‘Humble Hands in Humble Homes’: The Irish Homespun Society, Women’s Labour, and Craft Co-operatives in Ireland, 1935-65

by

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Abstract

This dissertation provides a historical analysis of the Irish Homespun Society (IHS), a female-led craft advocacy group active in Ireland between 1935 and 1965. Established to slow the steady decline of traditional craft manufacture in poverty-stricken western counties, the IHS worked directly with rural artisans to improve the quality of homespun tweed textiles, a significant portion of which were produced by women working and raising families on rural farms. Based on extensive analysis of archival papers, journals and periodicals, exhibition catalogues, and governmental debate transcripts, I contend that the IHS was an intensely ideological organisation guided by nationalist and traditionalist values in line with the governing *Fianna Fáil* party.

Despite the eventual failure of the IHS in their mission to “Keep Women Spinning in Their Homes,” it should be noted that the system of homespun manufacture advocated for by the organisation bears striking similarity to contemporary calls in the developed world to overhaul our own destructive textile and clothing manufacturing industries. The Irish Homespun Society envisioned a system of homespun manufacture which had crafted objects at the centre of an imbricated nexus of relations; the author has coined this nexus an *ecology of homespun*. Understood more generally, these *ecologies of craft* are indicative of an alternative manufacturing vision which foregrounds the tenets of local materials and environments; community and native identity; and a unified treatment of the artisan’s body and mind through stimulating and meaningful education, training, and labour opportunities.

Despite the inevitable loss of cottage-produced homespun, the legacy of the Irish Homespun Society may be its advocacy for a system of manufacture—an *ecology of craft*—relevant in light of our current catastrophic environmental situation, caused in no small part by our contemporary obsession with clothing and fast-fashion.

Preface

This thesis is an original work by Brandi S. Goddard.

No part of this thesis has been previously published.

Dedication

To Grandpa, I love you and miss you.

Acknowledgements

When it comes to mentors, supervisors, and supervisory committees, I could not have been blessed with a team of more compassionate and encouraging people. First and foremost, thank you to Joan Greer and Michelle Meagher; I can say with honesty that this dissertation would never have been completed without your constant words of support and kind reinforcement. A huge thanks as well to Betsy Boone and Robert Brazeau; it's been an absolute pleasure to grow as a scholar with such wonderful mentors to guide me. In addition to the above, this dissertation bears the traces of many powerful (predominately female) scholars, many of whom I have had the pleasure of engaging with throughout my decade of graduate studies: Beverly Lemire, Caitríona Clear, Elaine Cheasley Paterson, and Andrea Korda. Thank you all for the amazing research you've produced and the wonderful community you inspire.

In a practical sense, this research project would not have been possible without the assistance of Samantha Haywood, who spent hours (days!) in the National Library of Ireland photographing archival documents from the Muriel Gahan Papers (a task I 'unfortunately' had to pass on due to pandemic travel restrictions which plagued this project). Similarly, Dawn Hunter is deserving of my gratitude for all the behind-the-scenes assistance throughout my graduate (and undergraduate!) studies. I also wish to acknowledge the financial support received from the following donors, without which the completion of my dissertation would not have been possible: the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC), the University of Alberta's Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, and the Department of Art & Design.

As any doctoral student can likely confirm, the process of researching and writing a dissertation is equally rewarding and disheartening; exciting and terrifying; invigorating and exhausting. I wouldn't have had the opportunity to pursue this dream of mine without the amazing support of my parents, Curt and Teresa. Thanks for always encouraging and supporting me, and for giving me the best upbringing a girl could wish for! I'm so fortunate to have the best friends whose patience, encouragement, and much-needed distractions were central to my ability to complete this work. Thank you especially to Caroline and Laura, I am many cocktails in debt to both of you for the amazing support over these many years. Thank you, Martin and everyone in Kilcar, Co, Donegal. Without realizing it, your little historical artefacts display really started this project in the craft-oriented direction. And, finally, a big pssspssspsss to my constant feline companions, Polly and Pepper. Any and all errors in this dissertation are the sole responsibility of Polly, as she likely walked over the keyboard at that point.

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Glossary of Style, Language, Terms, and Abbreviations

A general note on the Irish language and Irish names: when possible, the native language has been used in discussion of the Irish Homespun Society and their work. It should be noted that Irish is very much an oral language tradition, with much less of a historical emphasis on written forms of communication. Paired with the impact of colonization on the language, there is not always consensus on the spelling of words. The Irish language also went through an official standardization and simplification in 1958. Due to these factors and many others, there are instances in this dissertation when the same Irish-language word may appear multiple times with different spellings. Similarly, it was a personal and family preference whether to Anglicize or Gaelicize ones' names; therefore, there is also a disparity in naming conventions. In this dissertation, I have chosen to stay consistent with spellings found in my research and source materials.

A few basics on Irish pronunciation:

When the following consonants appear together, the resultant phonic sound is:

fh = silent	bh, mh = w or v	dh = y or eye
sh = h	gh = eye or ow	bhf = w or v

Many letters in the Irish language are silent in spoken language, and this is due, in part, to a hangover from the pre-Standardization version of Irish Gaelic.

A general note on Irish currency: During the years under examination in this dissertation, the Irish standard currency was known as the Irish pound, or, colloquially, the *punt*. After independence, the Irish government inaugurated its own form of currency which was tied 1:1 with the British pound (£) until 1978 when the Republic of Ireland voted to join the European Monetary System, while the United Kingdom did not.

Currency is written using the standard pre-decimalization formula, as exemplified below:

- 1 pound = 20 shillings = 240 pence
- The symbols used are £ (pound), s (shilling), and d (pence)
- In practice, shillings and pence are abbreviated using a backslash and hyphen

£3/8/-, therefore, equates to 3 pounds, 8 shillings, and 0 pence.

Abbreviations

IAOS	Irish Agricultural Organisation Association	MGP	Muriel Gahan Papers
		NLI	National Library of Ireland
ICA	Irish Countrywomen's Association	NMI	National Museum of Ireland
		RDS	Royal Dublin Society
IFC	Irish Folklore Commission	RTT	Round Tower Tweeds
IHS	Irish Homespun Society	TD	Teachta Dála
GÉ	Gaeltarra Éireann	UI	United Irishwomen

Introduction: In Search of Homespun

The first unofficial meeting of the Irish Homespun Society (IHS) was held on May 2, 1935, at The Country Shop restaurant, located at #23 St Stephen's Green, Dublin. The twelve people present were all individually involved in protecting and preserving Irish craft traditions, being members of Country Workers Ltd., a craft advocacy group that had been established five years earlier. The driving force behind the establishment of these interrelated organisations was Muriel Gahan (1897-1995), a well-off Anglo-Irish woman from Co. Mayo whose father had also been involved in preserving the cottage industries of impoverished rural regions. According to Gahan and the others present, the impetus to form the Irish Homespun Society was especially urgent:

> It was pointed out by various speakers that great harm had been done to the Irish homespun industry in recent years by the extensive sale of hand woven tweeds that were made of factory spun yarn. These tweeds were being bought by the public under the impression they were homespun, while in actual fact the word homespun meant one thing only, *woollen material made from hand woven yarn that was also hand spun* and this name and definition were [*sic*] protected by law.[1]

Homespun was deemed to be sufficiently important as to warrant a separate organisation to advocate for it, as it was noted that "the whole industry, bound up as it is with the lives

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[1] Emphasis added. Typewritten and hand-annotated meeting report, 1935. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/17. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Those present at this meeting included Professor Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh (Chair), Miss Barton, Miss Gleeson, Miss Gahan, Mr Hughes, Miss Kirkpatrick, Mrs McCullogh, Miss McDonald, Miss McGehan, Mr and Mrs Stoney, and Mr Shackleton. In the margin of the meeting notes there is a question mark next to the claim that the definition of homespun was protected by law, perhaps alluding to a sense of doubt by the writer as to whether this was true. As far as I am aware, there was no Irish legal precedent controlling the use of the term homespun. For an extensive biography of Muriel Gahan's life and career, see Geraldine Mitchell, *Deeds Not Words: The Life and Work of Muriel Gahan, Champion of Rural Women and Craftworkers* (Dublin: Town House and Country House, 1997). Mitchell is a relative to Lillias Mitchell, a weaving advocate and educator who was a contemporary with Gahan in Dublin.

of the people, is of national importance, and should be preserved," and this point was highlighted even further:

> In urging the immediate necessity for action, the point was stressed that all the homespun districts are Irish speaking. They are the districts from where formerly hundreds of girls and young men went yearly to America, and where now they sit at home drawing the dole, because there is nothing for them to do… For this reason apart from any other, hand spinning should be fostered.[2]

Taking the above quotation as a cue, this dissertation argues that the Irish Homespun Society is a prime example of the ways in which traditional crafts in Ireland were deeply imbricated with questions of national identity and culture, the provision of meaningful education and employment for women and girls, as well as larger ideological issues such as quality, authenticity, and representation. Using an original theoretical concept—craft thinking—I argue that the Irish Homespun Society was at once progressive for its championing of co-operative models and women's welfare and reactionary for the ways in which the IHS rejected modernisation and industrialisation in favour of doctrinal traditionalism, rurality, and self-sufficiency.

Background

> *We started our search in Mayo. County-Mayo-God-Help-Us they say in Galway, but then neighbours are always jealous. Everyone laughed at us when we asked in Castlebar – the county town – if there was any homespun made in that part of the country. At first they said, "Oh, you mean Foxford," naming a famous woollen mill close by. No, we did not mean Foxford, we meant homespun. Home-spun, spun at home, or if they liked it better, hand spun. Hand woven tweed made of yarn spun by hand, for that is what that misused word "homespun" means, and that only. It was then they laughed. "Why, there has been none of that made in Mayo for the last twenty years," they said, "you won't find any of your handwoven handspun here."*
>
> *But they were wrong. Less than twelve miles from there, on the way to Achill, we took a little mountainy road that went up and up and over the shining waters of a lovely lake. At the top*

[2] Ibid.

we stopped and looked back. Clew Bay with all its smooth green islands sparkled at our feet. To the west, Clare Island lay like a lion guarding the way to the wide Atlantic, and across the bay, Croagh Patrick stretched out his arms protectingly. Croagh Patrick, Ireland's holy mountain, down which St. Patrick banished the snakes so many years ago. We could see the pilgrims' way winding like a snake itself, white against the blue.

Our road now started to go down, and down, and down. Sea and lake were hidden, and there was nothing but the heather and the rock, and below in the valley miniature green fields with here and there a little whitewashed cottage. It was here we found our homespun. Here in the heart of the mountains, the women were spinning their wool as they had been for the last hundreds of years, and men were weaving on the same looms their fathers had used, and their fathers, and their fathers before them.[3]

The above recollections were written by Muriel Gahan in 1934, who had during that year travelled in rural County Mayo on behalf of the Society of United Irishwomen (UI) and Country Workers Ltd. in order to discern the state of the homespun cottage industries in that region (see fig. 0.1).[4] Her lyrical and descriptive report, entitled "In Search of Homespun," documents Gahan's journey into the rugged western Irish hinterland to re-discover the forgotten production of handspun and hand-woven textiles. Of the spinners and weavers that she came across, Gahan wrote that

> These people are the kindest in the world, and one of the most industrious, but they are living a hundred years too late. They are at the mercy of a world governed by advertising slogans and quick sale returns. Unable to go in search of a market, they are dependent on the trade that stops at their door; a letter with a chance order, a passing tourist, and many of them live off the beaten track of tourists.[5]

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[3] Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[4] Country Workers Limited was established in December 1930. The organisation's meeting minutes book describes the company's objectives as "1. To help the people in the poor districts in the west by encouraging and supporting home industries such as hand spinning, weaving, and knitting, 2. To encourage individual craftworkers such as smiths and carpenters in the country and all other country industries and country products, 3. To promote and assist the work of the United Irishwomen in the country. [Handwritten meeting minutes, December 11, 1930. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

[5] Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. This comment points to an interesting parallel between 1930s Ireland and the 21st century issue of "fast fashion."

From Gahan's romantic language, clearly she believed these handmade textiles to be bound up with larger issues of Irish national history, culture, and tradition. Further, Gahan's writing reveals the extent to which homespun was intimately tied to place and the Irish landscape, denoting that the artisans and final products were as much a part of the coastal western ecology as the raw materials from which homespun was produced. Gahan's report concludes with mention of the formation of the Irish Homespun Society, with "one of its objects…to get people who want homespuns in touch with the people who make it."[6]

The advocacy efforts on behalf of the Irish homespun industry began prior to the Society's official establishment in early 1935. While working with the Society of United Irishwomen (UI), an organisation founded as the women's branch of Horace Plunkett's co-operative Irish Agricultural Organisation Society—Gahan was tasked with finding a weaver to demonstrate at the UI's exhibition stall at the Royal Dublin Society's (RDS) Spring Show in 1930.[7] While travelling and meeting weavers in Co. Mayo, she also purchased lengths of homespun from local producers.[8] During a casual conversation with friend Paddy Somerville-Large at a cabin on Lough Corrib near Headford, Co. Galway, it was suggested that a central depot in Dublin could be established to sell the products of rural producers.[9] This led to the establishment of The Country Shop at #23 St Stephen's Green, Dublin in December 1930. The location became the headquarters for ICA activities but was most

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[6] Ibid.

[7] The IAOS was founded by Plunkett in 1894 with the intention to "promote and develop agricultural cooperatives and rural community enterprise." ("Our History," Irish Cooperative Organisation Society, http://icos.ie/about/history/). The main work of the IAOS in the early years was on the establishment of co-operative creameries. The United Irishwomen organisation was established in 1910 as a branch of the IAOS to allow women to more greatly engage with rural issues through the lens of what was considered most proper for women at the time: domesticity. See D.A.J. MacPherson, "The United Irishwomen," *Women and the Irish Nation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012): 51-86.

[8] "The Saturday Interview: Muriel Gahan," *Irish Times*, May 19, 1984.

