Reviving The William Liddell Collection

Roadshows

Stories and artefacts gathered at regional roadshows
The Roadshows books provide a glimpse of the wonderful artefacts and objects that were brought to the project’s regional Roadshows. The roadshows provided an opportunity for local communities, families and individuals involved in the textile manufacturing industries to share their memories and stories of their working lives in factories across the province.
National Museums NI are Northern Ireland’s premier cultural, learning, and tourist destinations, holding Ireland’s largest public collection of costume and textiles. This launch roadshow was held in the Parochial Hall, Ulster Folk and Transport museum as part of the museums ‘Linen Day’ of activities and craft demonstrations.

The team set up in anticipation of discovering many interesting artefacts, literature and people. Trestle tables were laid showing a selection of the glass plates, their first showing since being cleaned and digitised. The public had been invited to bring any artefacts, memorabilia or stories to be recorded, photographed and digitised. It was a busy day which yielded some beautiful literature and photographs, many with their own personal stories which were carefully recorded backed up by artefacts being scanned into the system.

This Hincks print of winding and warping was shared from David Willis’ collection. Three strategic locations were selected and promotion was through local networking and specifically targeted leaflets. The roadshows were facilitated by the Centre for Data and Digitisation Analysis (Cdda) Queen’s University Belfast.

Roads 1
Ulster Folk & Transport Museum, Cultra
Saturday 29th July 2017

Vision Support Services, the global textile company which acquired Hilden and Liddell in 2008 and still has offices in Lisburn and Blackburn in Lancashire, supplied some factual and poetic booklets. One example is the beautifully named leaflet ‘Damask for Dignity’ by Ethel R. Peysner (1887-1966) this was written for the American market.

“Flax, of which linen Damask is made, was woven in Ireland as early as the 11th Century, and was used there in 500AD and before. It is still made in Ireland in its greatest beauty in the vicinity of Belfast, where the Liddell Gold Medal Damasks have been woven for about one hundred years.”

“Dry in the sun. The more sun the better. Your linen then begins to feel at home – as if it were in old Ireland!”

“In fact, if any other material be used for the formal dinner, something of its impressiveness will flee away, and in the case of the luncheon table, importance will vanish.”

“Wherever Irish linen is mentioned, the name of Liddell comes to mind. For Wm Liddell & Co, stands pre-eminent among linen makers today and has for the past century.”

“Flax, of which linen Damask is made, was woven in Ireland as early as the 11th Century, and was used there in 500AD and before. It is still made in Ireland in its greatest beauty in the vicinity of Belfast, where the Liddell Gold Medal Damasks have been woven for about one hundred years.”
Further archive material supplied by Vision Support Services included an intriguing publication from the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Linen Trade Association 1891–1941, the event took place in The Waldorf Astoria in New York on Friday, the 2nd May 1941.

There were 62 pages of information, too much to include here, but insights into the content are:

Biblical references featured regularly:

“...and Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt and linen yarn: the king's merchants received the linen yarn at a price.”

1 KINGS 10:28

“Consequently, when the Egyptian refugee linen weavers sought a new land with a climate favourable for raising flax, making linen, and indulging their passion for freedom, legend has it that the Phoenicians transported them to the Emerald Isle. What a great day that must have been when they stepped ashore in a land whose beauty has inspired so many poets and minstrels and some of the world's great artists and hand-craftsmen.”

Other poetic references to the Island of Ireland are:

“The records fail to tell us, but Rames 11 undoubtedly lived to regret losing the linen industry through the careless application of the tax laws and the bullwhip.”

“Neither art, science, craftsmanship nor genius of any kind, whether it be the linen industry, or any other field of endeavour, can flourish or long survive under tyranny and oppression.”

How inspiring to think that Ireland was referenced in such glowing terms in 1941 at an annual dinner in The Waldorf Astoria. Further references discuss problems of political unrest.

“Neither art, science, craftsmanship nor genius of any kind, whether it be the linen industry, or any other field of endeavour, can flourish or long survive under tyranny and oppression.”

“Heavenly references to the Island of Ireland are:

“...and Solomon had horses brought out of Egypt and linen yarn: the king’s merchants received the linen yarn at a price.”

1 KINGS 10:28

“Consequently, when the Egyptian refugee linen weavers sought a new land with a climate favourable for raising flax, making linen, and indulging their passion for freedom, legend has it that the Phoenicians transported them to the Emerald Isle. What a great day that must have been when they stepped ashore in a land whose beauty has inspired so many poets and minstrels and some of the world’s great artists and hand-craftsmen.”

Other poetic references to the Island of Ireland are:

“The records fail to tell us, but Rames 11 undoubtedly lived to regret losing the linen industry through the careless application of the tax laws and the bullwhip.”

“Neither art, science, craftsmanship nor genius of any kind, whether it be the linen industry, or any other field of endeavour, can flourish or long survive under tyranny and oppression.”

