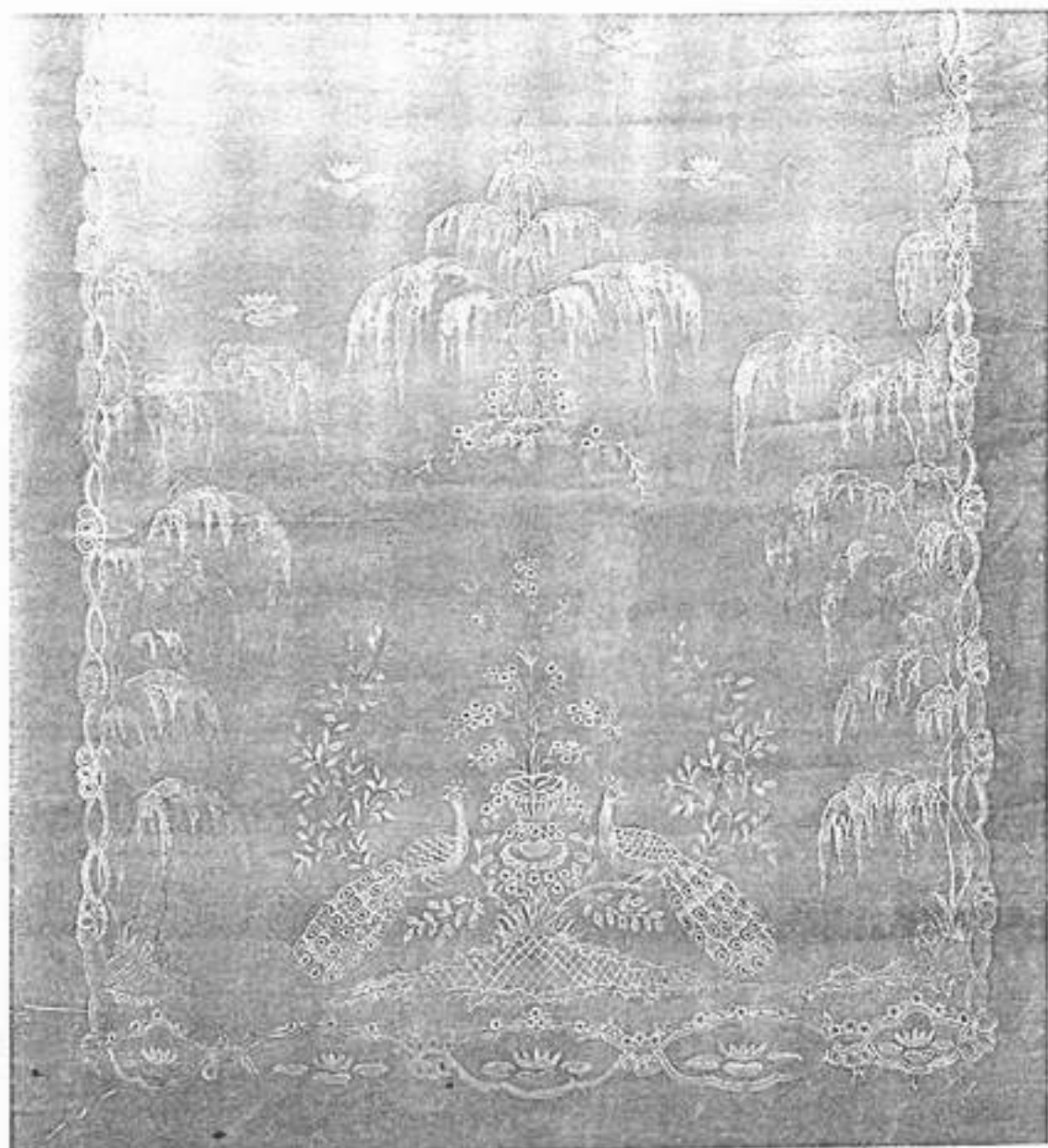


lace classes, and by their intelligence and industry became able to add from ten to fifteen shillings per week to the family income".<sup>13</sup> Very often the money saved was used to pay passages to America.

Limerick, like other Irish Laces, was sold at exhibitions in Dublin, Cork, London, Paris, New York, Chicago, St. Louis and Milan, as well as at retail outlets. Goblets of Milk Street, London, and Dublin shops like Walpoles of Suffolk Street, and Forrests and the Irish Lace Depot in Grafton Street, all sold quantities of Irish Lace. The Irish Lace Depot, whose interior is illustrated here, was purchased by Lady Aberdeen from the family of the lace dealer, Ben Lindsay, on his death. Apart from its sales, it provided another important service, because it supplied designs and materials. Lady Aberdeen also organized a sales outlet in London and part of the profits from the Chicago Exhibition was used to set up a depot there.

Nellie O Cleirigh



Design for stole or scarf. Probably College of Art, Dublin, c.1900. Photograph Anthony Hobbs.



Tambour cape. Note that swags on fringe are scaled down versions of the main garment, c. 1900.

NOTES

1. *Limerick Chronicle*, 4 Nov. 1843.
2. *Ibid.*
3. Mr. and Mrs. S.C. Hall, *Hall's Ireland*, 3 Vols., London, 1841 (condensed edition, 2 Vols., London, 1984, edited by Michael Scott).
4. *Ibid.*
5. *Ibid.*
6. 1853 Dublin Exhibition Catalogue.
7. Mrs. Meredith, *The Lace Makers, Sketches of Irish Character with some account of the effort to Establish Lacemaking in Ireland*, 1865.
8. Mrs. Vere O'Brien, "The Limerick Lace Industry", *The Irish Homestead*, June 1897.
9. *Journal of the Women's National Health Association*, Countess of Aberdeen (ed.), Dublin, Maunsell & Co., 1911.
10. Convent of Mercy, Kinsale, Co. Cork annals (unpublished).
11. *Ibid.*
12. Alan S. Cole, *A Renaissance of the Irish Art of Lace-making*, London, 1888.
13. Congested Districts Board records.