[9] Kevin Myers, "Spinning Traditions," *Irish Times*, July 20, 1991.

well-known and beloved for the basement restaurant that served tea, sandwiches, and baked goods. In a 1977 reflective interview with renowned *Irish Times* literary editor Terence de Vere White, Gahan noted that "any profit made in the restaurant was used in the country work," and that "profits on craft sales went back to the workers as Christmas bonus."[10] As the ICA's registration as an educational and charitable organisation prohibited it from profit-making, the business component of the Country Shop was registered as Country Workers Ltd., Gahan's first foray into direct co-operative work with rural producers of homespun and other country crafts.[11]

Hoping to increase the market and viewing audience for rural producers, Gahan wrote to the organisers of the annual Spring and Horse shows hosted at the Royal Dublin Society requesting space for an exhibition. Professor Felix Hackett corresponded at length with Gahan and was keen on the idea; however, he recommended the creation of a voluntary exhibition society to separate the advocacy work from the business and profiteering aspects of Country Markets Ltd. In an address titled "Country Crafts and Countrywomen," Gahan wrote of how from Country Workers' "first few years of research it was clear that homespun was the craft that needed the greatest publicity and help."[12] Thus, the Irish Homespun Society was founded in 1935, and hosted its first small exhibition of crafts at the Country Shop in October of the same year. This display impressed RDS organisers, who subsequently offered the IHS space for an annual exhibition of crafts at the Spring Show, a working relationship which would last for the next decade.

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[10] "The Saturday Interview: Terence de Vere White talks to Doyenne of the Irish Countrywomen's Association Muriel Gahan," *Irish Times*, May 7, 1977.

[11] Kevin Myers, "Spinning Traditions," *Irish Times*, July 20, 1991.

[12] "Country Crafts and Country Women," date unknown, Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1988, MS 49 806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

After a decade of exhibitions at the RDS Spring Show, the IHS deemed that these Dublin-based exhibitions were no longer meeting the needs of rural producers because of the geographic distance from predominant homespun-producing districts in the west. In Gahan's words to Fergus Pyle of the *Irish Times* in 1984, "we decided from then on we must organise production in the country instead of city exhibitions."[13] While the IHS continued to exist, its function was largely taken over by Gahan's next venture, Country Markets Ltd., which was founded as a joint venture between the ICA and the IHS.[14] The announcement of this "All-Ireland Co-operative Society" was made in the regional and national press, such as this lengthy piece that appeared in the *Irish Independent*:

> The Irish Countrywomen's Association and the Irish Homespun Society have founded jointly a new All-Ireland Co-operative Society whose main object will be the organisation of markets in every town and village where food producers can sell direct to the consumers. The markets will meet the demand in areas where quantities of country produce are too small and too perishable for the small shopkeeper to handle. Members of the society will be grouped in each area and will be helped to organise, establish, and manage local markets to be held regularly on a fixed day in their own districts or market towns. Membership is open to all country craftworkers and small producers in Ireland and to all interested in promoting the work of the society. Shares will cost 1/- each and up to £200 worth may be had. Registered societies and companies may join, and any profit will be divided among the members in proportion to their sales.[15]

While, as is made clear in this excerpt, the focus of Country Markets Ltd. was agricultural produce, the Country Shop in Dublin continued to function as a central depot for the sales of country crafts on behalf of Country Markets. According to a news article from December 1946, "in effect the Society provides a guaranteed market for [country crafts] which reach a

[13] "The Saturday Interview: Fergus Pyle talked to Muriel Gahan," *Irish Times*, May 19, 1984.

[14] As had been the issue previously, since both the ICA and the IHS were classified as educational and charitable organisations they were prohibited from trading. Therefore, Country Markets Ltd. was established to allow for the accrual of profits ("The United Irishwomen," *Irish Press*, April 18, 1969). ./

[15] "New Co-operative Society Formed," *Irish Independent*, January 7, 1947.

specified standard. Goods sent to the market premises by the producers are purchased by the Society and sold to retailers at a profit of ten per cent."[16]

By the mid-1960s Country Markets Ltd. flourished with nineteen weekly markets across the entire island supporting approximately 1,600 workers. The Department of Agriculture paid the salary for a market organiser, Anne Roche, who travelled to all the markets offering assistance and organisation advice.[17] By 1969, it was reported that thirty produce markets were in regular operation, and that crafts sales were now being co-ordinated and sold at the Slieve Bawn Co-Operative Handicraft Market in Strokestown, Co. Roscommon (fig. 0.2).[18] Slieve Bawn reported a turn-over of £6,000 in 1965 and was expecting £9,000 the following year.[19] Of these markets, Gahan stated that they were "really promoting the economic programme of the Irish Countrywomen's Association's five-year rural development programme…Raising the rural income is one way to raise the general standard of living."[20] Even into the late-1960s, Gahan and her various craft organisations and co-operatives continued to advocate for rural production based on traditional methods and hand-made objects by skilled rural producers.

The first Chair of the Irish Homespun Society executive team was Agnes O'Farrelly (Úna Ní Fhaircheallaigh, 1874-1951), Professor of Irish at University College Dublin and Gaelic League member. Society meetings were attended by well-known nationalist figures such as Eoin MacNeill, noted scholar, politician and Irish-language activist. At a 1942 Society lecture given by Emyr Estyn Evans on "Aspects of Irish Folk-Culture," MacNeill

[16] "Central Market for Country Crafts," *Sunday Independent*, December 8, 1946.
[17] Ida Grehan, "Raising the Rural Income," *Irish Times*, May 24, 1966.
[18] "The United Irishwomen," *Irish Press*, April 18, 1969.
[19] Ida Grehan, "Raising the Rural Income," *Irish Times*, May 24, 1966.
[20] Ibid.

polemicized, as reported in the *Irish Independent*, that "he who has contempt for rural life art and crafts is an enemy of Ireland."[21] Several years earlier, Reverend Peter Conefrey (1880-1939) argued at a Society lecture that Irish farmers were being exploited more under the Free State government than they had been previously under British rule. He recollected that

> The farmers in Ireland were, as a body, uneducated—the British government had seen to that. The Free State government has done nothing to raise them out of that state. The Minister has stated that the Government will see to it that the farmers will give up the milk, and the butter will be made for them, thus the government tried to apply the system of the English factory to the agriculture of Ireland. That would be to reduce them to a lower state of ignorance. It is to try to compel them to pay for work which they had done themselves.[22]

The thrust of Conefrey's statement is that governmental rule from Dublin was equally bad or worse for Irish farmers than rule from London; this ideological mindset aligns with the rural fundamentalist thread that ran through IHS discourse. The Irish Homespun Society represents a microcosm of ruralist, nationalist, and post-colonial ideas which proliferated in mid-century Ireland.

Historical Context & Literature Review

This dissertation emerges at the intersection of several disciplines: art history, anthropology, and Irish studies. Similarly, the topic under consideration can only be understood through the application of diverse theories and methodologies; central to this exploration of the Irish Homespun Society is existing scholarship in the discursive fields of women's and gender studies, craft studies, textile history, and explorations of nationalism, labour, class, and rurality. This segment—which functions as both an historical

[21] "Irish Arts and Crafts," *Irish Independent*, March 28, 1942.
[22] "Economist's Views on Rural Economic Problems," *Irish Independent*, February 25, 1937.

introduction to the geographic and temporal situation of the IHS and a review of existing literature on the subject—begins with a personal reflection on what inspired this research project. Following that are sections on the current state of scholarship on crafts, analyses of crafts as they relate to Irish tradition, and an in-depth introduction to the state of Irish economy, agriculture, and co-operative organizations. The final topic of this literature review is a discussion of Muriel Gahan in the context of female labour and work, and women's agency in textile crafts industries. Craft studies is a vibrant and active discipline, and this dissertation contributes to the field by providing a long overdue assessment of the Irish Homespun Society, an imperfect organization which nonetheless undertook ground-breaking work in collaboration, co-operation, and craft advocacy, all the while running by and for women.

The prime impetus for my research into crafts—particularly textile crafts—was spurred in large part by a popular culture phenomenon that has appeared in social media, mass media publishing, and online/streaming documentaries: a new consciousness of negative aspects of globalized textile production and fashion systems. Largely a reaction against the exploitative and dangerous outcomes of Fast Fashion, a grassroots social justice and activism movement has grown into a global crusade to draw attention to and work towards alleviating the worst evils of capitalistic garment and textile production, much of which occurs in the Global South. The horrific collapse of a garment factory in Dhaka, Bangladesh that killed over 1,000 garment workers—predominantly women—is only the most tragic example of a system which operates at the nexus of corporate greed, economic

imperialism, and consumer ignorance or apathy.[23] In the last five years (2018-2023), several mass-media publications have attempted to package these complex issues for a general audience. Dana Thomas's 2018 exposé *Fashionopolis: Why What We Wear Matters* takes a global perspective on the previous thirty years of garment manufacturing and mass consumption.[24] The author argues that a fundamental reconsideration of style and purchasing habits is needed to slow the human and environmental destruction being wrought; on a more positive note, Thomas also reports on current research and development projects aiming for improved sustainability and accountability for the textile industry moving forward. The public thirst for publications such as these is evidenced by the proliferation of similar books.[25] In her analysis of clothing manufacture and consumption *Worn*, author Sofi Thanhauser provides a truly global human history of clothing as told through the five fibers of our clothing: linen, cotton, silk, wool, and synthetic fibers.[26] Other similar explorations of a single fiber family include Steven Yafa's *Cotton* (2005), Sven Beckert's *Empire of Cotton* (2015), or Peggy Hart's *Wool* (2017), to name just a few.[27] In the Irish-specific context, Dublin-based writer Vawn Corrigan has published extensive social histories of both Irish tweed and Aran knitting.[28] These

[23] See Trebilcock, A. "The Rana Plaza disaster seven years on: Transnational experiments and perhaps a new treaty?" *International Labour Review* 159, no. 4 (December 2020): 545-568.

[24] Dana Thomas, *Fashionopolis: Why What We Wear Matters* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019).

[25] See also: Kassia St. Clair, *The Golden Thread: How Fabric Changed History* (London: John Murray, 2018), Virginia Postrel, *The Fabric of Civilization: How Textiles Made the World* (New York: Basic Books, 2020), and Clare Hunter, *Threads of Life: A History of the World Through the Eye of a Needle* (London: Sceptre, 2020)

[26] Sofi Thanhauser, *Worn: A People's History of Clothing* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2022).

[27] Steven Yafa, Cotton: The Biography of a Revolutionary Fiber (New York: Penguin Books, 2005), Sven Beckert, Empire of Cotton: A Global History (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), and Peggy Hart, Wool: Unravelling an American Story of Artisans and Innovation (Atglen, Philadelphia: Schiffer Publishing, 2017).

[28] Vawn Corrigan, *Irish Aran: History, Tradition, Fashion* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2019) and *Irish Tweed: History, Tradition, Fashion* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 2020).

beautifully-illustrated volumes provide an excellent introduction to the textile materials, techniques, and fabrics that are central to this dissertation while also situating knits and tweed in the larger context of Ireland's craft history.

Late -19th Century Precedents: Early Craft Philanthropy and the Congested Districts Board

In both *Irish Aran* and *Irish Tweed*, Vawn Corrigan writes of the enormous influence that female philanthropists had on the persistence of Irish cottage crafts.[29] The individual efforts of two women in particular—Alice Hart and Ishbel Hamilton—were particularly significant for supporting artisans in Ireland's impoverished western regions, also known as Congested Districts. Both women were an integral part of broader craft advocacy initiatives which arose within the Irish branch of the international Arts and Crafts movement, which had reached Ireland by the final years of the nineteenth century. In 1894 the Arts and Crafts Society of Ireland was formed by a group of interested patrons including Dermot Robert Wyndham Bourke, 7th Earl of Mayo, and other members of the Protestant Ascendancy. The Society's mandate was to

> Promote and improve the practice of the Artistic Handicrafts in Ireland—and of all the work of an ornamental and decorative character. The Society hopes to be able to develop much natural talent which is now unused or misdirected—and in various ways to aid Irish Craftsmen in regaining for their work the high repute it once possessed for excellence of workmanship and artistic taste.[30]

Art Historian Nicola Gordon Bowe, a specialist of the Irish Arts and Crafts movement, draws attention to the elitist character of the movement, arguing that "the genesis of the

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[29] See, for example, Chapter 5. Cottage Industries as a Lifeline in *Irish Aran* or Chapter 5. From Donegal to Oxford Street in *Irish Tweed*.

[30] Nicola Gordon Bowe, "The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925)," *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1990/1991), 175. The Protestant Ascendancy refers to the population of landowners in Ireland that were descended from, or achieved status due to, the settlements of English and Scottish planters in Ireland from the 16th century onwards. The use of titles such as "Lord" and "Lady" persisted in Ireland into the twentieth century but was largely negated by the *Land Purchase (Ireland) Act* of 1903 and other acts which saw land redistributed from the Protestant Ascendancy to small-holding farmers.

society took place among businessmen, connoisseurs, and amateurs on the hunting fields of Co. Kildare, rather than in the studios of the architects and crafts practitioners of its namesake."[31] The Irish Arts and Crafts movement seems to have primarily served the interests of the upper levels of Irish society, with little influence on the lives of rural artisans. It functioned as one aspect of the larger Celtic Revival, a cultural nationalist movement that sought to unite the population through the resurrection of a shared, common past.[32] There was a renewed interest in hurling and Gaelic football, and the Gaelic Athletic Association was founded in 1884.[33] Douglas Hyde, following on the heels of his polemical article "The Necessity for De-Anglicizing Ireland," founded the Gaelic League in 1893 with the mission to preserve, protect, and encourage the use of the Irish language in Ireland.[34] The most thoroughly researched aspect of the Celtic Revival is its literary output characterized by authors such as James Clarence Mangan, William Butler Yeats, Lady Augusta Gregory, and John Millington Synge.[35] Folded within this larger cultural nationalist

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[31] Nicola Gordon Bowe, "Preserving the Relics of Heroic Time: Visualising the Celtic Revival in Early-Twentieth Century Ireland," in *Synge and Edwardian Ireland*, edited by Brian Cliff and Nicholas Grene (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 59.

[32] For further discussion of the Celtic Revival, see Jeanne Sheehy, *The Rediscovery of Ireland's Past: the Celtic Revival, 1830-1930* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1980), and T.J. Edelstein, ed., *Imagining an Irish Past: The Celtic Revival, 1840-1940* (Chicago: David and Alfred Smart Museum of Art, 1992).

[33] See Mike Cronin, William Murphy, and Paul Rouse, eds., *The Gaelic Athletic Association, 1884-2009* (Dublin and Portland, OR: Irish Academic Press, 2009) and *The GAA: A People's History* (Cork: The Collins Press, 2009).

