

30-years-on Ferenka workers reunite

Plant was reputed to have been built on a fairy fort

Limerick Post reporter Mary Earls recalls the day 1,400 lost their jobs

CONSIDERED the Dell of its day, there was widespread shock and devastation when the Ferenka manufacturing plant in Annacotty, announced its closure in 1975, with the loss of over 1,400 jobs.

One of the major employers in the Mid-West region and amongst the largest factory complexes in Ireland, Ferenka is often better remembered for its notorious industrial relations record and the highly publicised kidnapping of its Dutch managing director, Dr Tiede Herrema, by the IRA.

But if you were one of the thousands of Limerick people who worked at the steel cord plant during the seventies, you might be interested in attending

a Ferenka reunion which is taking place in the main bar at the Best Western Pery's Hotel, Glentworth Street, on Friday, November 16, at 8.30pm.

The social event is being organised by ex-employees John O'Brien, Dermot Waters, Michael Kennedy and Sean O'Connor. Mr O'Brien, who did his apprenticeship as a fitter in the factory, said that they decided to hold a reunion because this November marks 30 years since the closure of the factory. And he said that over 4,000 people worked there for some duration or another during its six years "and some lifelong friendships were forged amongst the various groups and departments throughout the plant".



First group of apprentices at the Ferenka plant in 1971.

"Despite a 'colourful' history and after only six years in operation, the closure announcement, in November 1977, came as a great shock to the people of Limerick and surrounding areas. In the lean times of the seventies the local economy has built a dependency on the income of the direct employees and service industries which Ferenka supported.

"And in an effort to bring these groups together, to recreate the 'Ferenka' atmosphere and to retell some of the countless stories and experiences of the workforce, a small group of us ex-employees are organising a Ferenka reunion. Past employees are urged to attend and to bring any memorabilia they may have in their possession such as photographs, newspaper clip-

pings etc. This will add to the enjoyment of what already looks set to be a magnificent event," he enthused.

Opening in 1971, the giant purpose built plant at Annacotty produced brass plated steel cord used in radial ply tyres for the automotive industry. Ferenka was a subsidiary of the Dutch multinational group AKZO International, which had its headquarters in Arnhem, Holland.

There were dozens of official and unofficial disputes over the factory's lifetime, with complaints of low morale amongst staff. However, locals in Annacotty have said that the factory was built on the site of a fairy fort and was cursed with bad luck from the start for interfering with the little people.

Taking a more common-sense approach, Mr O'Brien joked that the shift work didn't suit people's social lives at the time, leading to disputes.

"It was all stupid little things. We operated a four or five cycle shift doing two days, two evenings, three nights and two days off. So people would sometimes be working weekends, like starting on Saturday and Sunday at 4pm. At the time, everyone would like to go out drinking at the weekend and the cycle didn't suit people's social lives. But Annacotty Business Park is simply thriving now as it had been idle for four to five years after Ferenka closed. Annacotty was a real country village back then and very rural. Now it is part of the outskirts and the city has really moved out there," he said.

Recalling the kidnapping of Dr Herrema, he reported that the whole factory was in complete shock. "We really didn't think that it had anything to do with industry as it was a republican issue and our boss was a non-national, so it was a real shock," he said. The Dutch industrialist and MD of Ferenka was kidnapped by the IRA on Monaleen Road, on his way to

work at the plant on October 2, 1975.

IRA members Eddie Gallagher and Marion Coyle demanded the release of three IRA prisoners as the price for his safe return. Dr Herrema was held hostage for 36 days, and was only released after an 18-day siege of a house at Monasterevin, Co. Kildare, when his captors finally surrendered. The kidnapping attracted huge international attention and a massive countrywide search had involved thousands of gardai, supported by the army.

Gallagher's main aim was to secure the release of his loved one, Dr Rose Dugdale, who was being held in Limerick Prison in connection with a failed IRA bomb attack. Born in England, Dr Dugdale was the daughter of a British army officer who had joined the IRA out of rebelliousness and had fallen in love with Gallagher. And the plan was to trade Dr Herrema for her, along with two other Republican prisoners.

Earlier this year, Dr Herrema donated his private archive of documentation relating to the kidnapping to the University of Limerick library, marking the 30th anniversary of his ordeal.