Information for this article was also supplied by the nuns of the Good Shepherd Convent, Limerick; the Mercy Convent, Kinsale; the records of the Congested Districts Board; the catalogues of the exhibitions held in Dublin and Cork; *Ireland Industrial and Agricultural*, William P. Coyne (ed.), (Superintendent of Statistics and Intelligence branch of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland), Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland, Dublin, Cork and Belfast, 1902; *Irish Rural Life and Industry*, W. T. M.F. (ed.), (presumably W. T. McCartney-Filgate), foreword by the Countess of Aberdeen, Dublin, Healy's, 1907.

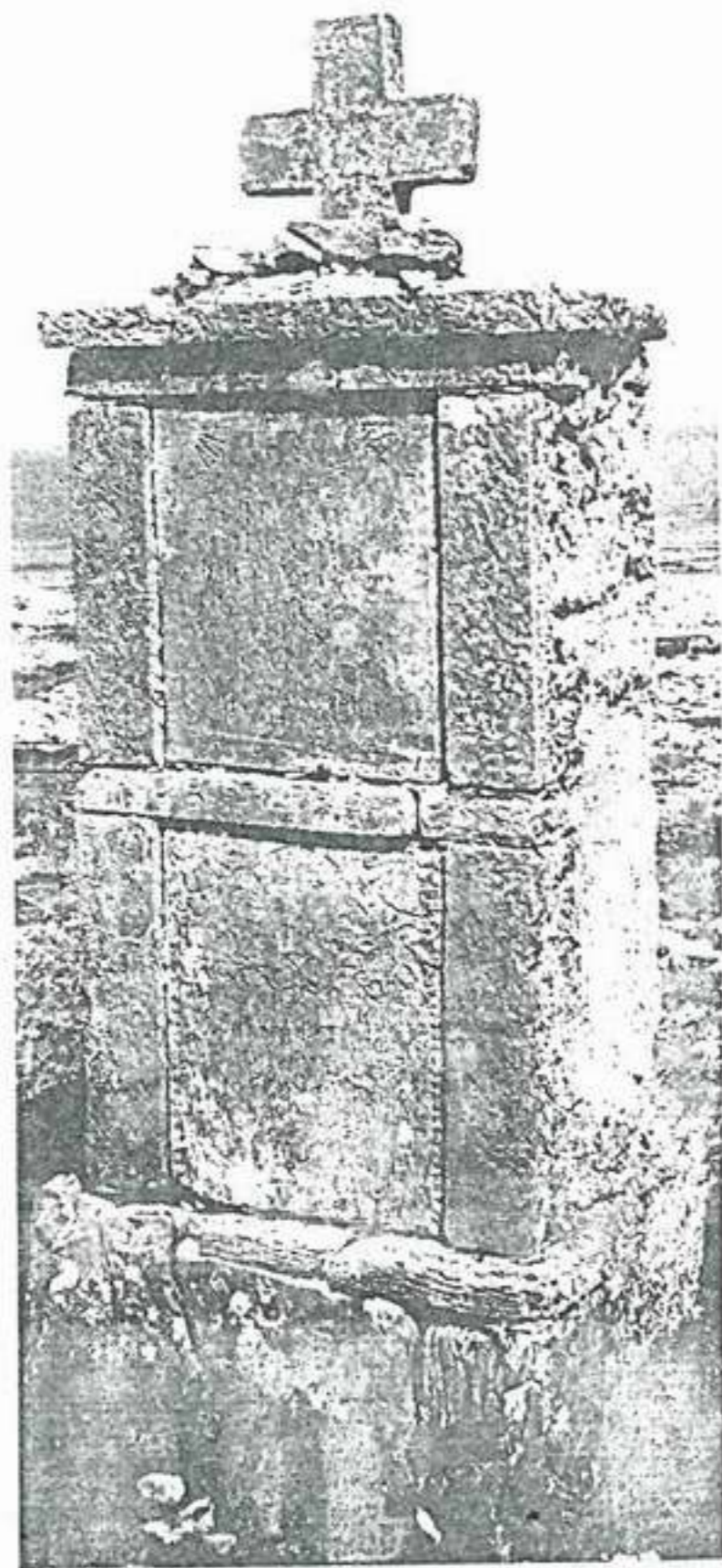
APPENDIX

Extract from List of Exhibitors at the Irish International Exhibition, Dublin, 1907.

