish Linen Society)

Irish Linen Society (chaired by W.H. Webb of Old Bleach) est. 1920

Irish Linen Trade Corporation (ILTC) est. 1920

Irish Linen Guild, est. 1928 (@ LIRA)

The Federation for Local Ulster Studies (Due North and Ulster Local Studies Journals)

Ulster Historical Foundation

### National Design Reform Groups (many of whose archives are held in AAD, VAM)

BIIA (British Institute of Industrial Art) est.1920

CAI Council for Art & Industry, est.1933

DIA (Design & Industries Association) est.1915

SIA (Society of Industrial Artists) est.1930

Committee on Art & Industry (The Gorrell Report, published 1932)

RSA Royal Society of Arts, est.1754

MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group) est. 1933

## **Archives – England and Scotland**

### Archive of Art and Design, Victoria and Albert Museum

AAD/1978/2/200 – 203, Heal's Fabric Sample Books.  
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AAD/1987/1 *International Textiles*, export magazine for fashion and textiles.  
AAD/1982/9, British Art in Industry.  
AAD/1983/3/6, National Register of Industrial Art Designers.  
AAD/1978/3, AAD/1988/2, AAD/1997/7, AAD/2003/5, Design and Industries Association.  
AAD/4/61 - 64 – 1990, House of Worth.

MA/6/15, CIRC. Collections, Register of Acquisitions.  
MA/1/N71, Paul and Margaret Nash, Nominal File, V&A Registry.  
MA/1/0 181, Old Bleach Furnishings Ltd, Nominal File, V&A Registry.  
MA/1/C2876, Council for Art and Industry, 1939-1954 (Technical Textile Loan, 1939).  
MA/1/D981/2 Design Council, 1956-1968.  
MA/1/M1763, Dr. Helen Megaw.

RF 1999/465, Old Bleach Linen Samples c.1929, Nominal File, V&A Registry.  
RF 1992/511, Girton College, Cambridge, Nominal File, V&A Registry.

### National Art Library, Victoria and Albert Museum

"Old Bleach Towels" Catalogue, 1900, T.C.K. 0118, National Art Library, V & A, London.

### The Clothworkers Centre, The Victoria & Albert Museum

holds approximately 30 samples (lengths and small pieces by the yard) by Old Bleach and several dyed linen sample cards.

### Ashley Havinden Archive, Scottish National Gallery of Modern Art, Edinburgh.

GMA A39/3/171-196 (all related to his textile designs)  
GMA A39/4 (promotional material for Old Bleach)

### Manchester Art Gallery

Records of the Industrial Art Collection including exhibition catalogues and contemporary journals from the interwar period, exhibition and artefact photographs, correspondence between the Museum and various manufacturers including Old Bleach, manufacturers' publicity material including a booklet and pricelist from Old Bleach, Industrial Art Sub-Committee: Textile Section minutes, research notes and photocopies (from primary and secondary sources) by Museum staff on industrial art, local and national press cuttings.

### The Whitworth Art Gallery, Manchester

Industrial Art Collection from the 1930s – which includes approximately 50+ examples of Old Bleach, and Posters from the Empire Marketing Board from the 1920s + 1930s.

Manchester Metropolitan University, Special Collections and Main Library

Trade journals including *Furnishings Trades Organizer*, *Decoration*, *Decorative Art: The Studio Yearbook* and *Museum Journal*

The National Archives, Kew

Board of Trade: Design Registers (each register comprises 500 pages with approximately 5 registrations on each page = 2,500 Registrations in each volume)

**1875-1883**

BT43/30 (Charles James Webb)  
BT43/400 (Charles James Webb)  
BT43/403 (Webb Brothers)  
BT43/401 (       "       )  
BT43/402 (       "       )  
BT43/403 (       "       )  
BT43/404 (       "       )  
BT43/405 (       "       )  
BT43/414 (       "       )  
BT43/415 (       "       )  
BT44/30 (       "       )

**1930-1940**

BT53/120 (Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics Ltd.)  
BT53/121 (       "       )  
BT53/122 (       "       )  
BT53/123 (       "       )  
BT53/124 (       "       )  
BT53/125 (       "       )  
BT53/126 (       "       )  
BT53/127 (       "       )  
BT53/128 (       "       )  
BT53/129 (       "       )

Board of Trade: Design Representations (each box holds approximately fabric samples – companies could submit a photograph in place of a fabric sample)