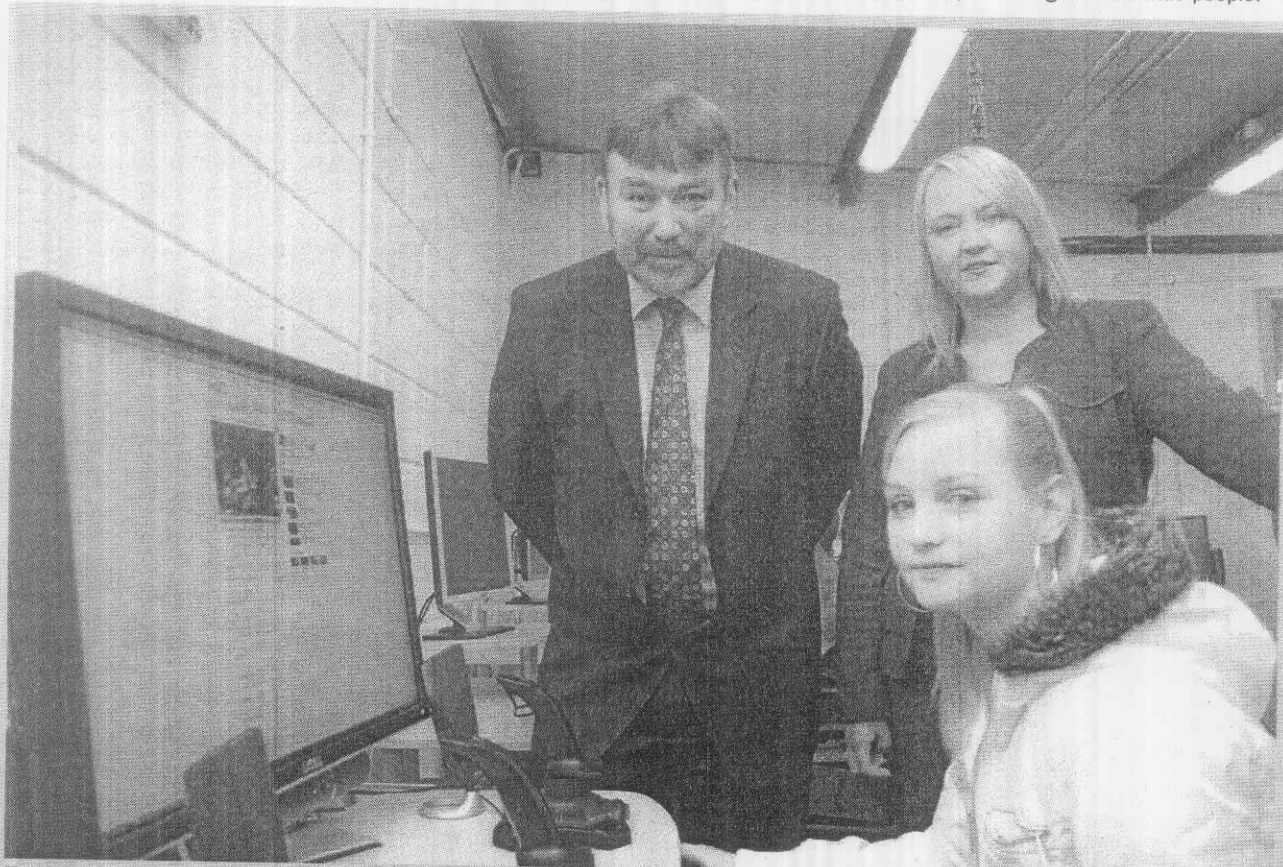
400,000 euro for St Munchin's centre

UPWARDS of 394,000 euro is to be allocated to St Munchin's Family Resource Centre in Ballynanty for a new building.

Said Minister Willie O'Dea: "I am delighted that such a substantial sum of money is being provided to support our local Family Resource Centre which helps marginalised groups combat disadvantage and improve the function of the family unit.

"This funding is vital to finance a much needed new building and is one of the highest allocations in the country".

The funding will come through the Family Support Agency which was established by the Department of Social and Family Affairs and aims to promote local family support.



Taken at the opening of the Moyross Technology Room supported by the DELL Foundation were, Nicky Hartery VP EMEA, manufacturing and business operations Dell, Elaine Slattery Moyross Development Company and Marla Maher trying out the latest technology.

Selling yourself on TV

THE search is on to find Limerick people who would love to reinvent themselves by changing their career, make the move from a job they hate or who would welcome some help in returning to the work place.

Throwing out the challenge is RTE 1, whose eight-part series, What Am I Worth, is currently seeking participants.

Promoting the programme, a spokesperson says: "Each week the programme takes a different person and helps them to radically reinvent themselves by getting that new job and bumping up their personal income price tag by thousands of euro".

Leading the overhaul is Lisa Holt, an experienced but no-nonsense careers expert who knows all the pitfalls and is used to dealing with clients who need a bit of "cruel to be kind" persuasion to get them onto a better career path.

"In each programme Lisa is presented with someone keen to improve their job lot and bring home more bacon. But no matter how hard they try, they just can't seem to bag a better paying gig or a career that they could enjoy, so Lisa is called into action and meets the failing career climber for a harsh fact-facing session, drawing up a list of dramatic steps that need to be taken before she can find a new job for her charge".

The producers are currently seeking participants and anyone interested in taking part should email jackie.s@agtel.ie

What Am I Worth? is an Independent Pictures production for RTE.

FIRST REPORT

OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE
LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE,
APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND
PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY
THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY.

The Committee appointed to enquire into the state of Manufactures in Limerick have obtained much valuable information on the subject submitted to them, and have agreed to the following Report:—

In order to render their enquiries as practically useful as possible, they deemed it advisable to direct these enquiries to the past and present state of each Trade—the changes it had undergone—and the causes of decline, where decline had occurred. With this view, a certain list of questions of very general applicability, were submitted to persons of experience and intelligence in the different Trades, and their replies obtained. Letters were also addressed to several houses that manufacture extensively in Ireland, and replies obtained from them to a different set of questions.—The information thus arrived at, relative to each Trade, shall be submitted to the Board, together with some that the Committee have incidentally fallen upon; but they wish first to make a few remarks upon a circumstance that in the course of this enquiry, has forced itself upon their attention—viz, the prejudice that seems, in many instances, to buy “the worse and the dearer article instead of the better and the cheaper.”