LACE AND CROCHET				
NAME OF INDUSTRY	ADDRESS	NATURE OF MANUFACTURE	NO. OF HANDS	REMARKS
Urker Lace Class	Crossmaglen, Co. Armagh	Carrickmacross Lace	100	Ready market and more labour available.
Co. Cork Industrial Association	22 South Mall, Cork	Lace and Crochet	—	do.
Riverstown Lace Class	Riverstown, Co. Cork	Limerick Lace	14	do.
Blarney Crochet Cottage Industry	St. Ann's Hill, Co. Cork	Crochet	25	do.
Convent of Mercy	Queenstown, Co. Cork	Carrickmacross and Crochet	60	Open for orders.
St. Joseph's Convent School	Kinsale, Co. Cork	Limerick Lace and Crochet	140	do.
Youghal Co-operative Lace Society	Youghal, Co. Cork	"Needlepoint" and Crochet	500	Ready market and more labour available.
St. Joseph's Technical School, Convent of Mercy	Bantry, Co. Cork	Limerick Lace and Crochet	30	do.
South Presentation Convent	Douglas Street, Cork	Limerick Lace, Point Lace and Crochet	58	do.
Presentation Convent	Bandon, Co. Cork	Carrickmacross Lace and Crochet	30	do.
Macroom Convent Industrial School	Macroom, Co. Cork	Limerick Lace	13	Open to orders.
Lace Class, Crawford Municipal Technical Institute	Emmet Place, Cork	Limerick Lace and Crochet	65	Ready market for goods, and more labour available.
Convent of Poor Clares	Ballyjamesduff, Co. Cavan	Crochet	34	Ready market and more labour available.
Mrs. Vere O'Brien's Lace School	48 George Street, Limerick	Limerick Lace (Run & Tambour)	60	Ready market for goods.
Borris Lace Industry	Borris, Co. Carlow	Lace	14	Ready market, but no more labour available.
Corris Cottage Industry	Bagenalstown, Co. Carlow	Crochet	3	Open for orders.
Kilgobbin Lace School	Foxrock, Co. Dublin	Carrickmacross Appliqué	7	do.
Craugh Lace School	Tibradden, Rathfarnham, Co. Dublin	Carrickmacross Lace	4	Ready market.
St. Mary's Catholic Institution for the Deaf and Dumb	Cabra, Dublin	Limerick Lace	8	Ready market and more labour available.
Crochet School, Sisters of Charity	Howth, Co. Dublin	Crochet	24	do.
Royal Irish Industries Association	76 Grafton Street, Dublin	Lace and Crochet	—	—
Co. Donegal Joint Technical Instruction Committee:-				
Falcarragh Lace Class	Falcarragh, Co. Donegal	Lace and Crochet	30	do.
Lace and Crochet Class St. Louis Convent	Bundoran, Co. Donegal	Carrickmacross and "Bundoran" Crochet Appliqué	100	do.
Ballyshannon Lace School	Co. Donegal	Crochet	84	do.
Ballybofey Crochet Class	Co. Donegal	Crochet	40	do.
Letterkenny Crochet Class	Co. Donegal	Crochet	39	do.
Drumbeg Industry	Mount Charles, Co. Donegal	Greek Lace	10	Open to orders.
Strangford Lough	Oldcourt, Strangford, Co. Down	Carrickmacross and Crochet	85	Ready market and more labour available.
Fermanagh Co. Committee of Agriculture and Technical Instruction:-				
Countess of Erne's Home Industry	Derrylin, Belturbet, Co. Fermanagh	Crochet	50	Ready market (through Countess of Erne)
Strabreena Lace Class	Co. Fermanagh	Crochet	60	Ready market and more labour available.
Tempo Crochet Class	Co. Fermanagh	Crochet	50	do.

chapel and domestic living rooms in house-like structures that accept something of their role as semi-public buildings; many were in fact hollowed out of real country houses. Large scale Government involvement in the provision of institutions also led to some serious Neo-Classical architecture. Barracks, a type common since the sixteenth century in Ireland, were built as terraces of barrack blocks forming large open courts within a light external wall; Crinkell Barracks in Birr was one example, now demolished. Jails offered similar opportunities for invention, generating perfect plans decorated with all the terror of Piranesi. Longford's had a semi-circle of cell blocks cranked around the focus of Governor's House and Chapel; at Nenagh, Co. Tipperary, they radiated from it.

To complete the picture, it is important to examine the architecture of mills and warehouses—often unseen in the landscape precisely because of their gigantic scale. With stables and barns they have a magnetic attraction for their insouciant concern with pure structure—making an abstractly perfect architecture. As buildings, they have all the excitement of a new technology, with high Cartesian grid elevations of regularly punched windows barely held together with timber floors, columns and metal ties threaded through from side to side—the machinery holding the structure and vice-versa. While their plans were utilitarian (rectangles and T plans again) based on process and the flow of water, they can



Inishmore, Aran Islands, Co. Galway. Wayside Tomb—an Irish Via Appia.

be discussed here not least for their builders' concern to transform some of them by an extension of the language of architecture. Slane Mill in Co. Meath—a building of world importance—transformed a T plan into a full, if attenuated, Classical elevation with pediment and string courses—a parody of the country house. New Haggard nearby did the same with lowering castellations to make a building more castle-like and Romantic than many more considered works of architecture.

The final typological group—monuments, and particularly burial monuments—make up an evocative tradition on the edge of architecture, all the more powerful for their exalted use. Prehistoric mounds and tombs have a long progeny in Ireland—in the slight, but powerful presence of killeens, also in finely incised slabs, exotic box tombs and the tomb houses of Co. Kerry. If a study of building typologies does anything, it releases the mute power of architecture and the suggestive relationship between forms—also the existence of an Irish way of building—an interpretation of typologies—within the European tradition. Its value is as a mark of what is important in our surroundings, and a reminder that those things form an architectural tradition that can be incorporated into our culture. By understanding the roots of that tradition, it becomes a powerful tool for the future.