[34] See Diarmid Coffey, *Douglas Hyde, President of Ireland* (Dublin: Talbot Press, 1938), Janet Egleson Dunleavy and Gareth W. Dunleavy, *Douglas Hyde: A Maker of Modern Ireland* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), and Timothy G. McMahon, 'Douglas Hyde and the Politics of the Gaelic League in 1914," *Éire-Ireland* 53, nos. 1&2 (Spring/Summer 2018): 29-47.

[35] For extended discussions of Irish literature in the late 19th and early 20th centuries see Seamus Deane, *Celtic Revivals: Essays in Modern Irish Literature, 1880-1980* (London and Boston: Faber & Faber, 1985), Gregory Castle, *Modernism and the Celtic Revival* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), and John Greaney, *Distance of Irish Modernism: Memory, Narrative, and Representation* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).

movement, there was also a drive to restore the prominence of traditional Irish crafts and cottage industries, including textile production.

In *Traditional Crafts of Ireland*, author David Shaw-Smith categorizes crafts into the following categories: textiles, stone and woodwork, willow, rush, and straw, leather, metal, ceramics, glass, calligraphy, and miscellaneous. Of these categories, textile production in Ireland has historically been part of female domestic labour; interestingly, advocacy for textile crafts also tended to be performed by women also. Two women, each with a bold vision, epitomize the Arts and Crafts advocacy movement in Ireland: Alice Hart (née Rowland, 1848-1931) and Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon (née Marjoribanks, 1857-1939). Hart, an Englishwoman who had previously studied medicine, founded the Donegal industrial Fund in 1883.[36] As Art Historian Janice Helland argues, Hart held strong opinions that Ireland's depressed economic state and the suffering of its impoverished citizens was due, in large part, to its colonisation by England and the latter's willful destruction of Irish industry, including woollen textiles.[37] Hart decided that "the most practical thing to do would be to revive the old Cottage industries, and to develop and improve the ancient arts of spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing, and embroidery."[38] Through her Donegal Industrial Fund, she established training classes in textiles for rural women and organised exhibitions and demonstrations of the products and their makers. Classes offered included lacemaking, tailoring, pattern design, and embroidery, among others. The greatest impact, according to

[36] Paul Larmour, "The Donegal Industrial Fund," *Irish Arts Review Yearbook* (1990-1991), 128 and Beattie, *Donegal in Transition*, 70.

[37] Janice Helland, "Working Bodies, Celtic Textiles, and the Donegal Industrial Fund, 1883-1890," *Textile*, 2, no. 1 (2004), 138.

[38] Alice Hart, *Cottage Industries and What They Can Do for Ireland* (London: Smith, Elder & Co., 1885), 12.

Paul Larmour, came from Hart's pioneering Kells Embroidery, which involved the use of polished flax thread on white Irish linen to create Celtic-inspired designs influenced by medieval illuminated manuscripts, especially the ninth century *Book of Kells*.[39] Alice Hart opened a storefront on London's Cavendish Street which sold the goods produced by Irish artisans; Hart also used this location as a marketing depot to sell to department stores such as Debenhams and Marshall.[40] She kept only enough of the proceeds to cover operating costs, and profits were returned directly to producers.[41] The Donegal Industrial Fund operated successfully for over a decade, and only ceased operations when Hart retired in 1896 to care for her ailing husband.[42]

In 1886, Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon accompanied her husband John Campbell Hamilton-Gordon—the Earl of Aberdeen—on a visit to Ireland.[43] Inspired by her travels, within a year Hamilton-Gordon had established the Irish Industries Association with which she marketed the products of Irish cottage industry to the wealthy elite of Dublin and London.[44] For instance, she planned and executed a garden party at the Viceregal Lodge in

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[39] Larmour, 129.

[40] Helland, "Working Bodies, Celtic Textiles, and the Donegal Industrial Fund, 1883-1890, 138-9.

[41] Janice Helland, "Benevolence, Revival and 'Fair Trade': An Historical Perspective," in *Craft, Community and the Material Culture of Place and Politics, 19th-20th Century*, edited by Janice Helland, Beverly Lemire and Alena Buis (Surrey, UK: Ashgate, 2014), 126-127. Organisations such as the Donegal Industrial Fund and the Irish Industries Association are usually referred to as philanthropic organisations; however, Helland makes a compelling argument for their reconsideration in the context of fair trade. FINE, a conglomeration of fair-trade policy and advocacy groups defines fair trade as "engaged in actively supporting producers, awareness raising and in campaigning for changes in the rules and practices of conventional trade" (Helland 125). Despite not being termed as such until after WWII, fair-trade seems to be an applicable term for the work of Hart and others, including Muriel Gahan.

[42] Bridget Hourican, "Alice Hart," *Dictionary of Irish Biography*, accessed May 18, 2020, https://dib-cambridge-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/viewReadPage.do?articleId=a3829&searchClicked=clicked&searchBy=1&browsesearch=yes

[43] Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon is usually referred to as Lady Aberdeen to recognise her role within the British aristocracy. However, in acknowledgement of the colonising implications of such titles, I chose to drop the prefix and refer to her by her married name.

[44] Bowe, "The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925),"175.

Dublin's Phoenix Park; all guests were required to attend in clothing which was produced in Ireland using Irish materials.[45] Hamilton-Gordon's dress was decorated with Irish-specific iconography such as shamrocks and Celtic interlacing. The Irish Industries Association initially worked very closely with Hart's Donegal Industrial Fund. Both organisations specialised in the production of "artistic handicrafts," especially elaborate gowns and textiles used to adorn the bodies and homes of the wealthy Ascendancy population in Ireland.

While clearly contributing a great deal to the persistence of traditional cottage textile production in Ireland, scholars have since offered a revisionist appraisal of the philanthropic efforts of these English women. Seán Beattie notes that the Celtic Revival created an increased demand for Irish-produced textiles; however, he cites Joanna Bourke's arguments that these organizations were also elitist, patronizing, and ultimately failed due to their dependence on "artificial stimulation" of the industries.[46] These criticisms were not entirely new, as Helland notes that a journalist contemporary with Hamilton-Gordon claimed that an exhibition of that latter's luxurious gowns being embroidered in a reconstructed cottage filled with peat smoke was nothing more than a culturally insensitive display of exoticism.[47]

This version of Irish identity—both essentializing and exoticizing—was paraded internationally at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago by the British colonial philanthropists.[48]

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[45] Helland, 143. The Viceregal Lodge was one of the official residences of the Irish Lord Lieutenant prior to Independence, and is today known as Áras an Uachtaráin, the official residence of Uachtarán na hÉireann (the President of Ireland).

[46] Beattie, 70 and 164.

[47] Helland, 148.

[48] See, for example, Joseph Lennon, *Irish Orientalism: A Literary and Intellectual History* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2004).

Hart and Hamilton-Gordon hosted competing pavilions on the Fair's Midway with two "Irish villages" that were quite similar and oftentimes even conflated with one another in public discourse and commentary.[49] Hamilton-Gordon's Irish Industrial Village was the more monumental of the two. It included large-scale reconstructions of Blarney Castle, Muckross Abbey, and Cormac's Chapel from the Rock of Cashel.[50] Hart's Donegal Castle Irish Village included a replica of the St. Lawrence Gate from Co. Louth, reproductions of medieval round towers and Celtic crosses, and a reconstruction of Donegal Town's fifteenth-century castle.[51] Importantly, "pure Celtic lassies," as described by Hart, had been brought from Ireland to offer demonstrations on spinning, dyeing, lacemaking, weaving, and butter-churning.[52] Both pavilions included multiple reconstructions of the ubiquitous white-washed Irish thatched cottage which had become symbolic of rural Ireland. Despite their success and popularity in the 1880s and 1890s, both organisations were either shuttered or in decline by the turn of the century, surpassed by native Arts and Crafts workshops such as the Dun Emer Guild or *An Túr Gloine* stained glass co-operative, both based in Co. Dublin and operated mainly by Irish-born artisans.[53]

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[49] Jeffrey O'Leary, "St. Patrick Meets St. Louis: The Display of the Irish at the 1904 St. Louis World's Fair," *Éire-Ireland* 54, nos. 3&4 (Fall/Winter 2019), 150-1. O'Leary notes that Ireland was initially meant to have one unified pavilion, but the women were unable to resolve disagreements between themselves stemming from class-based tensions, resulting in two competing pavilions.

[50] Bowe, "The Irish Arts and Crafts Movement (1886-1925),"174-5.

[51] O'Leary, 139.

[52] O'Leary, 140.

[53] For more information on these workshops, see Paul Larmour, "The Dun Emer Guild," *Irish Arts Review* 1, no. 4 (1984): 24-28, Liam Miller, *The Dun Emer Press, later the Cuala Press* (Dublin: Dolmen Press, 1973), Sheila Pim, "Dun Emer: The Origins," *Irish Arts Review* 2, no. 2 (1985): 18-22, Nicola Gordon Bowe, *Harry Clarke: The Life and Work* (Dublin: History Press Ireland, 2012), Thomas David Caron, *An Túr Gloine and Michael Healy(1873-1941)*, PhD diss. Trinity College Dublin, 1991, John O'Grady, *The Life and Work of Sarah Purser* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 1996).

In addition to the concerted efforts of independently wealthy British philanthropists, the government in Ireland also set its sights on improving the conditions of the rural poor. In 1891 the Congested Districts Board (CDB) was established by the Chief Secretary of Ireland, Arthur Balfour, as part of the *Land Purchases (Ireland) Act*.[54] Balfour toured the poverty-stricken and under-industrialised western regions of Ulster and Connacht provinces and concluded that means did not currently exist to alleviate suffering or improve the living conditions of these people. The designation of "congested" district was given to areas where the valuation of the land divided by the number of inhabitants on that land was less than one pound ten shillings.[55] Using these metrics, eighty-four congested districts were identified, being inhabited by 3,606,369 residents. This totaled "16 per cent of the land area of Ireland and 11 per cent of its population."[56] The congested districts extended across eight western counties, including Donegal, Sligo, Leitrim, Mayo, Roscommon, Galway, Kerry, and Cork; however, Donegal, Mayo, and Galway were the most impoverished and least industrialised (fig. 0.3).[57]

Irish scholars who study the late-nineteenth century note that women played an extraordinary economic role in the congested districts. In many cases, the majority of a family's earnings might come from work undertaken by women which historically included

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[54] David M. Smith, "'I Thought I Was Landed!': The Congested Districts Board and the Women of Western Ireland," *Éire-Ireland* 31, nos. 3&4 (Fall, 1996), 210. Ireland, in 1891, was still part of the United Kingdom. The Chief Secretary of Ireland was the Irish Head of State within the British Administration.

[55] *Purchase of Land (Ireland) Act 1891, Statutes of Ireland*, Part II, section 36.1, Government of Ireland, *Irish Statute Book,* http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1891/act/48/enacted/en/print.html

[56] David M. Smith, 210.

[57] Despite the work of the CDB into the twentieth-century, Donegal, Mayo, and Galway remained the most impoverished areas. These three counties form the geographical focus of my research, with the addition of Kerry, as they were also the areas where intervention most frequently took the form of establishing cottage industry textile enterprises aimed at employing women. Dublin will also be an important geographical focus, as it was the urban centre where exhibitions and marketing schemes for country crafts took place. This rural/urban dichotomy is an integral aspect of this dissertation.

the sale of butter and eggs, and the cottage-based textile crafts (spinning, weaving, knitting, sewing, embroidering, and lacemaking).[58] However, as Joanna Bourke argues, women lost an important source of income when agricultural co-operatives and private interest creameries—predominantly operated by men—took over the marketing and sales of butter and eggs.[59] To supplement the loss of these female-centric economic activities, many of the actions of the CDB were aimed directly at improving the working conditions and earning potential of women through textile production. In his analysis of the CDB's efforts in Co. Donegal, Seán Beattie notes that throughout its existence the Board became involved in various ventures to support and sustain cottage industries. There included:

> A combination of craft classes, the setting up of carpet factories, the introduction of domestic economy training courses, the promotion of knitting machines, actively supporting the destruction of the exploitative barter system, encouraging householders to make improvements in their dwellings, improving sanitation and curbing infection, encouraging the setting up of cottage industries and creating marketing opportunities for craft workers.[60]

The Congested Districts Board was discontinued by the new government of the Irish Free State in 1923; however, it left behind a legacy of craft centres, particularly the Killybegs carpet factory in Co. Donegal (est. 1898) which employed many women to hand-weave

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[58] Ciara Breathnach, "The Role of Women in the Economy of the West of Ireland, 1891-1923," *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 82.

[59] Joanna Bourke, *From Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 87. Under the creamery system, rather than being churned at home, cream was taken to a local depot for processing. The transport and deal-making was considered to be a masculine role, and therefore the work of the husband (except in cases, for example, where a widow or single female farmed, which was not infrequent).

[60] Seán Beattie, *Donegal in Transition: The Impact of the Congested Districts Board* (Kildare, Irish Academic Press, 2013), 182. Though not explicitly mentioned here, another exploitative practice frequently found in cottage industries was the "putting-out" system, which involved large textile firms, dealers, and brokers utilising the services of women in rural areas to sew products. This was especially prevalent within the Belfast linen industry.

specially commissioned carpets for places of importance such as Buckingham Palace and the White House.[61]

The efforts of the Congested Districts Board have been subject to various interpretations by scholars. In *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918*, Joseph Lee argues that the CDB was "an expensive waste of time" that only focused on the provision of short-term economic fixes to a deeper societal problem.[62] Beattie conversely claims that despite the short-term nature of many of the initiatives of the Board, it did in fact effect change by re-introducing craft skills and improving living conditions through a combination of education and the provision of new technologies.[63] Perhaps the most controversial opinion of the CDB comes from Joanna Bourke, who argues that the CDB along with a host of other governmental agencies in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries actually minimised the agency of women.[64] Bourke contends that many women willingly relinquished paid employment and economic independence in order to undertake unpaid domestic labour due to pressures of decency, presentation, and conspicuous consumption that came along with household modernisation. Since the initial publication of Bourke's book in 1993 many scholars have criticized her methods and conclusions. David M. Smith argues that the CDB should not be lumped in with other

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[61] Donegal Carpets was established in Killybegs in 1898 as a joint venture between the CDB and Scottish textile manufacturer Alexander Morton. The factory ran continuously until it closed in 1987, but with government support Donegal carpets was re-opened in 1997 and still produces bespoke, hand-knotted carpets. The original factory has been made into a heritage centre and houses the largest hand-knotted loom in the world. See https://visitkillybegs.com/carpet-factory/.