The Committee have made it their business carefully to ascertain how this prejudice originated, and to find out, if possible, whether or no the Irish public were justified in yielding to it; a point of the utmost importance, because, if not supported in this course by the strongest reasons, we are doing what we have been continually warned against by political economists—viz., “buying the worse and the dearer article in preference to the better and the cheaper.” We are selling our agricultural produce at a disadvantage, and we are doing it against our own feeling, because no Irishman could or would hesitate to purchase what he wanted from his own countrymen, if he knew it to be “better and cheaper” than he could buy from others. It seemed impossible to the Committee, that, where the Irishman’s facility of obtaining the material for his work was equal—his industry great—his wages generally extremely low—and his mode of living poorer and more scanty than that of almost any other country—he should not find it easy to produce articles, at least, such as are principally the work of hands, as good and as cheap as they could be produced by the natives of any other country; or that even the English themselves could compete with except in those articles that were the produce of elegant machinery, which he could not obtain possession of.—The result of their enquiry has been a conviction that the Irish people have, for many years, under an almost unaccountable delusion, been paying large sums of money for articles which could be had of a much better quality, quite as cheap, and in many instances cheaper at home. It would seem, perhaps, singular how, if this be the case, the Irish manufacturer lost the market. It appears to the Committee that there are three methods by which this was effected; and it will be recollected that these observations apply to those articles in the making of which little or no machinery is used, and which are principally the work of hands. In the first place, an article was imported of very superior quality and elegance, and when it had caught the public attention, and taken possession of the market, an article of the same name, but far inferior in excellence, followed it and kept its place.—Take the case of Leather for example. The Committee have almost the universal testimony of those who work it up into boots and shoes, that the leather imported from England, and used in this city, is generally far inferior in quality to that which comes from Cork: still, by the elegance of its finish, and a gloss raised on it, which the Irish workmen cannot easily imitate, it catches the eye, and is very frequently called for. To take, however, an instance in which the proof of quality is demonstrable, that of Candles; The Committee caused some experiments to be instituted on the duration of Kensington and Limerick Candles. They were purchased at different shops, and chosen exactly of the same size and weight (six to the lb.) The Kensington candle is known by its particular shape at the top—burns with a slightly purer light—and is generally, though this is far from being the case always, superior in whiteness. In some instances it was found far inferior in colour to the Limerick candle. The result of these experiments was—the Kensington candle burned for 8 hours 13 minutes, and cost 10d. per lb., while the Limerick candle, of the same size and weight, burned 9 hours and four minutes, and cost 8d. per lb. To be equally cheap, the Kensington at 10d. per lb. should have burned 11 hours 20 minutes; or, burning as it did, should have been only 7½d., while the other was 8d. per lb. In other experiments the difference of value was not so much, but was always in favour of the Limerick made candle. Thus, on this article alone, there is at least a loss of 20 per cent. by the preference of the English, or a loss of one lb. on every five. Yet, Kensington candles are imported and sold in Limerick, in considerable quantities, notwithstanding the superiority of our own manufacture: a strong proof how difficult it is to get the public mind clear of a prejudice once raised in favour of a particular article. Indeed, instances have come to the knowledge of the Committee where the quality of the imported candle was so evidently inferior that the manufacturer preferred laying it by, lest, from its indifferent quality, he should damage the reputation of that which he acknowledged to be his own by its being thought. Such is the force of prejudice, that he substituted one for the other. The Committee have no doubt the same prejudice has existed to an extent very disadvantageous in the cloth and other trades, though they are assured by most respectable manufacturers, that there is no ground whatever for it. In a letter which the Secretaries have had from Mr. Willans, of Dublin, in reply to some queries put to him he states that “Woollen goods of all kinds can be made in Ireland as cheap, and got up as well as in any part of England. There is nothing to prevent this.—Our fiscal regulations, as they apply to duties on Foreign materials, are the same, and the markets for them equally accessible. Coals are dearer than in some parts of the English districts. In others, and those most famous for the best cloths, we have this necessary article quite as cheap.” And again—“One of the important effects of the movement and your labours we hope will be to remove a prejudice and enlighten the judgment of consumers as to what is their best interest, not only as regards the public but themselves, by showing that articles showy and nice in appearance are not always such as will stand the test of wear.” The next method is adulteration. The degree to which this takes place in the soap imported into Ireland is scarcely credible. The adulterating substance is sometimes a fine yellow clay, very much of the colour of the soap. This imparts to it a degree of hardness and weight that render it more prized by the purchaser.—The Committee have been assured that the proportion of this clay in the soap is often from 50 to 70 per cent. and even sometimes much more; and they have caused

The Committee have been assured that the proportion of this clay in the soap is often from 50 to 70 per cent. and even sometimes much more; and they have caused some of it to be brought for exhibition to the Board-room. It is needless to say how impossible it would be for any Irish Manufacturer who wished to carry on his business honestly to contend against such practices as these. Latterly the practice has been to adulterate with a substance little heavier than water, and the presence of this is not so easily detected, as it will not sink to the bottom like clay. The Committee have been informed that persons have even been travelling in Ireland, and this City, offering these adulterating substances to the soap-boilers at 3d. per lb. The third method by which our markets are occupied, and the only one that cannot be fairly complained of is, by the force of Capital. A poor artizan in our city, though he works very cheap, must be paid for his work as he does it.—The Shopkeeper, of limited capital, finds it, therefore, an advantage to deal with an English House, which will supply the goods equally cheap, and give a twelve month’s time for the payment. The Boot and Shoe trade in his city suffer much too by these arrangements. Large quantities of boots and shoes, of very inferior quality, are brought from England under the name of “Dublin Work,” and sold at prices but little lower than the operatives of Limerick could make them for,—while Limerick made shoes, though of infinitely better quality, are disregarded: a circumstance simply owing to the salesman’s want of capital. It is not easy to suggest a remedy for this evil. It is one of the many instances in which the public seem to leave quite out of consideration, the quality of durability in relation to the price, and can only be remedied, perhaps, by directing the public attention strongly to the disadvantages of such an oversight. One of the best proofs that can be given of the superior quality of Limerick workmanship in this article is, that the late Mr. Samuel Wilson, who always particularly patronised it, was one of the most successful tradesmen in our City in that branch; and though his prices were generally higher than those of any other establishment, he left an ample fortune. A very remarkable exception, however, to this general want of discrimination is found on the part of the peasantry of the South of Ireland, in respect of the frieze which they daily wear in their coats. They pay a much higher price for this article than they could get it

from England for; but such is the superiority of the Irish frieze that the English have never been able to force their’s into the market, though if they could succeed in this, the consumption would be enormous, and the return considerable. With regard to the other two above-mentioned, the public have the remedy quite in their own hands, for they have absolutely hitherto been throwing away large sums of money on an unjustifiable and anti-national prejudice.

The Committee proceed to report on the past and present state of the different Trades, and to offer such suggestions for the removal of their difficulties, as it seems possible to put into practical operation.

(To be continued.)

who brought it to market, and frequently from Ballinasloe and Dublin. The spinning of the worsted was carried on in the counties of Limerick, Cork, and Kerry; and there were agents paid a commission for getting it done. Part of the manufacture was begun and finished in Limerick, except the spinning; another part of the stuffs and serges were sold in the greasy state in the Dublin market.

With regard to the present condition of the Trade it is totally abolished as regards the stuffs and serges, which is quite given up; but there are about 10 employers, who give occupation to about 40 wool-combers in the manufacture of worsted. The weavers of stuffs and serges understood the business of wool-combing too; and those of them who did not go in search of work elsewhere, when the weaving of these articles was no longer remunerative, turned to the combing of wool. These are, in general, fully occupied, being paid at the rate of 4d. a ball of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb weight; and can earn from 12s. to £1 a week, working with diligence for about 14 hours a day. It is remarked that in the combing of wool, machinery has not been so successful, as the article produced is of a very inferior kind. In one house, in Kidderminster, they employ about 400 wool-combers, though they keep a combing machine also at work. No change or improvement is stated to have taken place in the wool-comber's tools, and he can only produce the same quantity of work as formerly, viz.—from three to six balls a day of $1\frac{1}{2}$ lb. weight each. The other members of his family receive no employment in connection with this business, except in hand-spinning, at which a woman will earn about 1s. 6d. per week.