How inspiring to think that Ireland was referenced in such glowing terms in 1941 at an annual dinner in The Waldorf Astoria. Further references discuss problems of political unrest.

“Neither art, science, craftsmanship nor genius of any kind, whether it be the linen industry, or any other field of endeavour, can flourish or long survive under tyranny and oppression.”

How inspiring to think that Ireland was referenced in such glowing terms in 1941 at an annual dinner in The Waldorf Astoria. Further references discuss problems of political unrest.
The Linen Trade Association commemoration continues to document many historical highlights too numerous to mention, however the last snapshot is a piece recounting the making of a film:

1936 – Irish Linen Film

“Late in 1936, the Association received a copy of a motion picture film entitled “The Wee Blue Blossom,” which had been prepared for promotional purposes by the Irish Linen Guild of Belfast. After considerable negotiation, the ownership of this film was transferred, in 1937, to the Universal Pictures Corporation where it was revised with a new script narrated by Lowell Thomas, famous American radio and screen commentator. Under a new title, “The Cloth of Kings,” the film was widely distributed as an educational short in first class motion picture theatres throughout the United States and Canada.”

Fiona McKelvie provided some beautiful documents that record the making and history of Irish Linen, too many to go through in detail. Of particular interest was “Irish Linen – Queen of Fabrics”, published by The Irish Linen Guild, with a foreword by Her Grace the Duchess of Abercorn D.B.E in 1937. Many of the evocative images are used in “The wee blue blossom film.” This book is distinct in that it represents the complete story of Irish linen manufacture.避免繁重的文字，它只是把相关故事铺在读者面前。

避免繁重的文字，它只是把相关故事铺在读者面前。

“The creation of Irish Linen begins amid the charming scenery of the Irish countryside…”

The final pages of this comprehensive report are a series of beautiful labels, artworks in their own right, and a testimony to the breadth of US interest in Irish Linen.
“Regulations and Conditions”, also supplied by Visions Support Services provided interesting insight into the documentation and environment of “all persons working in the Donacloney Power Loom Factory”.

**Hours**

- All workers shall start to work each morning at 6am and continue in employment till 5:30pm except on Saturdays when the Factory closes at 12:30am.
- Three quarters of an hour is allowed for Breakfast and the same time is allowed for Dinner except on Saturdays when only half an hour is allowed for Breakfast.

The complexity of weaving these stories, documents and narrative has revealed many complex overlaps, both within the Northern Irish landscape and wider afield. The abundance of local interest combined with the global reach is illustrated by the wealth and diversity of information brought to this roadshow. William Clark based in Upperlands, still operates as a working mill, and it was wonderful to have a visit from Bruce Clark, who has a keen interest and wealth of knowledge on the Linen Industry. Bruce kindly copies new edition copies of “Linen on the Green” written by his father Wallace Clark, a classic account of the 300 year old linen village of Upperlands. It traces the story of the Clark family and their involvement in linens over nine generations. It also describes the surrounding community and makes an important contribution to the social history. Uniquely among textile dynasties of the north of Ireland, the Clarks span many different phases of the linen story. They began in the 18th century as people who applied simple water-driven machinery to process and finish cloth, notably by bleaching and beetling it. In those early days, the cloth was marketed via Dublin and sent on to England and then the New World. The Clarks survived the boom and bust of the Napoleonic wars and were well placed to benefit from the mechanisation and globalisation which gathered pace in the 19th century. The book tells the story of Harry Jackson Clark, a gifted salesman and engineer who made his first sales trip to America in 1888-89 and helped over the next two decades to increase the firm’s turnover by a factor of ten, reaching £400,000 in 1914. Bruce Clark produced the new edition in 2016, celebrating the fact that in several different ways, the village of Upperlands continues to flourish with a lively visitor’s centre and an ongoing business that produces stunning furnishing fabrics and interlining for bespoke tailors.

Bruce delightfully dedicates the book to “To the Clady River Which has clothed and fed us all in Upperlands For 300 years”.

Fiona also supplied “Linen; The story of an Irish Industry” by William Carter, this was a general description of how Irish Linen is made. One illustration depicts an early advertisement from The William Clark & Sons Ltd business, who are still in existence and beetling, a process where the linen is dampened and wound round an iron cylinder producing a hard surface with a high lustre. It is also featured in the “Irish Linen Queens of fabrics” literature.
Marion Baur from Flaxmill Dungiven arrived with spun linen yarn, unspun flax, crocus dyed yarn from the 1930s and a section of a descriptive label dated 1928, a treasured gift to Marion from Wallace Clark. The label was difficult to decipher, but Leona Ferris at The Dungiven Library was able to provide a translation.

Marion and her husband Hermann Glaser-Baur are very passionate flax growers and linen weavers, intent on looking forward to keep the tradition alive. Glaser-Baur relates how when visiting William Clark 16 miles down the road the employees “turn to the room before beating it to a shine” as reported by Jonathan Foyle in a Financial Times article “picking up the threads” (15th September 2017).