[62] Joseph Lee, *The Modernisation of Irish Society, 1848-1918* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1989), 124-5.

[63] Beattie, *Donegal in Transition*, 168-171.

[64] Bourke, 3.

agencies under discussion by Bourke.[65] Breathnach believes that Bourke mistook the effects of general modernising tendencies underway in Ireland as outcomes that could be specifically attributable to the work of the CDB.[66] Finally, Beattie states that her analysis "lacks credibility" due to an overreliance on feminist ideologies.[67] Despite these valid criticisms, Bourke's analysis remains a touchstone volume for understanding the complex gendered politics at play in Irish domestic agriculture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Even in its own time, the CDB was not immune from criticism. Despite its moderate success in alleviating poverty in the western provinces, many radical nationalists disapproved of the paternalistic overtones of the CDB that were "often regarded as an instrument of Conservative and unionist policy, which attempted to keep Ireland off the British parliamentary agenda, favouring coercion before conciliation."[68] Beattie argues that Nationalist ideologies pervaded many of the socio-economic and cultural reform movements undertaken in late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century Ireland, and Irish people themselves are understood to bear, at least partial, responsibility for the regeneration of their land.

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[65] David M. Smith, 211. The other institutions discussed by Smith are the IAOS and the Department of Agricultural and Technical Instruction (DATI).

[66] Breathnach, "The Role of Women in the Economy of the West of Ireland," 90.

[67] Beattie, 164-5. While I agree with the criticisms made by Smith and Breathnach, I disagree with Beattie's assessment. Bourke's contribution to the study of Irish women in the period 1890-1914 remains a seminal study of how economic and socio-cultural polices directly impacted the lives of women, and functions within larger discourses surrounding unpaid domestic labour, such as argued by Silvia Federici and Maria Mies.

[68] Beattie, 5. It is true, in fact, that the formation of the CDB was part of the larger movement by the UK to quash Irish nationalist calls for independence, colloquially referred to as "killing Home Rule with kindness."

Ireland in the 1930s: Economy, Demographics, and a Co-operative Dream

When the Free State was established in the early-1920s, Ireland's economy remained overwhelmingly dependent on agriculture, and policy decisions were made that favoured agriculture over industry. In large part, these decisions were based on the fact that since the time of the Industrial Revolution in England, Ireland had functioned as that nation's most significant source of agricultural imports.[69] As Mary E. Daly notes, Ireland was "the largest Commonwealth supplier to Britain of meat, poultry and dairy produce, and Britain's largest market for many manufactured products."[70] According to 1929 figures, the agricultural sector was responsible for 86 percent of Ireland's merchandise exports (which included food and drink), much of which went directly to England.[71] Most of the Irish population in this period was employed in agricultural labour, which obviously implies the dominance of a largely rural lifestyle.

Rural living was perceived to provide many benefits over life in urban areas. As Caitríona Clear argues, "as a general rule, the less 'developed' and more 'rural' a place was, the lower its sickness and death-rate."[72] By the mid-nineteenth century, urban planners and public health officials were well-aware of the positive influence that fresh air and rural environments had on the population.[73] Unsurprisingly then, the importance of rurality to

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[69] Brian Girvin, "Economic Policy, Continuity and Crisis in de Valera's Ireland, 1945-1961," *Irish Economic & Social History* 38 (2011), 39.

[70] Mary E. Daly, "The Irish Free State and the Great Depression of the 1930s: The Interaction of the Global and the Local," *Irish Economic & Social History* 38 (2011), 29.

[71] Daly, "The Irish Free State and the Great Depression of the 1930s," 21.

[72] Caitríona Clear, "Social Conditions in Ireland, 1880-1914," *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, v. 4: 1880 to the Present, edited by Thomas Bartlett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 161.

[73] See Georgina Laragy, Olwen Purdue and Jonathan Jeffrey Wright, *Urban Spaces in Nineteenth-Century Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), especially Laura Johnstone's article on the development of seaside suburban neighbourhoods near Dublin and Gillian Allmond's exploration of rural asylums.

Ireland was foregrounded by Éamon de Valera—whose Fianna Fáil government had taken over from Cumann na nGaedheal in 1932—who proclaimed in a 1938 address before the Dáil Éireann (Irish Parliament) that

> I do believe that it will be a serious loss to this country if we are not able to stop the change from country life to city life or to check the tendency that there is to go from the country into the towns. Personally, I believe that country life is far better. I believe that there are advantages pertaining to country life which are not realised by the number of people who leave the country and go to the towns…[I]n the long run, country life is better for our people and a nation is a better and a strong nation if it is based on country life rather than on city life and city conditions.[74]

A decade earlier he had made similar remarks when, as Daly expounds, he had suggested that the "Irish Free State should reject international living standards, and international types and quality of manufacturing goods, and concentrate on supplying the people of Ireland with the 'necessaries of life', 'forget[ting] as far as we can what are the standards prevalent in countries outside this'."[75] These remarks were typical of de Valera's position in the 1920s and 1930s, and reflect his emphasis on maintaining Ireland as an insular, self-sufficient, and self-defining (predominantly) rural nation.[76]

While cultural nationalist ideologies contributed to Ireland's protectionist policies in this period, the economy itself played a fundamental role in the continuing insistence on

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[74] Quoted in Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 30.

[75] Daly, "The Irish Free State and the Great Depression of the 1930s," 32.

[76] The economy of Ireland in the 20th century is a perennially popular subject of research in Irish Studies, and there is an abundance of published material on this topic. Relevant studies include Mary E. Daly, "The Economic Ideals of Irish Nationalism: Frugal Comfort or Lavish Austerity?" *Éire-Ireland* 29, no. 4 (Winter 1994): 77-100, Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland, 1900-2000* (Woodstock, New York: Overlook Press, 2005), Timothy Guinnane, *The Vanishing Irish: Households, Migration and the Rural Economy in Ireland, 1850-1914* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), or Kevin Hora, *Propaganda and Nation Building: Selling the Irish Free State* (London: Routledge, 2017). The political connections to rural identity as noted above underline the fact that categories such as 'rural' or 'traditional' are bound up with complex issues of identity and socio-politics rather than just being strict demarcations of geography and time. Of particular interest in this respect is scholarship by Suzanne Luckman, especially *Locating Cultural Work: The Politics and Poetics of Rural, Regional, and Remote Creativity*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.

maintaining Ireland's dependence on agriculture. Because of its insular economy and the fact that most farms operated on family labour and not wage incomes, Ireland fared much better during the Great Depression than other nations. In December 1930, John J. Horgan wrote in *Round Table* that "despite the general slump in agricultural prices, conditions in the Free State are relatively more normal than most other European countries. This is probably due to the fact…that the Free State is predominantly agricultural and pastoral, and so the reactions of the almost world-wide economic depression are slow to take effect here."[77] This optimism furthered de Valera and Fianna Fáil's insistence that the maintenance of small-scale family farming and economic self-sufficiency were of utmost importance. De Valera leveraged Ireland's relative economic strength and the importance of its agricultural exports to England when he decided to renege on the Anglo-Irish Treaty by refusing to pay land annuities due to England, which ultimately resulted in what is known as the Economic War of the 1930s.

The suspension of annuities payments was met with the imposition of severe duties and tariffs on Irish products, particularly on cattle, which as Kevin O'Rourke notes, "faced a 68 to 88 per cent *ad valorem* duty by 1935."[78] The Irish countered by restricting imports of many industrial manufactures from Britain such as coal, iron, and steel, and fortified the government's protectionist policies. Ultimately, the economic war was settled in Ireland's favour with a significantly reduced lump sum payment taking the place of annuities; however, this sense of victory and the confirmation of Ireland's economic principles

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[77] *Round Table* 81 (December 1930), 158. Quoted in Daly, "The Irish Free State and the Great Depression of the 1930s," 23.

[78] Kevin O'Rourke, "Burn Everything British but Their Coal: The Anglo-Irish Economic War of the 1930s," *Journal of Economic History* 51, no. 2 (June 1991), 358.

hindered economic progress over the coming decades. Brian Girvin argues that "policy makers and politicians continued to assume that nationalism and self-sufficiency had served the state and society well during the depression and the Emergency," a position which saw the strengthening and solidification of agricultural export deals to Britain. However, there was a generalised failure to both engage in meaningful trade discussions with the broader European economic community and to encourage foreign industrial investments which would have diversified Ireland's economy.[79] Therefore, while much of the rest of the developed world entered a period of unprecedented growth and economic strength in the 1950s, Ireland entered a deep recession that resulted in loss of jobs in the agricultural sector and massive levels of emigration.[80] It would be some time before government officials engaged in any meaningful negotiations with international groups that would lead to diversification and the strengthening of Ireland's economy, a period which lies outside the scope of this dissertation.

Prior to Irish independence from the United Kingdom, Irish nationalists embraced agricultural co-operation as a possible avenue towards improving economic and sociocultural issues such as un-and underemployment. Journalist and poet George William Russell (1867-1935), better known as Æ, was a keen and active advocate for cooperatives, claiming that

> The co-operative movement alone of all movements in Ireland has aspired to make an economic solidarity in Ireland. Whatever the aims of the other movements may be—and many of them have high ideals and are necessary for the spiritual and intellectual development of our people—there is none of them which has for aim the unity of economic life.[81]

[79] Girvin, 42.
[80] Girvin, 38.
[81] Bowe, "Preserving the Relics of Heroic Time," 79.

Æ partnered with Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organisation Society (IAOS), established in 1894 with the intention to "promote and develop agricultural cooperatives and rural community enterprise."[82] According to Patrick Doyle, the IAOS represented a way in which a farmer might be "morally reconstituted as a noble peasant of the cultural revival."[83] The intention of the IAOS was to organise rural Irish farmers into collectives that would allow them to pool resources to purchase advanced farming equipment and technology as well as provide a platform for marketing agricultural goods. By 1920, the IAOS had enrolled over a thousand societies throughout Ireland with over 150,000 members.[84] Ideologically, a co-operative vision for Ireland favoured agriculture and rural living and was virtually indistinguishable from that spoken of by Taoiseach Éamon de Valera a half century later: a rural nationalist economy with strong and independent farmers capable of self-improvement.

Irish nationalists were keen on the ideals of co-operation. For instance, Sinn Féin political intellectual Darrell Figgis wrote that Irish farmers had "turned their co-operative societies into rural communities that were a re-birth in modern conditions of their old stateships."[85] However, in a 1908 royal inquiry, Father Terence C. Connolly of Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim, confessed his feelings of guilt for advocating co-operative

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[82] Our History," Irish Cooperative Organisation Society, accessed December 18, 2019, http://icos.ie/about/history/. The Irish Co-operative movement was initially focused on agricultural reforms, mainly creameries, and did not initially include an emphasis on work for women or the support of cottage-industries; however, as is discussed below, cottage textile production was later boosted due to the IAOS's neglect of these areas.

[83] Patrick Doyle, *Civilising Rural Ireland: The Co-operative Movement, Development and the Nation State, 1889-1939* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2019), 25.

[84] Patrick Doyle, "'Better Farming, Better Business, Better Living': The Irish Co-operative Movement and the Construction of the Irish Nation State, 1894-1932." PhD diss., University of Manchester, 2013.

[85] Doyle, *Civilising Rural Ireland*, 128.

practices that resulted in the exclusion of women from lucrative employment. He stated that

> I was one of the men who committed what some might call the sin of doing what I could to start the co-operative creameries. I spent a good many hard days at it. The idea was where a girl was deprived of the industry of churning, she would be turned over to a cottage industry like lacemaking or sprigging or something of that kind. I think that matter has not been sufficiently followed up.[86]

Joanna Bourke notes that this shift to co-operative creameries had an impact which extended beyond the economic realm:

> The home churn became a less prominent feature of the farm household. Women lost a dominant forum for discussing matters of community interest. Less obviously, a tradition of folklore and folk-charms fell into disuse. The 'good people' [fairies] were not invoked in creameries. May-morning charms, prayers, and spells lost their efficacy: 'The advent of the separator has, I fear, destroyed nearly all the poetry of these times, and with it the power of the butter witch.' Butter making had become 'as scientific a business as brewing', and women were moved out.[87]

With the collapse of women's work in butter production, the failure of philanthropic industries such as those run by Hart and Aberdeen, and the shuttering of the work of the Congested Districts Board in 1923, it seemed that women's place in the national economy and their socio-political role were in a dire situation indeed. However, cottage textile production remained an industry predominated by women, offering continued avenues to supplementary income for the farm family.

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[86] Bourke, 102. "Sprigging" is an embroidery term that refers to the creation of plant and leaf motifs with white thread on white linen, often used to make fine objects such as doilies, bonnets, christening gowns, or tablecloths (Norma Owens, "Rathbarry Sprigging School," *Headford Lace Project*, http://headfordlaceproject.ie/blog/14-rathbarry-sprigging-school, accessed February 19, 2020).

[87] Bourke, 106-7. Bourke is here quoting two articles from the *Irish Homestead,* the journal of the IAOS. Respectively, R.A. Anderson, "The Influence of Co-operation on Dairying," *Irish Homestead* 4 (June 4, 1904), 469 and author unknown, "Gilt-Edged Butter," *Irish Homestead* (June 22, 1912), 497. Bourke's valuable contribution here is to note the extra-economic impact of the professional creameries; while finances were clearly a concern for those women who lost income, there were far larger implications for female socialization, folklore, and intangible cultural heritage such as the above-mentioned "May-morning charms, prayers, and spells."