The decline of the stuff, serge, and woollen trade in this city is attributed to the introduction of machine spinning in England; the difference between that and hand-spinning is about 4d. in the lb. or 1d. per yard in stuffs and serges. It is stated that these articles, when made from hand-spun worsted, give much better wear, and that the country people often ask "why they do not give the wear they formerly did?" There was formerly a duty on woollens coming into Ireland, amounting to about 2d. per yard on stuffs and serges, while there was a duty of 2s. per yard on the same articles of Irish manufacture going into England. There does not seem to be much improvement in any other department than the spinning, as the weaving of these articles in England as here is mostly performed by the hand-loom.

Considering that there are no weavers at present occupied in the manufacture of these fabrics in Limerick, the Committee have no suggestions to offer to the Board as to any immediate step regarding it; but they cannot help stating their conviction that were any capitalist or company to embark in the woollen trade in this city, an effort conducted with skill and enterprise, could not fail to meet with ample remuneration. Limerick, with a large navigable river flowing to its very walls—a rising commerce—a water power so immense that it is impossible it can ever be exhausted—and an over-flowing population ready to work at almost any wages—offers, certainly, strong temptations to the capitalist. Messrs. Beale, Millner, and others, in the Queen's county, send their goods into the Deptford market, the principal manufacturing town in England in their line; they send them to America. They also send a large quantity of what are called the "tops," or combed wool for machine spinning to France or England; and it is impossible Mountmellick, Abbeyleix, or any part of the Queen's county can have the natural advantages of Limerick.

THE POTTER TRADE.

This trade gave employment to about sixty people about the year 1810, who earned from ten to twelve shillings a-week each. There are at present but two workmen engaged in it. The decline is attributable to the introduction of machinery for working and preparing the clay previous to its being moulded. It is one of the characteristics of this trade that machinery can never go farther than it has done; the hands of the workman in shaping and moulding the article can never be dispensed with; and, therefore, from the cheapness of labour, if machinery for preparing the clay was introduced into this city, it is impossible that English goods of that kind could compete with ours. Four or five clay mills put up at an expense of from £80 to £100 would give constant employment to one hundred to two hundred men. The material is on the spot, of as fine a quality as can be had any where, and, in fact, this is a trade that if pushed with spirit would be capable of giving employment to any extent whatever. It would also give much occupation to carpenters, nailors, and sandmen; all which circumstances, in the opinion of the Committee, render it strongly deserving the consideration of the Board.

(To be continued.)

FIRST REPORT LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE,

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY—OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE

(In continuation from last post.)

STUFF, SERGE, AND WOOLLEN TRADE.

Before going into the condition of these trades in our city, we may mention that the manufacture of woollen stuffs, and coarse woollen cloths, is conducted on a very extensive scale by Messrs. Beale and the Messrs. Milner and Sons, at Mountmellick, in the Queen's County, who several years since erected very spacious buildings adjoining the town, for spinning and weaving, in which nearly 2,000 persons are kept in employment. Stuff weaving is also carried on extensively at Montrath; and the manufacture of stuffs, tammings, flannels, and stocking worsteds at Mr. Mahony's factory in Cork, who states that he is able to compete with any manufacturer in those articles; also that of blankets, coarse cloths, and flannels, &c., at Mr. Scott's long-established factory in Kilkenny, who says, in a letter to our secretaries—"Blankets and flannels require very little machinery—very little skill in manufacturing—and the wool adapted to them is in a great part the growth of the country; and for any additional supplies we are nearly as convenient to the Liverpool wool market as the Yorkshiremen are; and these articles make a quick return, and are of very great consumption in Ireland." At Abbeyleix, also, on the borders of the Queen's county and Kilkenny, a town containing little more than 1,000 inhabitants, there are two woollen manufactories. A large worsted mill and factory was established some years ago near the town, which affords employment to about 200 persons in combing, weaving, and spinning yarn; and on the river Nore, which passes near the town, is a boulding mill. These few facts, which are only a portion of what might be collected on the subject, are mentioned to shew that the woollen manufacture can be carried on successfully in circumstances much less favourable than those which our city presents, either with regard to cheapness of labour or power; and not the coarser kinds alone, for at the Hibernia Mills in Dublin, cloths of all colours, and many of exceedingly fine texture, are made under the directions of Mr. Willans. The committee have before quoted this gentleman on the capability of Ireland for the manufacture of woollens in general, and they beg to add that which the Railway Commissioners expressed on the same subject in their second Report in 1838:—"Upon the whole the woollen trade of Ireland, though much less than it formerly was, is now in a sounder and healthier state than when existing under the paralyzing influence of protecting duties. The manufacturers, though few in number, carry on their business with activity and intelligence; they have adopted every new improvement in machinery, and they have generally an abundant supply of water and water power. The wages which they pay are less than those paid for similar work in England; and Liverpool and London, the great marts for Foreign wool, dyes, and oil, are fully as accessible to the Irish as to the English manufacturer. They are in consequence able to produce an article capable of sustaining competition with the best specimens of Yorkshire cloth."

This trade is stated to have been in a very prosperous condition in this city at and before the year 1794. There were then 36 employers in Limerick, employing from 10 to 150 men each; and altogether about 1,500 weavers and wool-combers were occupied in the city and liberties. The weavers were paid by the yard, and by the piece, and could earn from 15s. to 24s. a week, working, when diligent, 14 hours a day. Before the introduction of the fly-shuttle a good weaver could weave from 20 to 25 yards a day of the description of work then made here, but on finer work not so much. When the fly-shuttle was introduced, and the men became expert at it, they could weave from 30 to 40 yards a day each; the wives and children were employed as winders and warpers. Winders could earn about 3s. a week—warpers 6s. The wool was obtained from the farmers in the districts all around Limerick,

FIRST REPORT

OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE,

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY.

(In continuation from last post.)

FANCY SHAWL WEAVING, SEWING, AND EMBROIDERY MANUFACTURE.