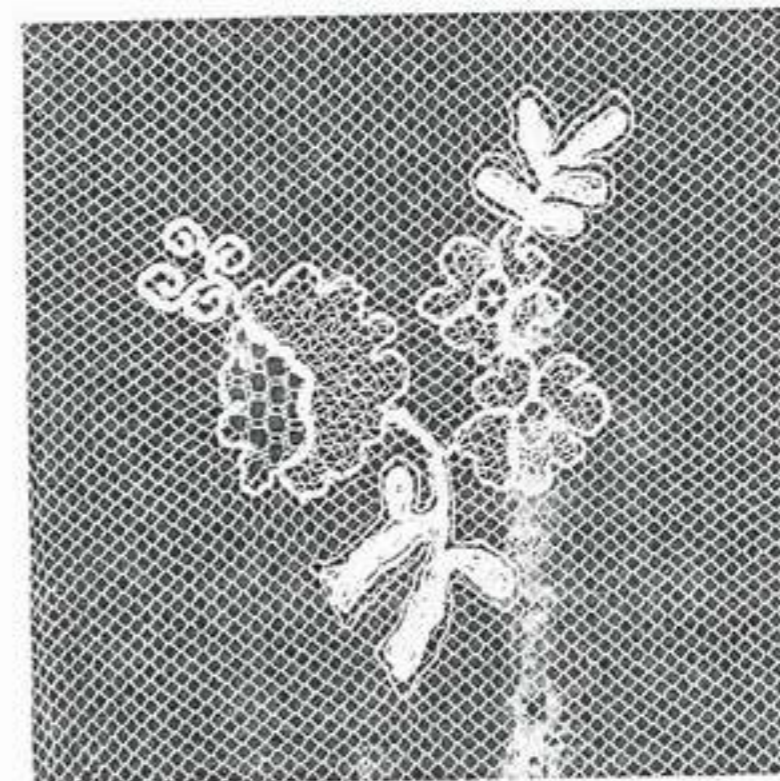
Niall McCullough  
Valerie Mulvin

LIMERICK LACE

The making of Limerick Lace became possible when machine-made net became readily available. Limerick Lace is a form of embroidery on net, being either chain-stitch (tambour) or darned net, or a combination of both techniques. Sometimes *appliqué* was used and even net *appliqué* on net, which made a gossamer fabric. Like Carrickmacross Lace, Limerick Lace had fillings of embroidery stitches, which were intended to 'embellish' the fabric.

Limerick Lace was the first lace-making venture set up on a truly commercial basis. In 1828 Charles Walker, a native of Oxford, whose wife's family owned a lace factory in Nottingham, brought about twenty-two girls to Limerick to teach lace-making. He was probably attracted by the large population of unemployed females providing cheap labour. However, his investment was very substantial, as according to the *Limerick Chronicle*,<sup>1</sup> he had expended the sum of £20,000, a very considerable sum at that time, in establishing the lace factory. After a difficult start, the factory achieved considerable success. Walker

Nellie O Cléirigh, the author of *Carrickmacross Lace* published by Dolmen Press in 1985, writes here of the manufacture of Limerick Lace, a flourishing industry which employed many hands in the last century.



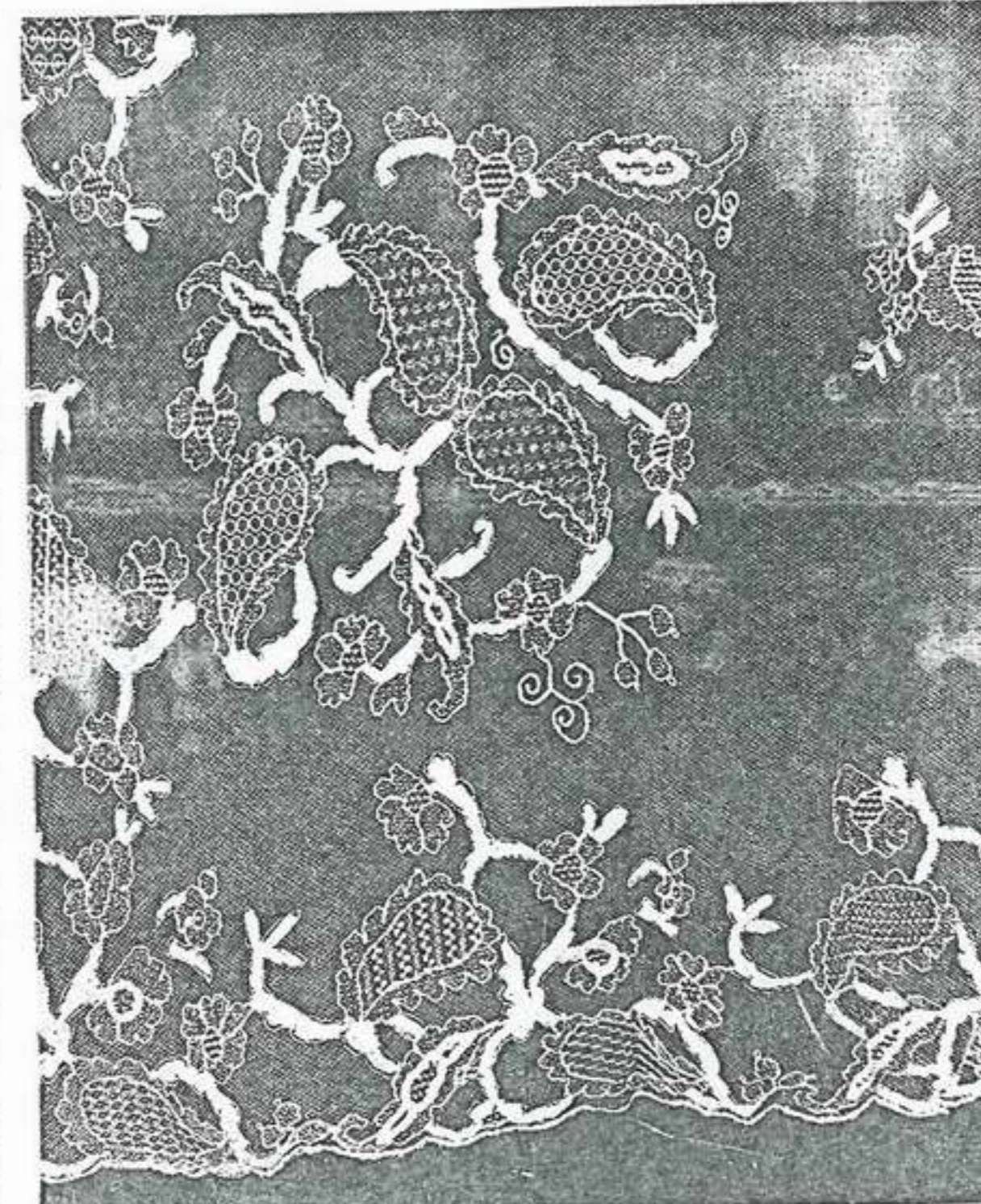
Detail of wedding veil or train in tambour. The same design is used in each case but filling stitches vary. Photograph Anthony Hobbs.