**1930-1940**

BT52/4574  
BT52/4775  
BT52/4884  
BT52/4928  
BT52/4930  
BT52/4948  
BT52/4954  
BT52/4975  
BT52/5064  
BT52/5074  
BT52/5085  
BT52/5095

BT52/5096  
BT52/5265  
BT52/5275  
BT52/5277  
BT52/5280  
BT52/5289  
BT52/5299  
BT52/5327  
BT52/5590

BT54, Records of Allied Organisations – British Industries Fair, 1915-1958  
BT57, Council for Art and Industry, minutes and papers, 1934-1940

NRA 26751, James Pearsall & Co. Ltd business records are held at The National Archives, Kew.

## **Archives – Northern Ireland**

### Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI)

#### Cabinet Secretariat

CAB 9/F/123/2 Nugent, R. 'Confidential Memorandum on Publicity', 7<sup>th</sup> October 1938, Cabinet Secretariat File, 1928-39.

CAB/9/F/123/3 Government Publicity: a short résumé since 1922, 1944.

CAB 9F/8/1 Webb, W.H., Letters to Sir James Craig, 11<sup>th</sup> & 21<sup>st</sup> March 1921.

CAB/9/F/14 British Empire Exhibition (Cabinet Secretariat), 1922-1926.

CAB/9/F/14/1 Ulster Pavilion, British Empire Exhibition, 1922-1926.

CAB/9/F/2/1 Tariffs on linen goods imported into the USA, Canada, NZ & Australia, 1923-39.

CAB/9/F/2/2 Tariffs on linen goods imported into the USA, Canada, NZ & Australia, 1947-55.

CAB/9/F/8 Flax Growing within the British Empire, 1921-1936.

CAB/9/F/8 Flax Growing within the British Empire, 1936-1947.

CAB/9/F/117 Inter Empire Trade, 1930.

CAB/9/F/117 Inter Empire Trade, 1930.

#### Ministry of Commerce

COM/16 Scottish Empire Exhibition, 1936-38.

COM/17 New Industries Development Act (NI) 1937.

COM/22 United Kingdom and United States of America Trade Negotiations 1938.

COM/23/59 Fifteenth Meeting of the Advisory Council, 1924.

COM/25/8 Gamsey, G. (K.B.E.), Irish Linen Industry: Memorandum dealing with a proposed 'Scheme of Amalgamation', 1929.



COM/26/1-18 Files of Industrial Art Committee, 1933-1938.

COM/26/2 Files of Industrial Art Committee, 1935.

COM/26/3 Files of Industrial Art Committee, 1937-1938.

COM/27/1 Report on the Principal Causes of Depression in the Irish Linen Industry, Ministry of Commerce, 12<sup>th</sup> June 1928.

COM/40/1/L/15A Leithwood Ltd (Formerly Old Bleach Linen Company), 1921-1960.

COM/40/2/1250 Old Bleach Furnishings, 1938-1965.

COM/62/1/69 Linen Industry: Suggestions re. Publication, 1924-1925.

COM/62/1/271 Ulster Industries Development Association (UIDA), 1932.

COM/62/1/413 Suggested Exhibition of British Industrial Art at Belfast Museum and Art Gallery, 1934-1935.

COM62/1/427 Flax Research Work in Norfolk, 1934-1938.

COM62/1/427A Proposal to set up flax factory at Sandringham Estate, Norfolk, 1932-33.

COM62/1/585 Flax Enterprise in West Suffolk, 1937.

COM/62/1/408 British Industries Fair, 1935.

COM/62/1/470A British Industries Fair, 1936.

COM/62/1/471 British Industries Fair Publicity, 1936.

COM/62/1/475 British Industries Fair Publicity, 1936.

COM/62/1/476 British Industries Fair: UIDA, 1936.

COM/62/1/512 British Industries Fair, 1937.

COM/62/1/509 Linen Propaganda in the USA, 1936-1938.

COM/62/1/534 Irish Linen Guild: Proposed new Book on Irish Linen, 1936-1937.

COM/62/1/588 Art Advisory Council, 1937.

COM/62/1/548A South African Exhibition, 1935-1936.

COM/62/1/610 The Empire Movement: British Industries, 1937.

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COM/62/1/927 USA Market for linen Goods in Post War Period.

COM/62/1/601 London Chamber of Commerce: Special Section on Northern Ireland, 1928-1937.

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COM/96/37/211 The Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, Randalstown, 1933-1934.