Organizing Labour, Class, and Agency in Irish Women's Textile Crafts

Muriel Gahan and the founders of the Irish Homespun Society were not alone in their advocacy work on behalf of Irish women; much to the contrary, in fact. Irish women had been at the forefront of many social, political, and economic movements in the early decades of the twentieth century. As Linda Connolly argues in *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution*, the Irish experienced the first and second waves of feminism like most western nations; however, scholars of this subject have tended to overemphasize both the early years of Irish feminism (ca. 1900-1922) and the branch of Irish feminism that was inseparable from the larger cultural nationalist movement.[88] Alongside nationalist organizations such as the Ladies Land League,[89] Cumann na mBan and Inghindidhe na hÉireann,[90] there were several Irish organizations that supported women within their domestic role. For example, Diarmaid Ferriter and Aileen Heverin have each published on the history of the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA), an

[88] Linda Connolly, *The Irish Women's Movement: From Revolution to Devolution* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 57. For other analyses of feminism and women's history in Ireland, see Maeve Casserly and Ciaran O'Neill, "Public History, Invisibility, and Women in the Republic of Ireland," *Public Historian* 39, no. 2 (May 2017): 10-30, Tricia Cusack, "Janus and Gender: Women and the Nation's Backward Look," *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 4 (2000): 541-61, Myrtle Hill, *Women in Ireland: A Century of Change* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 2003), Maria Luddy, *Women in Ireland, 1800-1918: A Documentary History* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1995), Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland, 1870-1970* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), and Maryann Valiulis and Mary O'Dowd, eds., *Women and Irish History: Essays in Honour of Margaret MacCurtain* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1997).

[89] For more on women's role in the Land Wars and pre-Independence nationalist movement, see Margaret Ward, "Gendering the Union: Imperial Feminism and the Ladies' Land League," *Women's History* 10, no. 1 (2001): 71-92, Jane Cotê, "Writing Women Out of History: Fanny and Anna Parnell and the Irish Ladies' Land League," *Etudes Irlandaises* (December 1992): 123-34, and Marie O'Neill, *From Parnell to De Valera: A Biography of Jennie Wyse Power, 1858-1941* (Charleston, West Virginia: Blackwater Press, 1991).

[90] For more on women's role in the twentieth century nationalist independence movement, see Ann Matthews, *Renegades: Irish Republican Women, 1900-1922* (Cork: Mercier Press, 2010), Joseph McKenna, *Women in the Struggle for Irish Independence* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Co., Ltd., 2019), Senia Pašeta, *Irish Nationalist Women, 1900-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), Gerry Kearns, "Mother Ireland and the Revolutionary Sisters," *Cultural Geographies* 11, no. 4 (October 2004): 443-67, and Frank A. Biletz, "Women and Irish-Ireland: The Domestic Nationalism of Mary Butler," *New Hibernia Review* 6, no. 1 (April 2002): 59-72.

organization in which Muriel Gahan gained experience with women's advocacy work before branching out to establish the Irish Homespun Society.[91] The ICA was founded in 1910 and was initially known as the United Irishwomen. It was founded as the women's branch of Horace Plunkett's Irish Agricultural Organization Society (IAOS) co-operative and was renamed the Irish Countrywomen's Association in 1935 to distinguish it from the violent nationalist political movement with which it shared a similar name. The ICA's mandate was "to improve the standard of life in rural Ireland through Education and Co-operative effort."[92] Similarly, Alan Hayes edited a collection of essays written in honour of Hilda Tweedy (1911-2005), the founder of the Irish Housewives Association (IHA), featuring contributions from many of Ireland's leading scholars such as Margaret MacCurtain, Caitríona Clear, and Mary Cullen.[93] As this volume explicates, the IHA was founded in 1942 with the purpose of providing support to low income families, particularly in the face of wartime deprivation and unacceptable child illness and mortality rates. It was within this context of female collaboration and co-operation that Muriel Gahan and her fellow homespun enthusiasts founded the Irish Homespun Society in 1935.[94]

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[91] See Diarmaid Ferriter, Mothers, Maidens, and Myths: A History of the Irish Countrywomen's Association (Dublin: An Foras Áiseanna Saothair, 1995) and Aileen Heverin, ICA: The Irish Countrywomen's Association, a History, 1910-2000 (London: Merlin Publishing, 2000).

[92] "Brief History," *The Irish Countrywomen's Association*, https://www.ica.ie/about-us/brief-history/, accessed August 10, 2023.

[93] See Alan Hayes, ed., Hilda Tweedy and the Irish Housewives Association: Links in the Chain (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2012).

[94] A central theme of this dissertation is women's labour and work across class distinctions. In this respect, my contribution is building upon the foundational research of many scholars. For relevant papers in this vein, see Mary Daly, "Women in the Irish Workforce from Pre-industrial to Modern Times," *Saothar* 7 (1981): 74-82, Tricia Cusack, "Janus and Gender: Women and the Nation's Backward Look," *Nations and Nationalism* 6, no. 4 (2000): 541-61, Jennifer Redmond, *Moving Histories: Irish Women's Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

In a memorandum on homespun prepared in 1946 by the Homespun Society it was clearly noted that "homespun is over and above all a woman's craft, bound up with the home. It is to women we must look for the greatest understanding of its needs and possibilities."[95] Similarly, Margaret Murray—an IHS colleague of Gahan—argued that "nine tenths of the work" of homespun was completed by women.[96] As mentioned in previous sections, the dissolution of the Congested Districts Board in 1923 by the Free State government left a lacuna in government support for these female-centred cottage industries and textile manufacturing. As was the case with Hart and Aberdeen in the 1880s, support for textile crafts increasingly came from civilians with a concerted interest and socio-economic background which allowed them to participate in voluntary, philanthropic, or enterprising activities. Muriel Gahan (1897-1995) was one such figure who worked as a craft advocate and co-operative organiser. Gahan was born in Co. Donegal, and raised near Castlebar, Co. Mayo, two of the least developed and most poverty-stricken counties. However, she came from a wealthy Anglo-Irish family, and her father Frederick was employed by the Congested Districts Board during its entire tenure. He was a key figure in supporting the tweed and flannel industry in Ardara, Co. Donegal, during the late 1880s.[97] This area was home to an unusually high concentration of spinners and weavers, and held

[95] "Homespun Memorandum presented by An Cumann Sniomacain, The Irish Homespun Society," 1946, Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[96] Geraldine Mitchell, *Deeds Not Words: The Life and Work of Muriel Gahan, Champion of Rural Women and Craftworkers* (Dublin: Town House and Country House, 1997), 106.

[97] County Donegal has a long tradition of home weaving completed predominantly by male weavers in their homes, outbuildings, or small weaving sheds where a small number of weavers would work collectively. Magee Donegal Tweed, for instance, was established in 1866 in Donegal Town by John Magee "buying and selling Hand-woven Donegal Tweed…from the part-time weavers [and] part-time fishermen/farmers." See "Our History," *Magee 1866*, https://www.magee1866.com/en/Our-History/cc-15.aspx, accessed August 1, 2023.

an important monthly wool fair.[98] Gahan was greatly influenced by the work of her father and following a brief career working as a house painter with The Modern Decorator, an all-women's firm in Dublin, she was inspired to enter into craft advocacy after working on the Country Workers Exhibition at the 1929 Royal Dublin Society Spring Show.[99]

Throughout her career, Gahan would be pivotal in the establishment of many craft organisations and marketing outlets for country producers. She set up The Country Shop at #23 St. Stephen's Green in Dublin to sell rural wares. The shop was run as a co-operative under the title Country Workers Ltd (October 1930-1988), with the objectives to:

> 1. Help the people in the poor districts in the west by encouraging and supporting home industries such as hand spinning, weaving, and knitting. 2. To encourage individual craftworkers such as smiths and carpenters in the country, and all other country industries and country products. 3. To promote and assist the work of the United Irishwomen in the country.[100]

The Country Shop also housed a restaurant which became an extremely popular spot in Dublin's city centre, and Gahan was encouraged in her work to establish other organisations. In 1935 she started the Irish Homespun Society to encourage the work of spinners, mainly those based in Co. Donegal. In recognition of the crucial role women played in the production of quality textiles, she wrote that "we understand the important part women take in making a piece of homespun. Nine-tenths of the work is theirs. There is of course good weaving and bad weaving, but it is the dyeing and the spinning that makes

[98] Geraldine Mitchell, 54. Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon also took an active interest in supporting the textile production in Ardara in the early 1890s. Her interventions included inspections of the products for sale at the monthly fairs, with those of high quality being stamped and given a bonus sum of money per yard (Frances Carruthers, "The Organisational Work of Lady Ishbel Aberdeen, Marchioness of Aberdeen and Temair (1857-1939)," PhD diss. National University of Ireland, Maynooth, 2001).

[99] According to Geraldine Mitchell, "Muriel and her co-workers in The Modern Decorator did everything: preparing and painting ceilings and walls, putting up wallpaper and stripping paint as well as working out colour schemes and mixing the paints." (58-61)

[100] G. Mitchell, 73.

the real difference between a good and a bad homespun."[101] In 1946 Gahan established another co-operative, the Country Markets Ltd., as a joint venture between the ICA and the Irish Homespun Society.[102] All these organisations emphasised the exhibition and marketing of country crafts, but Gahan was also motivated to provide education to improve the quality of the objects produced. In the 1950s, with funding provided by the Kellogg Foundation to purchase a country manor near the town of Termonfeckin, Co. Louth, Gahan established An Grianán, a residential college for the training of women in crafts and other aspects pertaining to self-care and domestic roles.[103] An Grianán, which is still in operation today, was founded to educate women in craft skills, but also included courses such as running a boarding house or how to incorporate electricity into the rural kitchen.[104]

Gahan became a founding member (and the only female member) of Ireland's arts council, An Chomhairle Ealaín, in the 1950s, was an influential member of the RDS throughout her career and was awarded an honourary degree from Trinity College Dublin in 1978. Her work undoubtedly protected and advanced the status of traditional Irish crafts. However, she is today somewhat of a marginal figure, the only major work published

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[101] G. Mitchell, 106. For a history of spinning see, for example C. Aspin, *The Woollen Industry* (Risborough, UK: Shire Publications, 1982); Elizabeth C. Barney Buel, *The Tale of the Spinning Wheel* (Litchfield, Connecticut: [s.n], 1903); H. Catling, "History of Spinning and Weaving," *Textiles* 12, no. 1 (1983): 20-28; Barbara Hahn, "Spinning Through the History of Technology: A Methodological Note," *Textile History* 47, no. 2 (November 2016): 227-242; David Jenkins, ed., *The Cambridge History of Western Textiles* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003); Mathilde Frances Lind, "Handspinning Tradition in the United States: Traditionalization and Revival," *Journal of American Folklore* 133, no. 528 (Spring 2020): 142-164.

[102] The Country Markets Co-operative Society is still in operation to this day.

[103] The Kellogg Foundation was established in 1930 by the WK Kellogg Company, manufacturers of cereal products initially produced to aid in the convalescence of patients at the Battle Creek Sanitorium in Michigan. Horace Plunkett spent time at the sanitorium when he was in the United States. Dr Emory Morris of the Kellogg Foundation travelled to Ireland in 1952 in search of a worthy agricultural project that might be funded by the Foundation. (G. Mitchell, 172).

[104] G. Mitchell, 190-1.

being a celebratory (and non-academic) biography by Geraldine Mitchell.[105] This dissertation functions, in part, as an archival excavation that brings the neglected work of Gahan to light while at the same time opening up several avenues for further research in regard to mid-century craft production and advocacy work in Ireland.

Chapter Breakdown

This dissertation has been influenced from the beginning by theoretical and scholarly voices whose work not only undergirds the theory and methodology of this research, but which also inspired the particular angles from which the Irish Homespun Society was analysed. This dissertation bears traces of the ecocritical discourses of Tim Ingold and Alexander Langlands, Janet Wolff's theory of the social production of art, T.J. Jackson Lears's antimodernism, and Joanna Bourke's femino-historical interpretations; however, to comprehensively understand the functioning of the Irish Homespun Society across all levels, a specific, coherent, and cohesive theory was required. To meet this demand, I have developed a theory of craft ecologies to explain not only the underlying motivations of the IHS, but also to link with parallels found within artisanal consumer culture and markets in the contemporary period.

This specialised theory emerged organically from and was developed concurrently alongside the historical and contextual research of this project. My concept of craft ecologies encompasses four interrelated elements that—when studied holistically—provide a cohesive and unified understanding of Irish homespun tweed. In fact, the nexus of the craft ecologies schema (see fig. 5.1) allows for any traditional art or craft to be placed

[105] See note 96 for full citation.

at the centre of analysis and examined holistically. The four elements which comprise this notion of craft ecologies are raw materials and the local environment, community and identity, bodies and skill, and minds and knowledge. Each chapter of this dissertation discusses one component of this holistic ecology of traditional Irish crafts as it relates to the advocacy work of the Homespun Society.

In Chapter One, homespun textiles are examined in the context of their constituent raw materials. Using a theory of the dwelling perspective borrowed from Ingold, this chapter attempts to make visible the situation of rural craft producers by looking to the Irish Folklore archives for traditions and evidence of sharing of intergenerational knowledge. Homespun's site-specificity is explored in terms of Ingold's *taskscape*, arguing that agricultural land, sheep, and wild flora come together with the productive capacities of homespun artisans to produce a material object that was constituted entirely from its surroundings. Building on this, Chapter Two shifts the geographic focus from the western Irish homespun *taskscapes* to IHS craft exhibitions at the Royal Dublin Society in Ireland's most populous urban area. This section offers an examination of the public exhibition of homespun and other traditional crafts, arguing that the Homespun Society was deeply enmeshed within socio-political ideologies of the period which sought to preserve and honour traditional crafts with a nationalist fervour. I argue that these exhibitions actively constructed an image of crafts as being representative of the resilience and strength of the Irish people and at the same time linking modern Ireland to a long lineage of pre-colonial figures and mythology.

Chapters Three and Four focus directly on the bodies and minds of homespun producers. Chapter Three looks at homespun production through the lens of embodied

knowledges and skill which is inherent in the active body, rather than intellectual mind. The various stages of production of high-quality homespun are explored in this chapter alongside discussions of holistic manufacturing, perceptive and sensuous production (taking a multi-sensory approach to crafts that deprivileges the purely visual), and the perpetuation of pre- and non-industrial conceptions of time and productivity. Finally, this chapter concludes with an examination of women's specific role in homespun production and exhibition, arguing that homespun offered an ideal occupation in which to perpetuate traditionally gendered ideals to younger generations. Chapter Four shifts focus from the body to the minds of these homespun producing women through an exploration of craft and domestic education offered through the Homespun Society and its related organisations. For instance, Muriel Gahan understood the importance of preserving craft artefacts for posterity and worked diligently to compile the nucleus of what would later become the Museum of Country Life in Co. Mayo. This chapter also examines educational opportunities provided to women by the IHS: the vocational educative model of the Kerry Weavers, and the residential college established for rural women at An Grianán, Co. Louth. This dissertation concludes with an afterword that explores the eventual dissolution of the Irish Homespun Society in 1965 in the context of a nationally funded report on the quality of design in Ireland completed by prominent Scandinavian designers. Finally, a brief summation of the novel theoretical concept of craft ecologies is explored in greater depth as a way to signpost areas for future research using this theory.