later offered a large wager that he would select a hundred Irish girls from among his workers, who would produce any given piece of lace superior to any similar work made by the same number of girls from France, Flanders, Saxony or Germany. Unfortunately, we don't know the result of the wager! Charles Walker appears to have been a man of artistic talent. According to his obituary he "engaged extensively in several works connected with art and literature".<sup>2</sup>

Walker was associated in his early venture with a Mr. Henning, an exclusive London lace merchant. While this connection lasted, there was a ready market in England for the work made in Limerick, but with Henning's failure in business some years afterwards, the entire responsibility of marketing the product fell upon Walker, who opened a London outlet on his own account. He also had Limerick Lace taken through England by hawkers. Walker brought to Limerick another Englishman named Lloyd to help and this man later opened a factory for himself. A third, Leicester Greaves of Cork, also ran a factory for



Wedding veil or train in tambour. Note use of thick thread. Photograph Anthony Hobbs.



Detail of wedding veil or train in tambour. Note at least eleven different filling stitches and some use of thick thread. Photograph Anthony Hobbs.

some years and was then succeeded by his widow. A Mr. M'Clure, a Mr. Forrest of Limerick and Dublin, and a partnership of Lambert and Bury were all also engaged in the trades as well as various smaller producers, including John Bradley and John Robertson.

The numbers employed were amazingly high. Lambert and Bury, who were in Glentworth Street, employed seven hundred; Forrest's in Abbey Court five hundred; M'Clure in Clare Street two hundred and fifty; Mr. Rolf in Patrick Street sixty; Mrs. Leicester Greaves thirty; these were all first class workers. A further thirty persons employed three hundred young females who worked in their own homes.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Hall, who toured Ireland in 1837 and published an account of their travels, have left us a very vivid description of the lace industry in Limerick. They recorded that the standard was then so high that the Limerick manufacture not only rivalled, but sur-

passed, that of any district in England. In 1844 they reported that about seventeen hundred females were employed in the various branches of the trade "consisting of tambourers, runners, darners, menders, washers, finishers, framers, muslin-embroiderers and lace open-workers".<sup>3</sup> The ages of the workers varied from eight to thirty years. Presumably, after thirty their eye-sight was no longer good enough, though Limerick workers fared better than Brussels lace-makers who often went blind at twenty-one. The average scale of wages was 3 shillings and 6 pence but some earned as much as seven shillings per week. The social consequences of the lace industry are well described by the Halls that: "The influence of these establishments has been largely felt in Limerick and its vicinity. The cottages of the workers are conspicuous for neatness and good order; and very many of the apprentices have sums varying from One Pound to Twenty deposited in the Savings Bank, a con-

siderable number of them earning more than a day labourer and the employment continuing during the whole year".<sup>4</sup> The Halls also noted "The utmost attention is paid to the social and moral condition of the workers; and good habits are studiously taught them as well as their business; they are remarkably clean and well ordered; and their appearance is healthy and comfortable. Their health is carefully watched by medical practitioners, who attend upon them in their houses in cases of illness, the expence of which is defrayed by the masters".<sup>5</sup> One other significant piece of information supplied by the Halls is that Mr. Lloyd annually visited Brussels, Caen, and other parts of France to collect new designs, thus being able to produce specimens as elegant and highly-wrought as any continental pieces. Lloyd seems to be the only manufacturer recorded as visiting the Continental lace-making areas.

Some idea of prices at this period and

their relative value can be got from Mrs. Hall's purchases in Limerick. She bought two lappets for which she paid 8 shillings and 6 pence and 7 shillings and which she considered such value that she would have paid half as much again for inferior articles in London. An elaborate collar in six different stitches and inlaid with the finest cambric cost 10 shillings as against 16 shillings in London. Other purchases were a muslin collar made in Co. Clare at 15 shillings, a habit-shirt at 10 shillings, a canezone at 12 shillings 6 pence and a beautiful shawl for 1 pound, 9 shillings, but this last was a wholesale price. Mrs. Hall was, of course, buying all these goods at source; before they reached the English market, many middlemen would have taken their profit as well as the shopkeeper. In fact, at this period good Limerick Lace was not considered cheap.