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COM/96/37/213 The Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, Randalstown, 1935.

COM/96/37/214 The Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, Randalstown, 1937-1938.

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D2103/1 - 5 Old Bleach Linen Company, privately deposited archives (incomplete), 1860-1955.

D3099/11/27 Lady Londonderry's Correspondence with the Old Bleach Linen Company, 1935.

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Report of the Committee appointed to Consider Remedies for the Present Position in the Irish Linen Industry, 1929, in John Gilliland's "Some Notes on the Irish Linen Industry", Newspaper Cuttings Book, 1910-1935.

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CI Times: London Irish Number, special supplement, Nov 4<sup>th</sup> 1919, newspaper clippings pasted into scrapbook.

H10 Irish Flax production, pasted newspaper articles and pamphlets, 1930s-1940s.

H11 'Linen' book by A.S. Moore with handwritten notes, pasted and loose newspaper clippings, 1942 (1922).

- H14 'Ministry of Commerce, NI, the Overseas markets of the Linen Industry and the competition encountered therein', April 1930, May 1934, June 1934.
- H17 'Linen Lectures' W.H. Webb (Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd), 1935, various printed lectures with pictures covering numerous aspects of the history and manufacture of linen.
- H18 Linen Industry, 1939, various clippings on the Irish linen industry for the year 1939.
- H19 Fibres and Fabrics Journal, various pages, loose bound, detailing aspects of linen industry, important figures and firms. Also, some pasted clippings, notes and letters. Typed and amended index.
- H20 LIRA report of Council, 1922-25, 1928-29, 1930-31.
- H21 'Scientific Research for the Linen Trade' John C. Curtiss. Reprint of articles for the provisional research committees, 1919.
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The Furnishing Trades Organiser, London, October 1935.
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Robert McBratney & Co., NY, December 1928.  
The Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, Randalstown, May 1920.  
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- LI (3) Stevenson & Sons, Dungannon, November 1927.  
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- M11 Carpet Weaving, Morton Sundour Fabrics, August, 1951.

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- M14 'Linen' A.S. Moore, Chapter XI  
 Damask Linen – Moore, 3 articles, typescript.  
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 Linen industry history, extracts from periodical, typescript.  
 'Linen industry in Northern Ireland: how the Government helps the linen industry', typescript.  
 Home and Export markets 1907-1950, 5 graphs, 6 pages.  
 Is linen dear? Portadown produces perfect linen. Cut out the Cotton habit – it is dear and nasty! 2 pages.  
 Linen's Golden Years, newspaper clippings, 2 items.  
 Linen Industry Statistics for various countries, 1935, notebook and clippings.
- M15 'Future of the Irish Linen Industry', W.H. Webb (Chair of Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd), typescript and graph, 1940-41, 3 pages.  
 'Facts are Facts: scientific reasons why you should buy linen', handwritten booklet, 36 pages.
- M17 'Damask Silvertone', article, typescript, 8 pages.  
 'Irish Hand Loom Damask – a Doomed industry', Clifford R. Carter, article, 1928, typescript.  
 The Irish and Scottish Linen Damask Advertising Association letter and 2 pages of pictorial examples.  
 Linen Damask Weaving, F.J.W. Shannon from Canadian Textile Journal, 1925.  
 'The Manchester Municipal School of Art' letter and typescript of R.A. Dawson (principal), 'Style, Fashion and Modernity in Textile Design', 1930.  
 'Linen Costs and Statistics', J.F. Whiteford, transcript of lecture, typescript, 8 pages.  
 The Drapers' Record, Irish Linen Trade Supplement, December 1922.
- M19 'Trade Review of Northern Ireland for year 1937', reprint from *The Belfast Newsletter*.
- M25 Textile Designs, photographs and textile samples  
 Fabrics – black & white pictures, 10 items.  
 'The Man Who Wrote the Ulster Linen Industry's Bible' (Lesley Marshall), Clifford Carter, 18<sup>th</sup> October 1940, Belfast Telegraph.
- M32 'The Establishment of a Flax Fibre and Linen Industry in America', William Jay Robinson, 1919.
- TF The Flax, Hemp and Jute Yearbook: 1910, 1914, 1915, 1917, 1918, 1922, 1928- 29, 1930-31.
- P8 (a.) The Linen Trade Circular, 7 January 1933 – 18 November 1933.  
 (b.) The Irish Trade Journal, February 1936 – November 1936.