This project took on an entirely different form than what could have been predicted at the outset seven years ago. My goal was to shed light on an underexamined segment of craft history, but in the meantime, I have also encountered many of the same issues which

plagued artisans, then as now. Questions of funding for the arts, limited and selective preservation of textile objects, and the unfortunate lengthy pandemic closure of many institutions ensured that the scope of this dissertation was one of discourse analysis and historical commentary, rather than able to be based in material artefacts themselves. However, it is the firm belief of this writer that the difficulties inherent in uncovering marginalized voices—such as rural women artisans—is meaningful enough to warrant the effort. I hope that this project will function as a starting point for future examinations of other craft figures and organizations. Further, the theoretical framework which structures this dissertation is inherently transferable, and it is hoped that this will be taken up in future studies to understand the past, but perhaps also to direct planning and policy for arts and crafts organizations in the present. Today, society is faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles in terms of climate change, economic necessity, and systemic inequalities; however, these are neither new nor unique problems. The role of this dissertation is threefold: to illuminate the work of the Irish Homespun Society, to divert academic focus away from Dublin towards the rural hinterland regions, and finally to offer a small glimmer of hope for how artisans and arts advocates can today focus on their own small craft ecologies by dwelling amongst raw materials and animals, by celebrating inclusion in and identity of a community, and by bringing together the bodies and minds of skilled artisans to produce quality objects through meaningful and ecologically-sound labour.

Chapter One - Soil, Sheep, and Natural Shades: Homespun & Ideology in the West of Ireland

Muriel Gahan's interest in supporting homespun industries in the west of Ireland predated her involvement with the Irish Homespun Society. In fact, in 1930 while still in her first year as a member of the United Irishwomen (UI), Gahan returned to her home county of Mayo in search of a weaver who might travel to Dublin to demonstrate his craft in the UI's installation at the Royal Dublin Society's Spring Show.[1] She eventually came across experienced carpet weaver Patrick Madden in Ballycroy, a small village in the northwest quadrant of that county. The two immediately sparked a friendship and Madden did in fact demonstrate his weaving in Dublin that same year; moreover, the correspondence between the two indicates the significant stakes of Irish homespun industry revitalization. In a letter dated February 12, 1930, Madden wrote at length to Gahan about his belief that the perceived poor quality of the homespun being produced was due, in part, to the poor living conditions of producers. He wrote:

> Our country spinner has water not always too clean; a small pot; perhaps a leaking pail; sometimes a dull fire; intrusion from youngsters and others every moment; a thousand odds and ends of household work to be attended. The dyed article has to be washed and dried perhaps where sheep and cattle or careless youngsters are roaming about…chances are that weeks, perhaps months later the wool or yarn will come back to the weaver or Depot so badly blotched and smeared and burned as to be useless for manufacturing into saleable articles.[2]

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[1] Geraldine Mitchell, *Deeds Not Words: The Life and Work of Muriel Gahan, Champion of Rural Women and Craftworkers* (Dublin: Townhouse, 1997), 62. The Society of United Irishwomen was founded in 1910 in Co. Wexford as a national and nationalist support organisation for rural women. The group changed their name to the Irish Countrywomen's Association in 1935 so as not to be too closely associated with more radical political parties. For more information on the United Irishwomen, see Horace Plunkett, *The United Irishwomen: Their Place, Work, and Ideals* (Dublin: Maunsel & Co., 1911) and D.A.J. MacPherson, *Women and the Irish Nation: Gender, Associational Culture, and Irish Identity, 1890-1914* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).

[2] Patrick Madden to Muriel Gahan, February 12, 1930, Geraldine Mitchell, *Deeds Not Words: The Life and Work of Muriel Gahan, Champion of Rural Women and Craftworkers* (Dublin: Town House, 1997), 213-6.

Madden definitively expressed his opinion that even "taking it for granted that supplies of clean wool are available, I still would not have dyeing carried out in the homes of the workers."[3] Madden, a highly experienced weaver, suggested to Gahan that he thought it prudent to remove the dyeing processes from the homes of individual producers to a central depot that could monitor quality and consistency. However, this seems to conflict explicitly with a mandate promoted by Gahan and the IHS which clearly stated that they understood homespun to be "handspun, *home-dyed* yarn, which is also handwoven."[4] For Gahan and the Homespun Society, quality homespun was the outcome of skilled producers using local materials and completing most—if not all—of the labour in their homes.

This chapter argues that the Irish Homespun Society was established upon a strong ideological foundation of antimodernism that favoured small-scale decentralized production completed by workers in their own homes, with materials drawn from the immediate environment and craft techniques informed by deep-time traditions of folkloric thinking and intergenerational knowledge. For Gahan, authentic and high-quality homespun could only be produced when the craft was properly situated within history, tradition, and the local specificities of place and landscape, regardless of the benefits available through industrial production. In an undated type-written article titled "Country Crafts and Countrywomen," she affirmed that country crafts have been described as being "rooted in the life and soil of the country. More prosaically, their materials, their character,

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[3] Ibid. Madden offered a suggestion on what he thought might be a remedy to the issue of poor dyeing: "If safety, success, and satisfaction is to be assured all ideas of local skill and effort must be abandoned so far as the dyeing of wool or yarn is concerned. A dye factory or Depot with skilled workers, under *expert supervision* — for even skilled workers sometimes run the easy way with business — should account for more work in a week, and the same satisfaction, than all the skilled workers of the Gaeltacht could attend in some kind of way in a month."

[4] Emphasis added. R.V. Stoney, "To The Editor," *Irish Independent*, March 2, 1938.

and their quality are determined by a country's geographic position and climate, the confirmation of its land and the use of its land, by the variety of races and people that inhabit it, their customs and beliefs, their way of life determined by the economic position in which they find themselves."[5] I contend that from the outset the Homespun Society conceived of homespun production as part of a living tradition that was deeply imbricated with and inseparable from the local environment, itself replete with superior raw materials. Using anthropologist Tim Ingold's interrelated concepts of the *dwelling perspective* and *taskscape*, this chapter employs an ecocritical lens to excavate and examine interconnectivities between landscape, raw materials, local producers, and craft objects; all were seen by the IHS as integral to the ideological ecology of homespun.

In *Perceptions of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill*, Ingold describes his theoretical concept of the "dwelling perspective."[6] Drawing on the phenomenological ideas of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the dwelling perspective is an alternative way of understanding humankind's place *vis-à-vis* all other living and non-living entities. He writes that, when humans conceptualize their existence from the perspective of phenomenological dwelling, "we do not act *upon* [the world], or do things *to* it; rather we move along *with* it. Our actions do not transform the world, they are part and parcel of the world's transforming itself."[7] In this understanding, Ingold destabilises anthropocentric perspectives by highlighting the interrelations between

[5] Muriel Gahan, "Country Crafts and Countrywomen," no date, typewritten and hand annotated document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[6] Tim Ingold, *Perceptions of the Environment; Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

[7] Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," in *Perceptions of the Environment; Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 199.

humans and non-humans and goes further in an attempt to "dissolve the orthodox dichotomies between evolution and history, and between biology and culture."[8] He argues that "far from being superimposed upon a substrate of evolved human universals, such variation must be part and parcel of the variation of all living things, which has its source in their enmeshment within an all-encompassing field of relations."[9] In this view, the world is envisioned as an organism whereby, rather than being separate entities acting on the world, humans are an integral part of the organism, working alongside all other entities: an "animal-in-its environment rather than the self-contained individual."[10] In exploring the work of the Irish Homespun Society, it is clear that an ideology similar to the dwelling perspective was at play, as noted by the organisation's insistent emphasis on the use of local materials and traditional production methods to produce quality homespun textiles.

Ingold's dwelling perspective situates humans *within* their environment, rather than as agents who act upon it externally. He makes the claim that "like organism and environment, body and landscape are complementary terms: each implies the other, alternatively as figure and ground."[11] He continues: "the forms of the landscape are not, however, prepared in advance for creatures to occupy, nor are the bodily forms of those creatures independently specified in their genetic makeup."[12] For Ingold, then, the dwelling perspective is a human-nature relationship which is *emergent*: the activities of human and animal agents actively produce the landscape, rather than applying *a priori*

[8] Ingold, "Building, Dwelling, Living: How Animals and People Make Themselves at Home in the World," in *Perceptions of the Environment; Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 187.

[9] Ingold, "Building, Dwelling, Living," 187.

[10] Ingold, "Building, Dwelling, Living," 186.

[11] Tim Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," *World Archaeology* 25, no. 2 (1993): 156.

[12] Ibid.

conceptualizations to the construction of that landscape (an oppositional paradigm Ingold termed the *building perspective*). The collective productive activities engaged in by agents of a particular landscape coalesce over extended periods of deep time to produce a *taskscape*. Productive tasks carried out by "skilled agents in an environment" are the "constitutive acts of dwelling," according to Ingold, and over time the individual acts collapse into one another, producing the landscape as known to current dwellers.[13] Therefore, the landscape becomes symbolically significant as material evidence of dwelling in that area. In the sections that follow, homespun will be situated within its broader ecological context to explore how the materials and techniques of craft production are both derived from and contribute to the taskscape of homespun textiles. I begin first with an examination of folklore and intergenerational knowledge before turning to explorations of traditional agricultural systems, sheep husbandry and fleece procurement, and finally the extraction of textile dye from local plants and organisms, all of which form an integral part of the Homespun Society's situated ecological ideology.

Folklore and Intergenerational Knowledge

In "The Temporality of the Landscape," Ingold makes the claim that "native dwellers…learn through an education of attention" that is situated within the taskscape at hand, and for which narrative is oftentimes used to pass information to successive occupants of that land.[14] This narrative memory of the landscape is made up of consecutive layers of sedimented knowledge that appear most clearly in inter-generationally passed folkloric stories. From its establishment, and indeed even before, the Irish Homespun

[13] Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," 157-9.
[14] Ingold, "The Temporality of the Landscape," 152-3.

Society worked closely with the Irish Folklore Commission and its predecessors. Among the best in the world, Ireland's folkloric archival collections include transcriptions of interviews made with rural Irish residents. These invisible figures are oftentimes absent from the more "official" archives of governmental and administrative history. The oral recollection of traditional practices and tales of magical thinking relating to the production of homespun are prevalent through both the Main Manuscript Collection and the Schools' Collection of the Irish Folklore Archive at University College Dublin.

Folkloric narratives strengthen the human relationship with landscape by recording and preserving "local wisdom drawn from interaction with the hinterland," one of Liam Leonard's indicators of a rural fundamentalist mindset.[15] Frequently featuring elements of magical thinking, the narratives recounted in folklore document practices of daily life while at the same time fabricating fantastical stories to ensure the perpetuation of this knowledge. For instance, the Homespun Society called on all homespun producers, when possible, to use *Parmelia saxatilis* when dying wool (fig. 1.1). Called crottle or moss in the local vernacular (Irish: *sgraithe na gcloch*), this coastal lichen was considered the easiest natural dye to use, and it grew ubiquitously on the western shores. The perpetuation of its use was encouraged by belief that clothing dyed in crottle had protective powers to shield children from the nefarious activities of *na Daoine maithe* (the "good people", or fairies) and changelings.[16] Frequently derided as premodern and superstitious, Irish folklore is filled with colourful allusions to pragmatic knowledge passed down generationally;

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[15] Liam Leonard, "Environmental Protest in Ireland," in *Occupy the Earth: Global Environmental Movements*, edited by Sya B. Kedzior and Liam Leonard (Bingley, U.K.: Emerald, 2014), 65.

[16] Chrissie O'Gorman, Typewritten draft of a lecture on her Craft Survey of Ireland," ca. 1950. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/67. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

perhaps the narrative flourishes of their telling is precisely why this knowledge has been retained to this day.[17]

In a lecture describing the craft survey of Ireland she completed on behalf of the IHS, Chrissie O'Gorman recounted local wisdom that claimed the ideal time for spinning fleeces into yarn was only after the sheep were asleep. This, in fact, has nothing to do with the sheep but instead narrativizes warnings for spinners not to exhaust themselves with unnecessary labour. Heat emanating from the central hearth fire would slowly increase temperatures of the interior spaces of rural cottages throughout the day; therefore, the late evening, when everyone else had also retired indoors, was the ideal time for carding and spinning fleeces, the natural oils of the wool having been softened by the warmth making the process easier. Nevertheless, spinners should also heed the warnings recorded in other folkloric narratives on the need to give oneself adequate rest. For instance, an oral story collected from a Mrs. Kate Corcoran in Co. Mayo details the necessity of self-restraint regarding the number of nighttime hours spent at the spinning wheel:

> Once upon a time there lived an old woman who used to be up very late spinning. One night after all the rest had gone to sleep she remained at the wheel. When she had finished she looked up to the fire and saw an old woman spinning in the corner. She saw another old hag under the bed spinning. She turned around and saw another at the backdoor. She knew at once that they were fairies and that it was not

[17] As is the case with any archive that contain significant oral recollections, the Irish Folklore Archive is special for the abundance of material gleaned directly from rural Irish residents. These voices—so often absent from governmental and larger institutionalised national archives—provide a direct tangible link to the lives of homespun producers in the west of Ireland. While this dissertation is not a theoretical exploration of "the Archive" *per se*, the author does recognize that there is a large field of discourse on the subject. See, for example, from the Irish context, Barry Houlihan, *Theatre and Archival Memory: Irish Drama and Marginalised Histories, 1951-1977* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). For a more general introduction to theorisations of the archive, see : Michel de Certeau, *The Writing of History*, translated by Tom Conley (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), Michel Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, translated by A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), or Michelle Caswell, "'The Archive' is Not An Archives: Acknowledging the Intellectual Contributions of Archival Studies," *Reconstruction: Studies in Contemporary Culture* 16, no. 1 (2016).