The industry in Limerick continued to prosper, though as early as 1838 on their return visit, the Halls could comment

that a vast quantity of inferior material was constantly thrown on the market. The standard seems to have fallen in the next few years. There was no attempt to change or improve designs. After Walker's death in 1843, some of his best workers returned to England but we know for certain that large quantities of lace continued to be made in the city, because in the catalogue of the Dublin Exhibition of 1853, fifteen hundred were said to be employed and the firm of Lambert and Bury were quoted as "doing a large export business".<sup>6</sup>

The catalogue of the 1853 Exhibition contained some very significant information for the lace trade in listing such exhibits as shawls, scarves, flounces and other garments of machine-made lace where only the edging was finished off by hand. From this time onwards the embroiderers of Limerick, as elsewhere, would have to compete with the machine and therefore be obliged to produce work very cheaply or of very superior quality.

Mrs. Meredith's book deals with all the kinds of lace made in Ireland when it was published in 1865. Mrs. Meredith had no time for Limerick Lace which she dismissed as "having run its course before crochet began".<sup>7</sup> It must be admitted however, that this was probably the lowest period in the nineteenth century for Limerick Lace.

The catalogue of the 1853 Dublin Exhibition contains a second significant entry: No. 41 from Madame de Beligand, of the convent of the Good Shepherd, Limerick, who showed ecclesiastical vestments, a Brussels Lace veil, and several patterns of Valenciennes Lace. All these laces were bobbin or pillow lace and were a different technique from Limerick Lace. Madame de Beligand, a native of France, was the second Superior of the Good Shepherd order in Limerick; she served there from 1848 to 1860 when she went to govern their convent at Aix-la-Chapelle. In Limerick, Madame de Beligand was most anxious



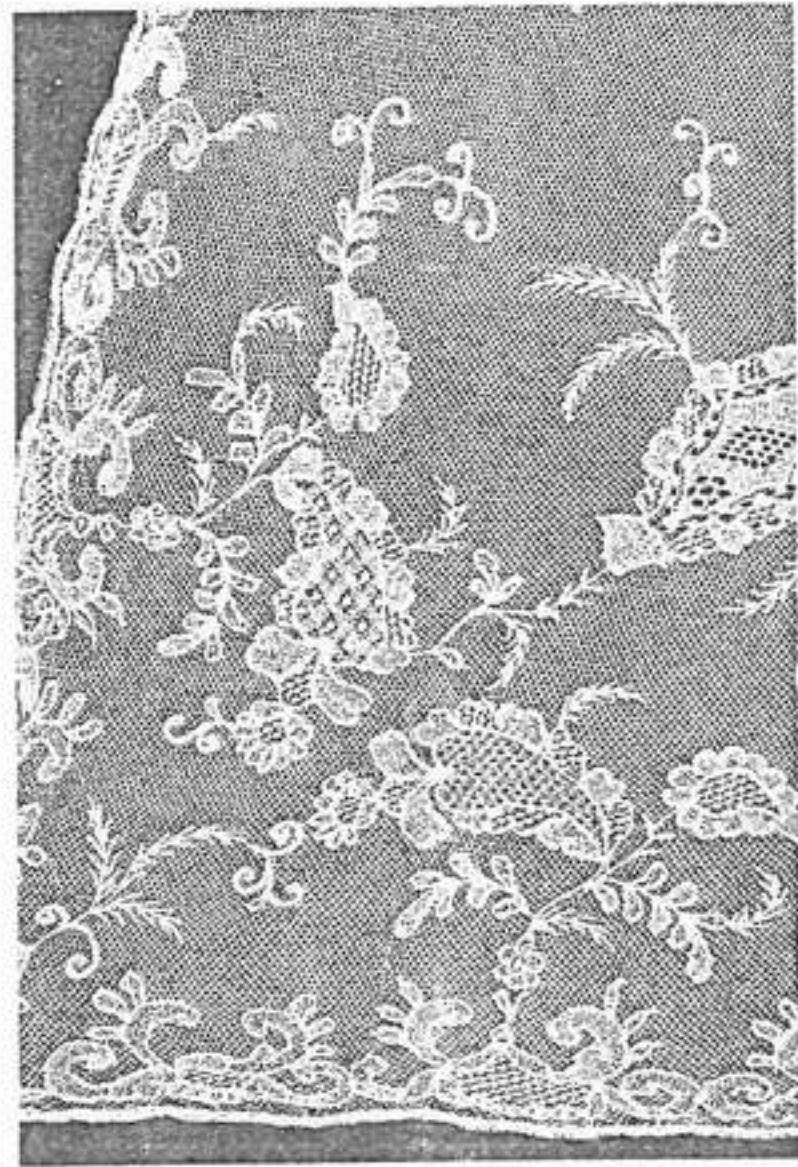
Interior of Irish Lace Depot, 76 Grafton Street, under the patronage of Lady Aberdeen, about 1900. from Lord and Lady Aberdeen, *We Twa*, Glasgow, 1925.



Convent workroom at St. Joseph's Mercy Convent, Kinsale.

to procure a lace teacher so that the "Penitents" as the unmarried mothers and ex-prostitutes housed at the convent were euphemistically called, could be employed at lighter work than was available in the laundry. Arrangements were made through the order's convents in Belgium, at Namur and Mons; in a short time Amelie van Verevenhaven, an expert in Valenciennes Lace came to the Limerick convent. Subsequently she became a member of the community and on 27th October 1850 received the religious habit, taking the name of Sister Marie de Ste. Philomène. The tradition of lace-making with bobbins was thus set up at the Good Shepherd Convent and continued for over forty years until the nuns switched to Limerick Lace making about 1890. Lace is still made at the convent today by a few elderly workers who use the traditional frames but who make only darned net work, or run-work, as it is also called. Tambour lace-making does not appear to have survived World War I. The lace room is open for business in the tourist season. Most of us would love to receive any piece made there, even if it was not as elaborate as the beautiful christening robe given by the late Mrs. Frances Condell to the late President Kennedy on his Irish visit. A Lace Makers Co-operative has recently been established in Limerick.