In February, 1836, the weaving of fancy shawls, and the satin stitch manufacture were established in Limerick by a Scotch company, which at one period gave employment to about one hundred and fifty boys, apprentices to the weaving trade, and to upwards of nine hundred girls, apprenticed to embroidery. In the weaving factory sixty looms were set to work and the number was eventually increased to one hundred. At first cotton handkerchiefs and cotton shawls were manufactured. *Figured cotton was afterwards made for the Constantinople market, to which it was shipped from Glasgow; and silk and cotton shawls, such as are wrought in Paisley and other places, succeeded. This establishment was capable of producing about one thousand or one thousand one hundred shawls weekly, with the number of weavers employed, who were almost all apprentices. These might be increased to any amount requisite, as it was found the aptitude of the boys in this city to learn weaving was so great, that after having acted as draw-boys for a few weeks, they become familiar with the whole process almost imperceptibly, and under the guidance and management of the teachers and weavers are fit for the loom in an incredibly short space of time. The sewing or satin stitch and embroidery manufacture had also attained great elegance and perfection. The embroidery of muslin, as it is done in France, has hitherto baffled all efforts at successful imitation in Scotland and England; but the girls taught in Limerick soon became so perfect in this description of work as to produce specimens not inferior to the most delicate embroidered muslin sent into England from any part of France. It was, in fact, acknowledged by those most conversant in the trade, that the collars and other work made in the Clare-street factory could scarcely be distinguished from the finest French fabric, and a corresponding price was obtained for them in the London market. The facilities of extending this manufacture in Ireland are considerable. It might be introduced into all the Convent Schools throughout the south, in which it would be eagerly encouraged, and these schools might be made tributary to the great central factory in Clare street, which would command a profitable London market for the work. For the information of capitalists your Committee think it would be advantageous to give the following extracts from a report drawn up by Mr. Moncrieff, a highly respectable Belfast muslin manufacturer, deputed by the Agricultural Bank to enquire into the state of the concern in the year 1838:—

"This establishment consists of three branches—A weaving factory, a finishing factory, and an extensive sewing and embroidery factory.

"The weaving factory contains eighty looms. The operatives consist exclusively of apprentices of the male sex, and are from twelve to fifteen years of age. They are classified as draw-boys and weavers, and are indentured for terms of from five to seven years. They commence as draw-boys, and are put to learn the plain weaving in order to fit them for the higher branches of their trade. While acting as draw-boys they receive only 1s. 3d. per week wages; when advanced to be weavers they receive 2s. and 6d. additional during each successive year, until the amount reaches a maximum of 5s. The advantages of carrying on the operations of this branch entirely by apprentices, at such very low wages, when the quality of work they produce is considered, must be obvious to any one conversant with the trade, as I presume it can be easily shewn that on the weaving alone a saving of 100 per cent. is thereby effected, from the scale of prices which should be paid for the same fabrics in any manufactory in the United Kingdom.

"With respect to the quantity of work which these boys can produce, four shawls per week is assumed as an average; but when they have had a little more practice it is my conviction, the expectation of the proprietors, that the boys will more than double their present prescribed tasks, will be fully realised, and it cannot reasonably be doubted they will then also produce a more improved and perfect quality of workmanship, which will add to the intrinsic value of the varied and fancy fabrics, which the taste and ingenuity of the proprietors may induce them from time to time to place in their hands.

"The bleaching and finishing factory is a branch of this establishment, which does not necessarily, or, perhaps, legitimately belong to the proprietors in their capacity of manufacturers. I know no part of the kingdom in which a fancy manufactory unites with that of a finishing department except in the concerns in question; and it must be distinctly understood that this connection adds materially to the responsibility, expense, and trouble of the management of the general business. But from the fact of Limerick not being a general manufacturing district, it was indispensably necessary that such an appendage as the one in question should be added, to carry on the manufacture with any prospect of success. The following is a short statement of the probable expenditure and income arising from the weaving department:—

"There are about sixty looms employed in the weaving of shawls, which, when the boys become more practised, will, on a fair calculation, produce sixty shawls per day—say, thirty dozen per week. The first cost of these shawls appear to be 2s. 3d. each, or 29s. per dozen—making for thirty dozen £43 10s. They sell for 52s. per dozen—making for thirty dozen £78; being a weekly gross profit of £34 10s. From this must be deducted £7 per week, the expenditure of the loom factory, for foremen, teachers, rent, &c.; and £3 10s. for the finishing factory—leaving a net annual profit of £24 per week, or £1,301 per annum.

"In the third branch of this extensive concern, the sewing and embroidery factory, no less than nine hundred female apprentices were at one time employed;—but owing to want of adequate means the number was reduced to three hundred. The girls in this department are paid according to the quantity and quality of the work they produce, and can earn about 2s. 6d. per week each. Those now employed (three hundred) by the report of the foreman, produce 208 collars per week, at an average cost of 6s. each—making an expenditure for material and wages of £60 per week. According to a letter received by the proprietors from an extensive London establishment, it appears these collars sell in the market for 12s. each—being a gross profit on cost of production of 100 per cent; making an annual profit of £3,120 on this branch of the business, from which a weekly expenditure of £3 10s. for superintendents, rent, &c., should be deducted.

"It should be mentioned that there is a part of the finishing factory appropriated to the bleaching and finishing of embroidery; a matter of great importance, whether as it regards convenience of arrangement, securing secrecy of the patterns, economy in expenditure, and the saving of much time."

It is much to be lamented that in consequence of the total want of adequate capital on the part of the proprietors, this fine establishment is now given up, and lies for disposal in the hands of the Agricultural Bank. Nine hundred girls and two or three hundred boys are thereby thrown out of employment; and Limerick has lost a vast manufacture peculiarly adapted to the genius and skill of the people. It is to be hoped some enterprising capitalist will avail himself of the advantages which its revival would present. The concern is newly built, and sufficiently capacious. It is one hundred and forty feet in depth from front to rear, and forty feet in width, and when the work ceased contained one hundred looms mounted.

(To be continued.)

18/5/1841

STRAW BONNET MANUFACTURE.