> right to wait up late spinning. She put out the light and went to bed. From that time forth she never waited up late spinning.[18]

A similar tale from Co. Louth carries a similar precaution:

> There was once an old woman who was always telling her neighbours how late she used to stay up at night spinning. One night she made up her mind that she would not go to bed till she would have all the spinning done. About three o'clock in the morning a knock came to the door. She opened the door and to her surprise she saw a woman with a spinning wheel on her head. The fairy woman asked the woman of the house would she go and help her to finish her spinning. The woman agreed and so she came in and sat down to spin. They were not long spinning till another fairy came in, and so on till twelve came. They all started spinning and after a while one of them asked for a drink. The woman had no water in the house and they said if she would not give them a drink that they would make water out of her blood. One of these fairy women was a friend of the old woman and she whispered to her to go to the door and say the lís was on fire which was close by. The old woman did as she was told and all the fairies ran out. When she got them out she locked the door, put out the light and went to bed. When she was in bed they came again to the door and shouted to let then in. She gave them no heed and they went away and she never stayed up a night so late again.[19]

As should be evident from these examples, the folklore of spinning and dying wool was predominantly aimed at female spinners, a fact highlighted by journalist Gertrude Gaffney who alludes to the deep-time historical connections between homespun production and matriarchal lineage. In 1939, she reported in the *Irish Independent* on a "wonderful range of natural dyes [used in homespun production in the west], the secret of which has come down in the Connemara tweed-making families, *from grand-mother to grand-daughter*."[20] By the 1930s, this female lineage had been interrupted by mass emigration drawing women away from farms and into large urban centres seeking work and other

[18] "Spinning at Night: The Hags," recounted by Kate Corcoran, Burren, Co. Mayo, ca. 1937-39. *The Schools' Collection*, vol. 0089, p. 023. National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/4498043/4345572.

[19] "A Fairy Story," recounted by Owen Duffy, Tullaghomeath, Co. Louth, ca. 1937-39. *The Schools' Collection*, vol. 0658, p. 109-10. National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/5008807/4957913.

[20] Gertrude Gaffney, "Sketch Your World," *Irish Independent*, April 28, 1939. Emphasis added.

opportunities; it was precisely for this reason that Muriel Gahan established the Irish Homespun Society.[21]

In a piece titled "In Search of Homespun," Gahan recounts her meeting with an aged spinner and dyer at a small cottage in Co. Mayo "half-buried in whins and rushes":

> We knew she was a fairy when we saw her. Unlike other women, she was dressed in a shawl and a scarlet petticoat with a white cloth tied round her head. Her face, rosy red, was seamed with a thousand wrinkles, and smiles ran out of her eyes and round her mouth. When she spoke, her deep voice echoed down the valley.[22]

Gahan recollected that the woman worked alongside the hearth with a young girl who aided her by carding wool. "'A neighbour,' the fairy said, and proudly she showed us photographs from London of her own daughters. Two lovely girls, with a handsome man apiece. No, they never came back to Shrahmore now: 'Sure, why would they?'"[23] It is not difficult to imagine how this single interaction might have encouraged Gahan in her work to preserve homespun production in Ireland; not only could she preserve a fast-disappearing craft tradition, but she might also be able to provide meaningful employment opportunities for young women frequently left with little other option than to emigrate to Dublin, London, or further abroad. In this sense, Gahan's rural fundamentalist agenda to "keep women spinning in their homes" was as much ideological as it was economic. Not only did she believe that country crafts were "rooted in the life and soil of the country," but

[21] As is well documented, the Irish emigrated in huge numbers to the United Kingdom, but also further afield, especially to the United States. See, for example: Gerard Moran, *Sending Out Ireland's Poor: Assisted Emigration to North America in the Nineteenth Century* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2004), Donald H. Akenson, *Ireland, Sweden and the Great European Migration, 1815-1914* (Montreal: Queen's University Press, 2011), and Mary Gilmartin and Allen White, eds., *Migrations: Ireland in a Global World* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013).

[22] Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document, 1. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[23] Ibid.

also that modern-day homespun producers were intimately linked to the (quite literal) giants of Irish mythology and the Irish of pre-colonial history.

The Nationalist, a regional newspaper in Co. Tipperary, reported on the Irish Homespun Society's efforts to "search for the lost secrets of the ancient Irish dye trade."[24] The article noted that "for long it has been a subject of regret that we have no knowledge of how to make from native dyes the purples, the blues, the greens, in which ancient Irishmen, like Finn MacCool, Cuchulainn and Conal Cearnach arrayed themselves when going to a party." This reference to Irish mythological heroes indicates a lineage, albeit a broken one, between grand legendary figures and the manufacture of Irish textiles in the contemporary time (which came largely at the expense of involvement in the contemporary fashion industry).[25] By fostering connections such as these, the IHS was able to construct national narratives which ostensibly attempted to bypass the period of Irish coloniality and centre on figures of historico-cultural significance to the nationalist imagination. Social discourse of the time included other similar instances where recourse to history—mythological or real—was used to generate pride and prestige for homespun in the present. For instance, the language used by IHS collaborator and dye expert Violetta Thurstan in 1939 signals the importance of rekindling traditional manufacturing methods by "reteaching the people their old ways of dyeing and encouraging their own natural resources."[26] Very clearly, this

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[24] "Lost Secrets: Ancient Irish Dyes," *The Nationalist*, September 23, 1942.

[25] For a small island nation, Ireland has had a surprising presence in the contemporary fashion world. Though largely outside the scope of this study, excellent sources exist on this subject. See, for example, Mary Burke, "The Cottage, the Castle, and the Couture Cloak: 'Traditional' Irish Fabrics and 'Modern' Irish Fashions in America, ca. 1952-1969," *Journal of Design History* 31, no. 4 (November 2018): 364-82 or Síle de Cléir, "Creativity in the Margins: Identity and Locality in Ireland's Fashion Journey," *The Journal of Dress, Body & Culture* 15, no. 2 (June 2011): 201-24.

[26] "Nothing Like Homespuns, Expert's Praise," *Irish Independent*, March 31, 1939.

kind of nostalgic—and at times, paternalistic—attitude was intended to foreground Irish identity and a collective history that was situated within the immediate rural areas of homespun-producing regions.

Case Studies of the Homespun Taskscape

As an agricultural craft, homespun production relied on access to land to husband sheep, procure natural dyes, and undertake the intensive steps of production. Gahan was well aware of the generalized poor conditions in homespun districts when she wrote that "it is always in mountain districts that homespun is found. The mountain people, cut off from the rest of the world have had to spin and weave to clothe themselves and their children, and so the homespun has survived. It is here too that the Irish language has survived; it is the speech of their everyday life."[27] The continuing linkages of rural artisanship and remote, mountainous regions was anything but incidental and was intimately connected to Ireland's colonial history and the pragmatics of poverty, self-sufficiency, and survival.

Soil: Geography, Colonialism, and Interrogation of the Agricultural Taskscape of Homespun

It was often noted during Homespun Society meetings that the isolated nature of homespun-producing districts was to blame for the industry's lack of variety and design, as well as the lag with which rural producers took up new trends and fashions from the international market. However, the perpetuation of true homespun practices was deeply imbricated with poverty, necessity, and self-reliance on the land. The native Gaelic Irish population was pushed westwards to rocky western coasts and islands following the

[27] Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document, 1. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

plantation of English and Scottish settlers on arable lands in eastern Ireland during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.[28] Abject poverty was an immediate result of the lack of access to suitable farming lands and was a precipitating cause of the devastating Irish famine (1845-1852).[29] The 1920s *Coimisiún na Gaeltachta* report echoed concerns raised by the Congested Districts Board decades earlier; both understood that the mountainous and coastal western regions were the least developed and most impoverished in the nation. The isolation of these areas required that the people be self-reliant in terms of providing food and clothing, and the purportedly altruistic aim of the Irish Homespun Society was to assist and aid producers by encouraging efficiency and quality using traditional techniques; the emphasis here was maintaining traditional and site-specific production methods.

Undoubtedly, conditions were very difficult for rural westerners in the decades after Irish independence; this is evidenced by the proliferation of autobiographies and memoirs of the time.[30] However, as Tricia Cusack argues, the seemingly paradoxical reaction to rural poverty was not modernisation, relocation, or extended state support (though these did all take place); instead, the official national (and nationalist) response in the 1930s—beginning at the top with the governing Fianna Fáil party—was to idealise and celebrate the rugged, difficult lives of Irish coastal inhabitants. Cusack states that "the idea of a

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[28] See Johan Patrick Montaño, *The Roots of English Colonialism in Ireland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011) and Jonathan Bardon, *The Plantation of Ulster: The British Colonisation of the North of Ireland in the Seventeenth Century* (Dublin: Gil & Macmillan, 2011).

[29] See Maria Luddy, *Ireland Since the Famine* (London: Weinfeld and Nicholson, 1971), Cormac Ó Grada, *Ireland Before and After the Famine* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), and Margaret Kelleher, *The Feminization of the Famine: Expressions of the Inexpressible* (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997)

[30] See, for example Muiris Ó Súilleabháin's *Fiche Bliain ag Fás* (*Twenty Years a-Growing*) published in 1933 documenting the author's life on the Atlantic coastal Blasket Islands (New York City: Viking Press, 1933). Similar accounts include Tomás Ó Criomhthain's *An t-Oileánach* (*The Islandman)*(London: Chatto & Windus, 1934), and Peig Sayers's 1936 *An Old Woman's Reflections: The Life of a Blasket Island Storyteller* from 1936 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

simple rural community based on the family and village, the image of a past golden age, became increasingly popular in Western countries as industrialization advanced, it was a model of order in an alienating world."[31] A focus on the specificities of traditional life in seemingly isolated regions formed the nucleus of nationalistic identity in the new Free State; in essence, it formed an ideology of what constituted an ideal Irish identity. This ideology was precisely that which influenced the work of the Homespun Society.[32] There are many instances of the practice of this ideology within the written records of the IHS. For example, Gahan reflected on her advocacy work during a 1984 interview with *Irish Times* journalist Fergus Pyle in which Gahan noted that the primary purpose of the Society had been to "develop homespuns in the Gaeltacht."[33] An early report echoed these sentiments, with the *Irish Times* reporting on an IHS exhibition as aiming "at the

[31] Tricia Cusack, "'A Countryside Bright with Cosy Homesteads': Irish Nationalism and the Cottage Landscape," *National Identities* 3, no 3 (2001), 223.

[32] Using examples from Appalachia and Ireland, Audrey Horning has argued that historical research and archaeology have been complicit in perpetuating these ruralist ideologies. For instance, she notes how Corbin Cottage in Virginia's Shenandoah National Park is presented as an example of the local vernacular architecture prior to the forced relocation of hundreds for the establishment of the park. However, the conservation of this one example obscures the true history of the immediate area. She notes that though "Haywood Nicholson's ten-room, three-storey stone and frame house was burned down," the much smaller, sparser, and rugged Corbin cabin (the smallest remaining house in that area) was retained and today is offered as a "typical example of Blue Ridge vernacular architecture." (361). Similarly, the excavations of post-medieval seasonal farming settlements in the west of Ireland, particularly from the late 19th century, routinely uncover "thousands of sherds of industrial ceramics, commercial food containers, and a range of other commercial goods." (367). Clearly then, despite indications to the otherwise, many researchers still maintain a bias towards this ideological rural fundamentalism. As Horning polemicizes, "such assumptions reveal more about modern attitudes towards upland environments than they inform about the experiences of the people in the past, people who were marginalized in colonial writings, and *people who are at risk of being further marginalized in archaeological writings*. Emphasis added. Audrey Horning, "Materiality and Mutable Landscapes; Rethinking Seasonality and Marginality in Rural Ireland," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 11 (2007): 358-378. Similar arguments are made by Eugene Costello in the introduction to his book on the traditional Irish practice of "booleying" or seasonal transhumance practices for cattle. Costello argues that "important first steps were taken in historical geography and folklife studies many decades ago, but by portraying [transhumance] as a 'traditional' practice that belonged in the past they partly held back deeper investigations of transhumance and landscape change in upland [regions of Ireland]." See Eugene Costello, *Transhumance and the Making of Ireland's Uplands, 1550-1900* (Martlesham, Suffolk: Boydell & Brewer Press, 2020), 4.

[33] "The Saturday Interview: Fergus Pyle Talked to Muriel Gahan," *Irish Times*, May 19, 1984.

preservation of the hand spinning and weaving industries carried on in the homes of the people in country districts."[34] However, a later cinematic example offers perhaps the most direct link between ruralist ideologies and the lush Irish landscape.

In 1958 the Irish tourism board—Bord Fáilte Éireann—produced a 27-minute film entitled *Irish Gossamer* directed by Colm Ó Laoghaire. The film documents the production of textiles in Ireland; dialogue is filled with idyllic phrases linking these textiles to the natural landscape of the island. For instance, the film notes that "the colours and textures of these materials are produced by craftsmen who absorb the patterns from life around them and weave them into their fabrics." Similarly, it is argued that these fabrics bear "colours, textures, patterns, all [of which] are inspired by the living tapestry of Ireland."[35] The film was released to international audiences in the late 1950s and epitomises the overarching ideological understanding of Irish culture under the traditionalist and protectionist government of Éamon de Valera (who would be replaced as Taoiseach by the modernising Seán Lemass in 1959). The relationship between Irish identity, the rural landscape, and traditional forms of textile production as they are interwoven together on screen typifies the patronising idealistic perceptions of the countryside that occluded the reality of a landscape marred by unemployment, emigration, under-education, and poverty.

The propagandistic qualities of *Irish Gossamer* make it clear that this is a film about—but not for—a rural population idealised as the true "Irish spirit." As Mary E. Daly confirms, electrification schemes did not reach rural areas of Co. Galway until well into the

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[34] J.A. Smith, "Beauty from Cottages," *Irish Times*, May 16, 1942.

[35] The short film, which was viewed by international audiences and even won an award at the Kelowna Film Festival, is available to view through the website of the Irish Film Archive, https://ifiarchiveplayer.ie/irish-gossamer/.