In the early 1880s there was a big revival in the making of Limerick Lace and Carrickmacross Lace which was also a form of embroidery on net. This renewal was mainly due to the efforts of Mrs. Robert Vere O'Brien of Ballyalla House, Ennis, Co. Clare, near Limerick. She came to live at Ballyalla in 1893 and used her remarkable practical and artistic abilities to revitalize the industry. In an article in *The Irish Homestead* in June 1897, she described how her first efforts to get the finer kinds of lace made again were frustrated by difficulties in obtaining really good net and fine thread.<sup>8</sup> New designs she could supply herself. Most important was the establishment of a lace-training-school in Limerick under Mrs. Vere O'Brien's direct supervision in 1893. Mrs. Vere O'Brien was also associated with the Convent of Mercy, Kinsale, where she had a stitch named after her, surely the highest tribute that could be paid to any designer. More important was her association with the committee to improve the design of Irish Lace set



Corner of flounce of stole.  
Photograph Anthony Hobbs.

up by Alan Cole of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London and by James Brenan, who worked in the Colleges of Art in both Waterford and Cork before becoming Head of the College of Art in Dublin. Several of the names on this committee appear on every charitable organization of this period but most had some connection with the lace or embroidery industries. The Countess of Aberdeen, wife of the Viceroy, was involved in health improvement movements like the Women's National Health Association, the Baby Clubs and the early sanatoriums, as well as in promoting the manufacture of lace and linen; Miss Keane of Cappoquin came from a family involved in Irish Lace making before 1800; the Bagwells of Clonmel had set up a coloured embroidery industry in Marlfield; Mrs. Arthur Kavanagh's family in Borris were responsible for a tape-lace industry. Funds came from a variety of sources, some outside the country. The Skinners Company, Messrs. Marshall and Snelgrove, Baroness de Rothschild and Edward Guinness were among the most famous sponsors.

In the 'Slainte' exhibition, organized by Lady Aberdeen and held in Ballsbridge, Dublin, in 1911, Mrs. Vere O'Brien's Limerick Lace School, of 48

George Street, Limerick, had a stand supervised by Miss N. Dunne, the "Courteous Manager" of the school. The magazine produced by the organizers of the exhibition, quoted that "the Lace itself was its own recommendation, for it would have been impossible to get together a more exquisite collection than was shown here. The many visitors who examined the pieces were not in the least surprised to hear that during the past 25 years the School had annexed a large number of prizes and awards."<sup>9</sup>

Mrs. Vere O'Brien's contribution to Limerick did not end with her work for lace. She also set up the Clare Embroidery Industry at Ballyalla, which specialized in coloured work and which survived up to the 1930s.

Like other Irish laces, the making of 'Limerick' spread outside the area where it was established and from which it got its name. The extract, published here, from the List of Exhibitors at the Irish International Exhibition held in Dublin in 1907, shows some of the variety made at this period as well as the numbers employed. However, not all makers featured in this exhibition; the Convent of Mercy, Dunmore East, Co. Waterford, where the very fine tambour stole or scarf illustrated here was made, was producing at this period but is not among those who exhibited in 1907. Benada Abbey, at Tubbercurry, Co. Sligo, was a very big lace-making centre; the 1907 list (but not the extract published here) shows that they were making Carrickmacross Lace as well as crochet and employed two hundred. The Irish Sisters of Charity, who were in charge in Benada, had received a grant from the Congested Districts Board to set up the school. Lace-making continued there into the 1930s but by that time all the workers were elderly.

One of the earliest centres, outside Limerick itself, was Kinsale, Co. Cork. In 1847, the year of the Great Famine, "looms were first introduced into Kinsale Convent for the manufacture of lace and muslin embroidery" to quote from the annals of the Convent of Mercy.<sup>10</sup> Rev. Mother Francis Bridgman procured the services of an experienced lace-maker from Limerick and the Board of National Education sent a qualified teacher to teach the embroidery. In 1848, an "Industrial School" was opened in which employment in various kinds

of needlework commenced. The girls who were to learn the lace-making were 'bound' as apprentices for three years, with their parents' consent. This is the only reference I have found to Irish lace-makers being indentured servants. The Annals of Kinsale Convent also include the information that community funds were made available to provide the necessary materials. Kinsale was an area where there was great poverty and the nuns must be given full credit for their continued efforts to provide employment for the girls from the surrounding farms and for the fishermen's wives.

In 1885 the Kinsale Lace School was brought into association with the South Kensington Establishment, the School of Art there. This was the period when design classes were set up by Alan S. Cole at the convents in the Cork area.<sup>11</sup> Exhibitions were mounted at the Royal Dublin Society's Shows in 1888 and 1889 and during the World Fair in Chicago. Lady Aberdeen brought a group of Irish girls to make lace at the Chicago Fair and even personally guaranteed their safety to their mothers. The Chicago Fair

brought very good orders to Kinsale and at this period many of the girls earned from 11 shillings to 14 shillings weekly, a good wage at that time. The Board of Education also assisted by granting £24 a year as the salary for a teacher in the industrial department. It seems too, that the teacher was usually the manager of the school and had to arrange sales and payments. This sometimes led to complaints of unfair treatment.