This is a business carried on to some extent in Limerick, and might, with some little encouragement, be considerably extended. There is none more calculated to promote industrious habits among the poor; or which, with a little "fair play," would stand a better chance of competing successfully with the English market. It would, indeed, be strange if, with the great difference in the price of labour here and in England, we could not compete with them in an article, the cost of which arises chiefly from the labour expended on it; and on comparing bonnets made here with those imported it will be found that in all the really useful requisites the former are much superior, being of better texture, less brittle, and consequently more durable, and more easily re-made or altered. The only advantage the English bonnet has over them, and which does not last long, is a somewhat whiter finish—a poor equivalent, however, for the general inferiority of the material of which it is made. Irish bonnet-makers always use the best plait they can get. That in the imported bonnets, which are made up purposely for the Irish market, is more loosely made, and of very inferior texture altogether, though of an equal degree of fineness. This defect is in a great measure concealed by the stiffening and pressing used after they are sewn together, but when taken apart for the purpose of alteration or re-making it is at once apparent. The low price of this indifferent plait in England enables the dealers there to send bonnets to this country at very reduced prices, looking, perhaps, even better to the eye than the Irish, but not giving half the wear. This unfair attempt to crush a most valuable branch of our native manufacture, by imposing a bad quality of goods, made up to resemble in appearance those of a really good description, should be met by a determination on the part of the Irish public to purchase nothing but Irish bonnets, which in reality are sold cheaper than the English ones of the same quality and goodness. Unless this be done the bonnet-makers must inevitably be ruined, as they are not likely to have recourse to the same alternative of using the same poor material and imposing it in a like manner on the public. It is more necessary to hold out this encouragement, as unlike other trades it has been seriously injured by the manufacture movement, which, without causing any additional demand for home-made bonnets, has only served to awaken the fears of the English wholesale dealers, lest our market should be shut against them, to prevent which they have lately glutted it with such low-priced articles that numbers have already been thrown out of employment, and the trade must speedily be at an end in this country unless a protecting hand be held out to save it. It can sustain any legitimate competition, but cannot withstand the great sacrifices and unfair means used by English capitalists to effect its destruction. As a proof that not only bonnets but the plait itself can be manufactured here, it is ascertained that Tuscan plait made in Ireland finds its best market in London. It is there made into bonnets, and eventually returns to Ireland as English manufacture.

HAT MANUFACTURE.

This is another species of manufacture which the low rate of labour in this country would enable the capitalist to carry on with the greatest success. Messrs. Wright and Stanley, who own a large concerns in both England and Ireland, extended their business at the Mespil Factory, Dublin, very considerably since the movement in favour of Home Manufactures commenced. There are 200 men employed in this establishment, and within three months 17,953 hats have been sold—an excess by four or five thousand over the number disposed of in the same period of time before the great demand for Irish Manufacture took place. There are also hat manufactories carried on in the principal cities in Ireland, which require only local encouragement to give more extensive employment. In Limerick Mr. St. Lawrence has for years carried on a hat factory, and though able to produce work as well finished, and as cheap as English houses, he felt it hard to overcome the general prejudice which existed in favour of the foreign article. He has now, however, experienced his share of the advantage which a more just feeling on the part of the consumers has brought about, and is preparing to enlarge his concerns and increase the number of his workmen. In fact, if the public would only resolve to give a preference to Irish goods, when they can procure them as good and as cheap, manufactures of every description would spring up and extend throughout the country without the aid either of Joint Stock Companies or Boards of Trade.

(To be continued.)

11/5/1841

FIRST REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE, APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY—

(In continuation from last post.)

BRUSH MANUFACTURE.

As the manufacture of brushes is effected entirely by hand-labour and not machinery, it ought to be carried on most successfully in Ireland, where such labour can be had at a low rate. There are, nevertheless, few manufactories of the kind, but those few offer convincing proofs of the perfection which the work has attained in this country, and the facility by which it might be extended by a fair support on the part of the public.—Brushes of every description, as fine and as highly finished as any made in England, and for the most part of better materials, are manufactured on rather an extensive scale by Mr. Hastings, of Charlotte's-quay, Limerick. In fact he supplies several London and Dublin houses with his manufacture, and yet such is the prejudice in favour of English workmanship, they could not sell his brushes in either city if they bore the Limerick mark. Mr. Hastings, in common with all Irish manufacturers of moderate capital, finds a difficulty in obtaining more extensive possession of the Irish market, in consequence of the much longer credits which the English capitalists can offer to the Irish retailer. The remedy for this evil is entirely in the hands of the consumers. If they will only buy Irish made brushes, the shopkeeper must necessarily resort to the Irish manufacturer, who will then feel a pride in affixing on his work—the mark of the city in which it was made.

HOUSE-PAPER MANUFACTURE.

There is, perhaps, no one manufacture in Ireland so fully capable of competing with the English as the manufacture of ornamental paper for rooms. This gives extensive employment, and would obtain a perfect monopoly of the Irish market if a sufficient capital was engaged in it to admit of giving long credits to the retailers. Specimens of flock papers from the manufactory of Mr. M'Nulty, in George's-street, Limerick, were exhibited at the Trades' Hall, and when placed side by side with an English article, 30 per cent. higher in price, were obviously superior both in richness of colour and velvety softness. In consequence of the prejudice in favour of English manufacture, which it is the interest of the Irish consumer, who gets long credits from him, to keep up, the Irish consumer pays one-third or half more for an inferior article than he could get a superior one for, if he determined to buy Irish manufacture only.

PAPER MANUFACTURE.

No reports have been received by your Committee from the paper manufactories; but they have learned, through the booksellers, that many such concerns are successfully carried on in several parts of the kingdom. The Irish manufacturers were heretofore unable to produce the high gloss or finish observable in the English papers, but since the introduction of an improved and more expensive machinery for the finishing process, the article produced equals the latter in quality, and is something lower in price. If the public confined themselves to the use of a manufacture, the consumption of which is necessarily so immense in this country, these factories would, do doubt, be extended to every part of the kingdom, where a cheap and good water site could be procured. The ruins of an old paper mill are to be seen at Annacotty, within a few miles of Limerick, on a part of the river Mulcair, where there is water power sufficient for any manufacture whatever.

(To be continued.)

11/5/1841

FIRST REPORT LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE,

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY—
OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE

(In continuation from last post.)

TANNING TRADE.

This trade is stated to have been in a very prosperous state in Limerick from the year 1780 to 1810. There were 40 tan-yards at full work for about 20 years of that time, and about 30 for the remainder. It has been on the decline ever since. Each yard gave employment to 10 or 12 men, or from 300 to 400 men altogether. The wages were from £1 to £1 1s. a week, while yardsmen were paid from 10 to 12s. Boys from 14 to 18 years of age had about 7s. per week. About 4000 tons of bark were used, a large portion of which was imported.