Although this project is primarily connected to the glass plates from William Liddell, the call for the roadshows was related to all aspects of the linen industry, as all of the mills gave Northern Ireland its unique place in the history of Linen. In this digital age, it was encouraging to see so many scrapbooks being brought in by younger members of the family. Jayne McClenaghan produced a lovely visual archive of Thomas Austin (1911-1982) who from school started as a weaver for Spence Bryson and worked his way up as a head cloth passer. Spence Bryson located in Portadown have been making handkerchiefs since 16th July 1891.

The Cultra Roadshow brought so many people, artefacts, stories and the sense was people just still loved to gather and talk the linen talk. We are grateful to the Museum for facilitating this event, the first of the roadshows, starting out with no idea what would uncovered.

Roadshow 2

DONAACLONEY
14th September 2017

The second roadshow was located in Donacloney, the home town of the William Liddell factory.

Events were well recorded at the Liddell factory, in particular in honour of longevity of service. Hilda Ferguson provided a photograph of her father Frank Finlay presenting Thomas Archer with a leaving gift on his retirement, Frank was very proud to be in charge of the card room.
Fred Weir spoke fondly of the mini bus that collected the workers, he also proudly reminisced that in 1975 “the mill bought the first brand new Dorniers” and he was the man sent to England for training. This investment by Liddell shows a forward-thinking company as Dornier were a progressive German weaving textile company, who first made their name as manufacturers of aircraft but diversified to textile machinery after the first world war.

Throughout any conversation about the workforce at Liddell’s one gentleman’s name was always mentioned with the upmost respect, Kenny Allen “he’s yer man to meet”. Towards the end of the day we were delighted that Kenny Allen gently arrived, with his granddaughter, quiet at first, Kenny was soon immersed browsing through scrapbooks, reminiscing and generally being the star of the roadshow. Kenny started work at 15 and retired in 1997 after 51 years. He became General Manager of Ewart Liddell. Mr Allen sadly passed away on January 3rd 2018, the project is honoured he came to the Donacloney event and share the passion he felt for the company.

The longevity of peoples working lives with Liddell’s was evident throughout the day, Carole Harland’s mother Sadie Beckett (now 95) worked at the mill from the age of 16 to 65, she was a weaver and would have been responsible for 6-8 small looms. She became one of the first to work on the automatic looms along with Maggie Allen and Fred Weir’s sister.

Visitors brought in examples of high quality linen, some in original packaging, often having been received by their parents as wedding presents and never used.
As the historic centre of Ulster’s Linen history, Lisburn was selected for the third and final roadshow.

Day one at Cultra and Donacloney had relied on local community. In Lisburn we wanted to use a very visible public space, with no particular linen associations, in order to reach as wide an audience as possible. We therefore used Lisburn City Library, which kindly provided an airy space on the second floor. Many of the visitors who came to Lisburn had already been to Donacloy or Cultra, they returned with a few more artefacts but in the main just wanted to continue to talk about their experiences working for Liddell. It was a delight to meet a number of people whose families had also played very significant roles in the industry. It is clear that the story of William Liddell’s success is but one of many.

William Liddell (fourth generation), paid a visit to Lisburn, and although he did not work in the business still holds a keen interest in the company and has been supportive of this project. The aim of the roadshows was to try to gather images and stories not readily available to the general public. This was certainly achieved with the added unexpected bonus of a reawakening of the community spirit that was evident from the passion of the people across the industry.

The overwhelming sentiment and thus the most significant part of the roadshows was the immense pride that the linen communities still feel for the ‘staccato clatter of the flying shuttle’. They retain their sense of honour, loyalty and warmth towards many of the mill owners, and certainly treasure the camaraderie of their fellow workers.

Ledgers from the 1920s also supplied by Keith Ogle showed the workings across a diverse range of departments; designing rooms, office, watchman, yarn boiling, weaving shed, bucking loom, engine driver, fireman, cropping machine, weaving room. All carefully documented.

High quality linen was shared – like this gold award winning example.

Alison Magown brought "The Linen Houses of the Lagan Valley" by Kathleen Rankin, referencing the Liddell family tree and Banoge House, once the family Liddell family residence and now a high quality country guest house.

Alison Magown, who we first met in Donacloy, returned bringing a timekeeping book that had been her father’s responsibility in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

A Linen Gold medal from Paris 1867.

An unused figurative damask tablecloth and napkins in the design “Springtime” from the John Shaw Brown factory, in Edenderry. Inside the lid of the box is an extract of a poem by Thomas Hood from the mid 19th century describing Springtime, supplied by Fiona McKelvie.
Liam Ewing was proud to present several excellent photographs of his father demonstrating to Anthony Armstrong Jones the testing of linen fibre, this royal visit was as a result of receiving the Queen's award for Industry, while working at Lambeg testing laboratory.

Fiona McKelvie returned to bring the only examples brought in of original drawings on point paper, a method used for translating designs into the correct format for Damask weaving.