Old Bleach Archive, Private Collection, Randalstown.

Comprises ledgers, journals, cash books, press cuttings books, correspondence, business papers, salary books, staff pension records, legal records, partnership agreements, annual summer school reports, minute books, debenture records, share records including dividend ledgers and

warrants, marketing and publicity records including advertising material, photographs, printed ephemera, insurance and maintenance records including personal assets of family members, operation records, property and premises records, a small design library of books and journals (listed below), small variety of fabric including small plain weave sample books, packaged linen merchandise and a small group of furnishing fabrics with design registration numbers.

Whiteford, J.F. "Report on General Organisation and Costing Methods", September 21<sup>st</sup> 1916, Old Bleach Linen Company Ltd, Private Collection.

Old Bleach Price Lists: 1925, 1926, 1929, 1932, 1936, 1938.

Old Bleach Furnishing Fabrics Catalogue, 1936.

#### Old Bleach Linen Company Design Library

(Arranged by publication date to indicate the chronology of company design interest.)

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Cole, Alan, (1899) *Ornament in European Silks*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, Debenham and Freebody.

Adam, Robert and James, (1901) *The Decorative Work of Robert and James Adam*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, B.T. Batsford.

Solon, M.L. (1903) *French Faience: A History and Description of the Old French Faience*, London, Cassell & Co.

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Thomson, W.G. (1914) *Tapestry Weaving in England from the Earliest Times to the End of the XVIIIth Century*, New York and London, C. Scribner's Sons and B.T. Batsford.

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Waring, Mary E. (1917) *An Embroidery Pattern Book* (with foreword by W.R. Lethaby), London, Sir Isaac Pitman.

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Simon, Oliver, (ed.) *The Fleuron: A Journal of Typography*, London at the office of The Fleuron, No.1, 1923.

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Moussinac, Léon, (1924) *Etoffes Imprimees et Papier Peints*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Paris, Albert Levy (cover boards + 18 out of 50 plates missing).

Scaby, Allen W. (1925) *Colour Printing with Linoleum and Wood Blocks*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Leicester, Dryad Handicrafts.

Clouzot, Henri, (1925) *Tentures Murales et Papiers Modernes*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Paris, Ch. Massin & Cie.

Verneuil, M.P. (1925) *Etoffes et Tapis Etrangers: Exposition des Arts Decoratifs*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, Paris, Albert Levy, Librairie Centrale des Beaux Arts.

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Warner, Ralph, (1928) *Dutch and Flemish Fruit and Flower Painters of the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, Mills & Boon.

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Dobson Margaret, (1930) *Block-Cutting and Print-Making by Hand*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London, Sir Isaac Pitman & Sons Ltd.

Fenn, Amor, (1930) *Abstract Design: a practical manual on the making of patterns for the use of students, teachers, designers and craftsmen*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, London and New York, B.T. Batsford and C. Scribner's Sons Ltd.

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Collection of Old Bleach Linens from the 1920s – 1960s.

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### **Old Bleach Linen Company**

LL1 R98/11 – Mary Sandford  
LL1 R96/16 – W.H. Webb jnr.  
LL1 R97/01 – C.C. Gotto  
LL1 R98/13 – Jean Webb  
LL1 R96/45 – Arlene Mary Herdman

LL2 R00/35 – Samuel Ramsay  
LL2 R00/34 – Beth Stewart  
LL2 R99/5 – James Kilpatrick  
LL2 R99/17 – James McIlroy  
LL2 R01/28 – Ivor Reynolds  
LL2 R02/02 – Reverend Jackson Buick  
LL2 R02/26 – Roy Shaw

### **Companies associated with Old Bleach**

LL2 R01/20 – Jimmy Mills, Hillside Textiles

R2001-142 and R2001-143 - Milan Mladek, Belfast Silk and Rayon Co. Ltd  
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VADS (online resource for visual arts) Design Council Slide Collection

RASCAL (research & special collections available locally – Ireland; incl. JSTOR Ireland)

<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/sites/nisra.gov.uk/files/publications/1951-census-antrim-county-report.pdf>

[http://www.estherfitzgerald.com/14\\_research/14\\_07.html](http://www.estherfitzgerald.com/14_research/14_07.html)

<https://libertyellisfoundation.org>

*The Urbana Daily Courier*, 22 May 1935. Illinois Digital Newspaper Collections ([idnc.library.illinois.edu](http://idnc.library.illinois.edu)).