At present there are but two tan-yards at work in this city, and they give employment to from 50 to 60 or 64 men, who earn from 7s. to 15s. per week each, while boys from 14 to 18 years of age earn from 3s. to 5s. per week. The home supply of raw hides is much more than sufficient. About 50 tons of Irish bark are used, and about 300 of foreign, which is imported direct from Leghorn. The raw hides and calf skins obtained in this city are said to be of a superior quality, and the decline of the trade is attributable almost entirely to want of capital, for so far as it has been prosecuted it is understood to be remunerative. If money was embarked in it, and the business carried on with spirit, there cannot be the least doubt of its succeeding. The leather produced would certainly, from its superiority, obtain a ready sale, and its manufacture would give employment to great numbers. There are at present from 45 to 50 tan-yards at work in Cork, and their facilities for importing bark and hides can be scarcely superior to ours. Indeed, their advantage over us in the prosecution of this manufacture is simply owing to their greater command of capital. On all these grounds the committee think the board would be justified in recommending it to capitalists as a branch of manufacture attended with much security, and of vast utility to the public, from the vast number of persons it would give employment to.

There are other branches of trade on which much useful information might be obtained, but the committee have not yet received reports on them. They have received reports on the past and present state of their respective trades from the Boot and Shoe-makers, the Soap-boilers and Chandlers, Nailers and Rope-makers. They have already glanced at the serious disadvantages under which the two first-mentioned of these trades labour. With regard to the others they have no practical suggestions to offer, except that the board should earnestly call the attention of the public to the needless expense they have often incurred from an unnatural and absurd prejudice, and if they cannot obtain from them, in every instance, a pledge to give a preference to the Irish article, at least persuade them to do that which will often come to the same—not to overlook the quality in relation to the price.

In connection with this part of the subject, the committee think it would be extremely desirable to have a 'Trades' Hall established in some conspicuous part of Limerick, where each artisan of the different trades could deposit the work of his hands for public exhibition, and have it sold for his benefit. Such an institution should be a good deal under the management of the trades themselves, so that if improper persons were appointed in its management they should have themselves to blame for any loss that occurred. The trades of Limerick have had from time to time an idea of establishing such an institution, and the committee believe it would require but little assistance from the public or the board to enable them to do so. One of the highest benefits of such an institution would be—that its advantages would apply more particularly to all articles of trade manufactured in Limerick itself, whether by hands or machinery, many of which have been too long and too undeservedly lying in obscurity; and it would be another considerable advantage that as there could not be the least conceivable motive for introducing articles of foreign manufacture into it, so the work of our operatives would there be properly tested, and stand or fall by its own merits.

18/5/1841

FIRST REPORT

OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE

LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE,

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY—

LACE MANUFACTURE.

The reputation which the Limerick lace as well as the embroidery has acquired within a very few years is a manifest proof of the natural genius of the people for manufacture. The lace manufacture was established in the summer of 1829 by Mr. Walker, an Englishman, who brought over twenty-two hands as teachers. The number of workers gradually increased since then, and now amounts to about eleven hundred—eight hundred of whom are apprentices, principally in Limerick—the remaining three hundred are employed at various places in the counties of Limerick and Clare. The quality of the lace manufactured in this establishment is superior to that manufactured at Nottingham, the chief town for lace in England of a similar description, and brings fully twenty-five per cent. higher price, assuming the time employed upon each piece in both places to be the same. A similar factory has since been undertaken by Mr. Lloyd, in Clare-street, and a third by Mr. Greaves, of Patrick-street, each of which gives employment to some hundred girls. The lace manufacture is considered by these gentlemen to be yet only in its infancy in Limerick, and the lace itself but partially known in London, although there, as well as in other places in England and Dublin, great quantities of inferior work are imposed upon the public by disreputable shopkeepers as "Limerick lace."

The advantage to be derived from the extension of manufactures in Ireland is no where so clearly illustrated as in the results of these few which the enterprise of Englishmen has established amongst us. Limerick contains a larger number of paupers than perhaps any other city in Ireland. The number in the parishes of St. Mary's and St. John's have been estimated by those who know their condition most intimately, at six thousand, and the total amount in the whole city probably falls little short of eight thousand. Two or three successful factories have made nearly a fourth of these independent; and if the weaving and embroidery factories had been continued, twelve or thirteen hundred more would have means of industrious support.—If the advantages which Limerick offers for various other species of manufacture should induce a few more capitalists to settle amongst us, more real good would be effected for the destitute labourers and artisans than by all the results of an improved system of agriculture or of easy emigration.

HABITS OF THE OPERATIVES.

Your Committee are unwilling to conclude without referring to one fact which has been impressed on their minds, from the report of all the large manufacturers, and is of immense importance as regards the present movement. The difficulty which capitalists meet with in successfully carrying on manufactures in Ireland has hitherto arisen in some degree from the want of that steady, continuous application, of that continued sense of accomplishing a certain quantity of work within a certain time, on the part of the operatives, which is common to all countries in the infancy of manufactures. If a capitalist finds it necessary to produce a certain amount of work weekly, to meet the demand of his customers, and he fails in executing their orders through the irregular attendance of the operatives, he is seriously injured, and this injury is not materially lessened by his having it in his power to dismiss the irregular parties, because it may be difficult to obtain trained or practised hands in their place.

In commenting on this obstacle to the prosperity of manufactures in this country, your Committee are influenced by a friendly spirit, and, in justice to the improved habits of the operatives since intoxicating drinks were abandoned, are ready to acknowledge that their observations apply to times which they hope are for ever gone by, rather than to the days we now live in.

(Concluded.)

FIRST REPORT LIMERICK BOARD OF TRADE,

APPOINTED TO INQUIRE INTO THE PRESENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF IRISH MANUFACTURES, ESPECIALLY THOSE CARRIED ON IN LIMERICK AND ITS VICINITY—OF THE COMMITTEE OF THE

(In continuation from last post.)

LINEN AND COTTON TRADE.