This was the period when the standard of design and workmanship was highest at the Kinsale school. Scholarships were obtained in three succeeding years, two of the winners being Cecilia Keyes and Albinia Collins. Cecilia Keyes eventually returned to the Kinsale convent and became a well-known designer, specializing in the flowers of the area. There is a tradition in Kinsale that she had drawn every flower in the district. As many as one hundred and forty girls were employed in Kinsale in 1909 but the number varied according to demand.

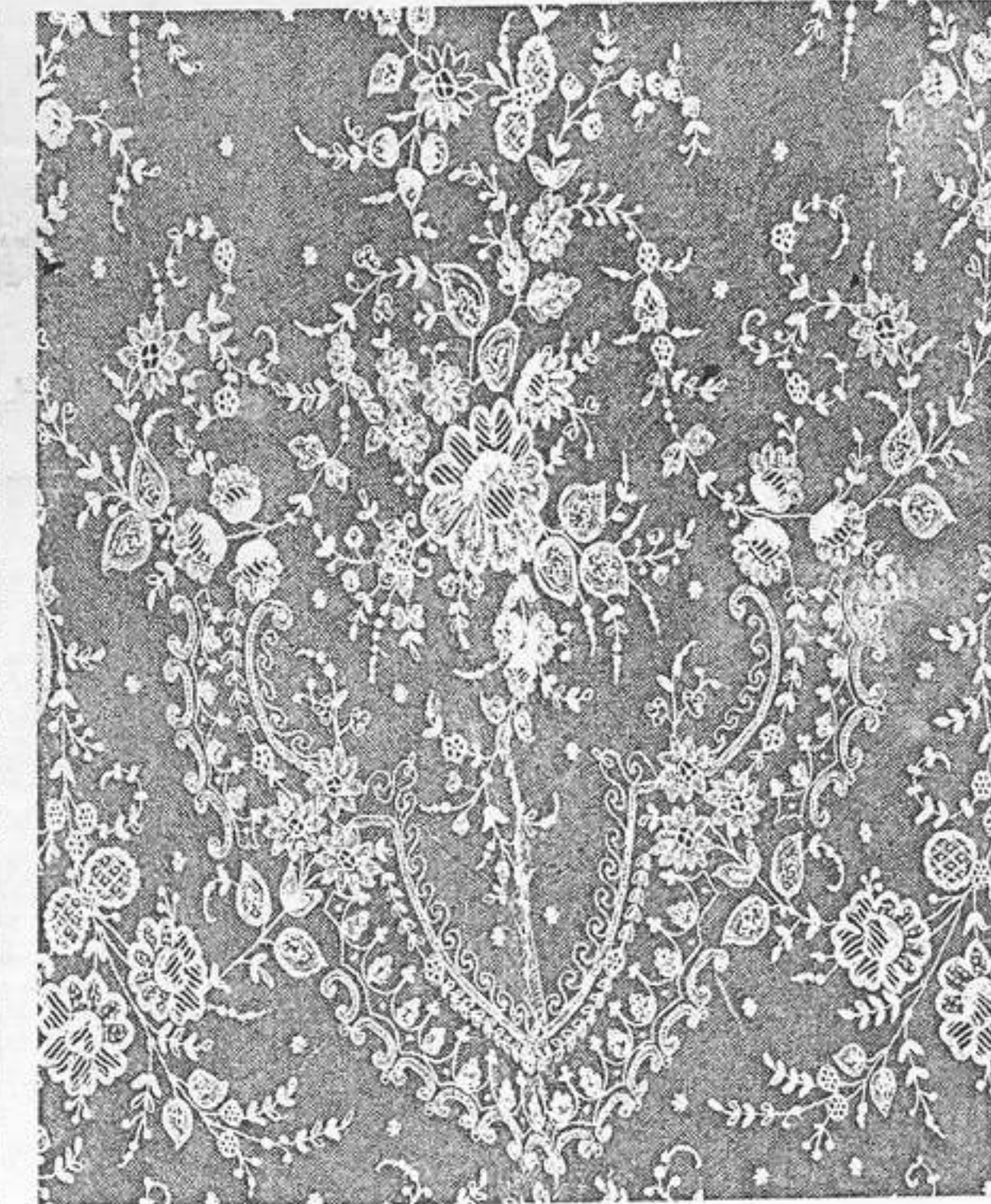
The high quality of work made outside Limerick itself is shown in the stole made at the Mercy Convent, Dunmore

East, illustrated here. As well as the tambour (chain-stitch) technique of this stole, excellent darned-net was made there. It is interesting to speculate where the nuns at Dunmore East got their designs but unfortunately there are no surviving records at the convent. The Lace School did not survive the First World War but unsold garments were given as wedding presents to the sisters of the nuns there and at the convent in Philip Street, Waterford, which was founded from Dunmore East. The tambour stole or scarf was presented as late as 1925.

The Congested Districts Board, set up by the British Government in 1891 to improve conditions in the west of Ireland, was responsible for the spread of Limerick lace-making to very remote areas. It isn't possible to estimate how much of the total lace made was in the Limerick style, but the industry as a whole was very important to the economy. It was claimed that "There are families in Mayo and Galway which had never been possessed of a cow until the younger members began to attend the



Tambour stole or scarf made at Dunmore East Convent of Mercy, Co. Waterford, before 1914.



Detail of tambour stole or scarf.  
Photograph Anthony Hobbs.