Whatever may have been the cause why no effort was made to support or revive the Cotton and Linen Trades in Limerick, since the introduction of spinning machinery into England, it is of importance to the public, and to the capitalists to know, that there is natural inaptitude in the circumstances of our City for the successful prosecution of such improved methods.—This is clearly shewn by their being carried on successfully in places, the natural advantages of which cannot be compared to ours. At Montrath, in the Queen's County, there is a factory in which the spinning and weaving of cotton goods is carried on to such an extent as in both departments to give employment to between 600 and 700 people; and the proprietor, Mr. Greenham, states, in a letter which the Secretary has had from him, that he is able to vie in price and quality with any English or Scotch goods. At Mountmellick, besides the manufacture of Wollen Stuffs and course Wollen Cloths, which give employment to a vast number, the weaving of Cotton affords occupation to about 2000 people.

The Linen Trade in this City is stated to have been in a flourishing condition in 1793, and to have continued so until the Linen Hall was dissolved. The Trade became gradually deteriorated, by the admixture of Cotton in the pieces; and, finally, the Cotton manufacture entirely took its place, and was in a prosperous state about the year 1807. There were then 24 employers in Limerick, 500 weavers, 250 winders together with many hundred spinners about the City and Liberties. The weavers were paid from 4d. to 8d. per yard, according to the description of yarn, and could earn each a pound or a guinea a week, weaving from 5 to 10 yards a day, according to the kind of yarn. No machinery was used but wheel, reels, and looms. The winders were paid by the employers generally by the quarter. The flax was grown in the country—the Cotton imported.

At present there are but two employers in Limerick. The number of weavers is about 40, but these are most of their time idle. About 18 months ago there were 150 at work; most of them are now distributed over the country at labouring work.

The present manufactures are principally cotton shawls, for which they are paid 3d. by the square; and a workman constantly employed could earn from 7s. to 10s. a week, working from 12 to 15 hours a day; the produce of a very diligent day's work being from 6 to 7 square handkerchiefs. The yarn is at present spun by machinery in Dublin and Belfast, where some of the best in Europe is manufactured.

The decline of these trades in Limerick is attributed to the various improvements in spinning and weaving in England, but particularly to the raw material being spun so extensively and so much cheaper by machinery than it can be done by hand—the natural effect being, that when the spinning is given up in any district, or departs from it, the weaving is sure to follow. If spinning machinery existed in Limerick, the weavers here being able to work as low as those of any place, need fear no competition. Limerick possesses as many advantages for such machinery as any other city, and far greater than many where it exists, and, therefore, offers a great temptation to capitalists to embark in it.—But, it appears to the Committee, from all the information they have been able to obtain on the subject, that it would require a considerable capital to do successfully, a large machine being less expensive in proportion to its performance, drives a small machine out of the field, just as a small machine drives out hand-spinning.

It would, therefore, in the opinion of the Committee, be useless to attempt such a thing, unless it was done on a proper scale. These observations, however, do not apply to the spinning machinery necessary for the sacking trade; such machinery could be procured for a moderate sum compared to the other. There is not the least doubt that it would yield a very fair return on the capital. It would give full employment;—and in the opinion of persons engaged in the trade, need fear no competition. The Committee thinks it exceedingly important, that steps should be taken at once to establish such machinery. As, however, it must necessarily take some time to do so, and it is extremely desirable to procure immediate occupation for the poor weavers of this City, the Committee beg leave to recommend, in the strongest manner, a proposal which has been laid before them by a person of much information and experience in this business—which is, that a Joint Stock Company be immediately formed, said Company to purchase linen and cotton thread in Dublin or Belfast, and at once employ all the Limerick weavers, at shawls, barragons, and tickens—appointing a proper ware-house where the thread could be supplied to the workmen, and subsequently sold to the shopkeepers of the city and surrounding towns and villages, allowing the workman such prices as would leave a profit of 20 per cent. on the capital. Thus with a very moderate sum immediate employment and ample pay would be given to operatives, and the best proof the Committee can give that this would succeed is, that it is actually put in practice by persons not many miles from Limerick, and, indeed, it would be followed by the weavers themselves if they only had money to purchase the yarn.

The Committee have received another proposal from the same hand which in their opinion, is highly deserving the consideration of the Board—viz., the promotion of the Linen and Damask business. It is proposed to be worked by apprentices, like the Clare-street Factory, and, if the per centage of profits on the capital were but one-sixth of what they are estimated at in the subjoined statement they must be considered as ample.

To illustrate which—the profit on 30 looms for one year would be as follows:—

To make one piece of Damask, containing 75 yards, will require 375 hanks of thread, which at 6d. per hank, is £. 9 7 6
Bleaching do. at 6d. per do 1 12 6

Sold bleached at 6s. 6d. per yard £. 11 0 0
24 7 6

Leaving a profit of £. 13 7 6 on one piece.

One loom will turn out six such pieces in the year £0 5 0
Five looms, therefore, would produce £. 401 5 0
Five napkin looms would leave a profit of 20% each 100 0 0

TWENTY LINEN LOOMS.
Fifty-two yards, one yard wide, 1600, will take 104 hanks of thread, at 6d. per hank £. 2 12 6
Bleaching do. at 3d. per yard 0 13 0

The piece would thus sell at 2s. per yard £. 3 5 0
Leaving a profit of £. 1 19 0

One loom would turn out 11 such pieces—20 looms, therefore, would earn 429 0 0

The above 30 looms would require 50 apprentices, to get 2s. per week for the first 2 years, £. 260 0 0
Foreman's wages 80 0 0
Shop to contain the above looms, 30 0 0
Ware-room and salesmaster .. 50 0 0

£. 420 0 0 420 0 0

Clear Profit £. 510 5 0

The cost of 20 linen looms in working order is £. 60 0 0
Five damask do. and machinery 60 0 0
Five napkin do. and do 30 0 0

Capital to carry on the above work £. 150 0 0
700 0 0

£. 850 0 0

Thus on a capital of £850 a profit of £510 would be realised, or about 60 per cent.!!

The Committee would suggest to the Board whether it might not be possible, by purchase or otherwise, to obtain the use of the excellent factory in Clare-street for any of the above purposes. And with regard to the question of executing any species of manufacture by apprentices only, they will hereafter, in giving an account of the Fancy Shawl waving in this City, after the testimony of a person of much experience in the working of that Factory.

(To be continued.)

Traders.
The Limerick Reporter
30. 4. 1841.