1950s, and many areas waited even longer.[36] While rural residents in the 1950s were increasingly drawn to villages and towns to partake in cinema-going, films did not form a large part of regular cultural experience in the same way that it did for urban dwellers.[37] In both content and formal cinematic quality, this film is representative of an enduring genre of cultural production with a basis in traditional crafts that continues to be both representative of, and influential on, urban and international perceptions of rural Irish livelihoods, as epitomised by the proliferation of mass-produced items made for the export tourist market. When understood alongside urban movements to preserve and support craft, and to buy and wear locally-produced textiles (such as that of Ishbel Hamilton-Gordon's Irish Garden Party or Gahan's IHS advocacy), this form of national documentary filmmaking can be seen to aid in the construction, proliferation, and perpetuation of an idealised rural mythology that began with the late-nineteenth century Celtic Revival and which remains today, such as in Fáilte Ireland's recent rebranding of the western coast as the Wild Atlantic Way. Despite being produced nearly seven decades ago, *Irish Gossamer* is little different from idyllic touristic representations of Ireland today; we continue to see representations of an idealised rural paradise, a nation with a quieter and simpler way of life where rush hour involved nothing more than a herd of sheep blocking a narrow country *bothairín* (fig. 1.2).

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[36] Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1920-1973* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 53.

[37] An interesting *Galway Advertiser* article from 2011 outlines the history of cinema in Galway City. It is noted that the first silent films were shown at the Town Hall, while the New Galway Cinema Theatre later opened with seating accommodation for 1,050 viewers (though it was converted back to a skating rink in 1937). The Savoy and Estoria theatres opened in 1934 and 1939 respectively. ("One Hundred Years of Cinema in Galway," *Galway Advertiser*, August 4, 2011).

Sheep: Indigeneity and Synergy in the Taskscape

The relative isolation of homespun regions necessitated self-sufficiency in providing for all who lived there. Fleeces sheared from sheep provided the foundational material for homespun and, therefore, the cottage industry was intimately connected with the husbandry of sheep. An invaluable agricultural resource, local breeds of sheep exhibited a hardiness which allowed them to withstand both the rugged landscape and the cool, wet climate of western Ireland. The instinctual actions of sheep in their native landscape inculcate them as active players in the homespun taskscape; for Ingold, this "interactivity" between agents is a constitutive element. For instance, an 1829 treatise on Irish agriculture noted that sheep played a central role in the biosphere of farmland by "always improving your land" through the fertilisation of soil with manure. Further, it was given that "greasy particles imparted from the wool to the grass, when sheep lie down, assist in enriching the land and promoting vegetation."[38] Joseph Lambert, the treatise's author, also wrote that sheep could survive on a very meagre access to crops, especially in the winter months when they could subsist on just turnips and hay. Further, sheep were "an animal easily fattened," and could be kept healthy on "almost any dry, sound land."[39] Overall, the raising of sheep provided an economic, sustainable, and synergistic practice that benefitted land, animals, and humans.

Dr. J.P. Hanrahan of the Teagasc Research Centre writes that very little information on indigenous breeds and flock development was kept for Scotland, Ireland, and Wales in

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[38] Joseph Lambert, *Observations on the rural affairs of Ireland: or, a Practical treatise on farming, planting, and gardening adapted to the circumstances, resources, soil and climate of the country: including some remarks on the reclaiming of bogs and wastes and a few hints on ornamental gardening* (Dublin: W. Curry. Jun., and Co., 1829), 78.

[39] Lambert, 96.

the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, "probably because of the peripheral status of these regions in the political structures of the time."[40] Importantly, records of various sheep breeds formed part of the discourse on improving the Irish homespun industry. In the late-nineteenth century philanthropist Alice Hart, through her work with the Donegal Industrial Fund, advocated for a return to breeding of native Irish breeds. She noted that she was "extremely anxious to reintroduce as much as possible the wool of the Donegal mountain sheep."[41] She was attentive to the imperialistic undertones concerning the history of Irish sheep husbandry: "after the enclosure of the common and mountain lands, the wool of the black-faced Scotch sheep was introduced, which is a very coarse wool, and has spoiled the sale of the homespuns."[42] The Scottish Blackface sheep was a hardy breed well accustomed to "survive the harsh conditions and poorer grazing on the bleak mountains," and had been imported *en masse* to Ireland by English landlords who held property there.[43] It is suspected that the proliferation of the Scottish breed throughout the western counties of Donegal, Mayo, and Galway can be attributed to Captain Houston, a landlord in West Mayo who brought thousands of these sheep to his 40,000 acre estate, from which many sheep were known to have strayed and escaped.[44] By the early-twentieth

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[40] J.P. Hanrahan, "The Galway Breed: origins and the Future," *Galway Sheep Breeders Association*, no date. https://galwaysheep.ie/origins-of-the-breed/, accessed April 12, 2023.

[41] Alice Hart, Parliamentary Papers, 1885. Quoted in Janice Helland, "Working Bodies, Celtic Textiles and the Donegal Industrial Fund, 1883-1890," *Textile: Journal of Cloth and Culture* 2, no. 2 (2004), 141-2.

[42] Ibid. For an extended discussion on animals, nationalism, and imperialism, see Harriet Ritvo, especially "Counting Sheep in the English Lake District: Rare Breeds, Local knowledge, and Environmental History," in *Noble Cows and Hybrid Zebras*: *Essays on Animals and History* (Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2010).

[43] It is believed that the Scottish Blackface originated in ancient Central Asia and had been brought to Britain by the Danish in or around the ninth century. They flourished in Britain by the seventeenth century, and became known as Linton, or short-wooled sheep. See "The Blackface Breed," *Project Baa Baa*, August 17, 2009, https://www.projectbaabaa.com/news/the-blackface-breed, accessed February 19, 2021.

[44] Ibid.

century, this breed was ubiquitous throughout the west, and well-suited to its wet climate because of their short undercoat (known as kemp) that kept them dry. However, kemp is undesirable in sheep being raised for wool as it is both very brittle and does not readily accept dye.[45] Just as Alice Hart had done in the previous century, Muriel Gahan and the IHS were very interested in the attributes of different sheep breeds and the ways in which the Society could improve the quality of raw materials.

In "Country Crafts and Country Women," Gahan wrote "the opportunity is there to build up our present-day handcraft production on a foundation of authentic craftsmanship and the individual characteristic of one's own district and its people."[46] This statement came after she specifically described several sheep breeds used in Ireland for homespun production:

> Thinking regionally, and with homespun and handweaving as examples, when we examine the frieze and flannel made in Donegal, and Mayo, Galway, Kerry, and Wicklow, we see that each has recognisable qualities and characteristics, and we realize that this is because of the differing breeds of sheep, —wiry Blackface in Donegal, Cheviot of the 'kind' wool in Mayo and Wicklow, strong Galway in the west and Midlands, Crossbred in Kerry.[47]

The difference in quality of the fleeces was frequently commented on in Gahan's writing for the IHS. For instance, she noted that the "pure mountainy wool" of Donegal, though it created a tweed that could stand up to weather better, was "much harsher than Mayo tweed."[48] In Kerry, the "local mountainy wool [was] very bad and impossible to use for

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[45] John Bernard D'Arcy, *Sheep Management and Wool Technology* (Sydney, Australia: UNSW Press, 1990), 90.

[46] Muriel Gahan, "Country Crafts and Countrywomen," no date, typewritten and hand annotated document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document, 1. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

tweed," while the Cheviot flocks of Co. Mayo provided "a 'kind' wool…it adds a softness to the yarn that the mountainy wool lacks."[49] Galway had several breeds, including the Blackface, Galway, and Claddagh sheep, as well as a Scottish Blackface and Cheviot cross whose wool was particularly suited to floor rugs and furnishing textiles (fig. 1.3).[50] Overall, Gahan stated proudly that "we are blessed in Ireland with a wealth of fleeces to choose from, of every texture and shade from white to near black. Buy in your locality. Choose and mix the colours yourselves, and, if you do add pattern let it fit in with the natural quality of the fleece."[51] As these many excerpts reveal, for Gahan and the Homespun Society, not only was it understood that Irish history and settlement had influenced the distribution of sheep breeds and quality of wool available in certain regions, but this was in fact something to be embraced.

In a 1946 letter to the Department of Lands, Gahan wrote extensively on her vision for how to improve the quality of homespun being produced in Ireland. She made the claim that

> A neglected aspect of our homespun production is the raw materials. Little thought has been given to the types of wool most suitable for Irish homespun, or to sorting the fleece for different uses. Efforts made by the Department of Agriculture to

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[49] "Memorandum on the Homespun Industry in Kerry," August 1936, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/20. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland, and Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document, 1. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[50] "Proposals by the Irish Homespun Society for the Development of Home Production in Connemara in Co-operation with the Co. Galway Vocational Education Committee by Means of: Training in Handcrafts, the Promotion of Group Activities, Co-operative Marketing," no date, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[51] Muriel Gahan, "Country Crafts and Countrywomen," no date, typewritten and hand annotated document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Gahan noted elsewhere that wool dictated the preferred patterning of tweeds: "Modern weaving is plain in Donegal because of wool, and in Mayo it can have herringbone and twill weaves." Muriel Gahan, "Our Homespun Tradition," Summer 1944, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

> improve the breeds of sheep in the homespun districts appear to have, so far, met with scant success.[52]

Gahan was acutely aware that the production of high-quality homespun was directly linked to the rugged flocks of sheep that occupied the mountainous lands for generations. Rather than attempting to impose a manufacturing system on homespun-producing communities—such as that done by Gaeltarra Éireann—Gahan deemed it essential to work within the biosphere that was already present. In essence, quality homespun was tied, at a molecular level, to its place of production and a deep-rooted co-operation between all constitutive elements of the ecology of homespun, from sheep and humans down to plants, minerals, and invertebrates used to produce the lovely colours for which Irish homespuns was famous.

Coloured in the Wool: The Case for Natural, Local Dyestuffs

Though wool was undoubtedly the foundational material required for homespun production, the use of natural and vegetable dyes was more frequently discussed in Homespun Society meeting minutes, press releases, and official correspondence. In fact, the minutes of the second official meeting of the Irish Homespun Society on June 20, 1935 categorically state that "the aims of the Society shall be the promotion and protection of the Irish Homespun industries *with special reference to the use of native vegetable dyes*."[53] From parsing Society discussions and public discourse, it became clear that the proper use of natural dyes was at once important for the production of saleable market products, an

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[52] Memorandum on Homespun sent by the Irish Homespun Society to the Department of Lands, 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[53] Emphasis added, Handwritten meeting minutes, June 20, 1935. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

imperative brought on by wartime shortages, and necessary for the preservation of Irish traditional production methods. Products of Irish homespun always negotiated the complexities of both their traditional genealogy of rural subsistence and their popularity on the international fashion market; these discordant worlds reflect the Homespun Society's ruralist ideologies that preferred—and at times demanded—that producers emphasize the use of locally-available natural flora in their dyed homespuns.

The aforementioned rural isolation of homespun producing communities resulted in their isolation from larger market trends. Following the Homespun Society's first exhibition in October 1935, representatives from Ireland's Brown Thomas department store noted that a larger purchase of tweeds would have been brokered if only a greater variety of colours and designs had been available.[54] While factory-produced textiles were engaged with the market and employed designers, rural artisans were typically unaware of market trends and insufficiently trained in proper design fundamentals. The IHS sought to remedy these concerns, the chief of which was inconsistent and poor dyeing of materials. Reporting on why homespuns were most frequently rejected from Homespun Society exhibitions, the *Irish Independent* noted that "streakiness in the warp" was a major concern, attributed

[54] "Demand for Brighter Irish Tweeds, Range Not Wide Enough for Public Taste, says Drapers," *Irish Press*, October 3, 1935. The need to quickly adapt to market demand is made explicit in this particular anecdote: while drapers and buyers demanded a broader range of bright colours in October 1935, the situation had reversed only a few short months later. Upon the death of King George V in January 1936, Britain was plunged into a national mourning period of nine months, which, as the *Evening Herald* noted, "is going to have a pronounced effect on the year's sportswear fashions. The spring trade will, of course, be most definitely involved. Presentations for the marketing of seasonal bright-coloured products of the textile industry have been stopped." Demand was increased for muted shades of black, purple, grey, and white, the "very quiet shade [which] will take the place of the resplendent colour schemes generally associated with the springtime." ("Sportswear Fashions," *Evening Herald*, January 28, 1936.

largely to a lack of access to proper utensils and the improper usage of dyes and mordants.[55]

A consistent irritation to advocates of traditional homespun production was the prolific use of store-bought aniline or chemical dye packets. Though they were easily procured from small shops throughout the countryside and were relatively simple to use, they were also denigrated as being cheap. In keeping with the IHS's emphasis on quality and authenticity, they advocated instead for the use of local naturally-derived dyestuffs; this is consistent with the Society's doctrine of traditionalism, nativism, and self-sufficiency.[56] In 1939 the IHS employed Violetta Thurstan, an English dye expert, to tour Donegal and provide lessons on the sourcing and use of native dye plants.[57] After her tour throughout the northwest, Thurstan gave a lecture on vegetable dyes at the Homespun Society's annual general meeting, where she advocated for the use of natural vegetable dyes. She complained of the ways that producers had recently "found it easier to get a

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[55] "Homespun: Some Causes of Decline, Society's View," *Irish Independent*, March 29, 1938. Also note the concerns raised by Patrick Madden in letters to Muriel Gahan in 1930, see Introduction.

[56] The ideological campaign against the use of chemical and aniline dyes was aided along during the wartime years, when store-bought dyes were largely unavailable in Ireland. Wartime shortages were, in fact, a large reason for the resurgence of many traditional craft skills and items in Ireland. For example, rationing of wax and the difficulties in securing candles led the IHS to revive the making of tallow (animal fat) and rushlight candles at their 1941 Spring Show exhibition. This was in response to 300-400% inflation on prices of candles, when they were even procurable at all. ("A Hen for a Candle: Light Now a Problem in the Country," *Irish Times*, August 9, 1941).

[57] Anna Violet Thurstan (1879-1978), or Violetta as she preferred to be called, was an English nurse, weaver, and crafts advocate. She worked on the front lines throughout Europe during WWI and her bravery was awarded by several different countries. Upon returning to Britain after the war, she embarked on intensive training in weaving and textiles and received a diploma from the August Abrahamson College of Arts in Sweden, and also studied in Italy, Paris, and Berlin. In the early 1920s she worked for the Egyptian government as the director of Bedouin industries, aiding Arab women in the production, marketing, and sale of handmade carpets. She became an expert on the use of natural dyes, and published *Use of Vegetable Dyes* in 1930, which has been re-issued in over fifteen editions and was published until the late 1980s. [Melissa Hardie-Budden, "Thurstan, Anna Violet (Violetta), Nurse and Weaver," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, October 4, 2008, https://www-oxforddnb-com.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/view/10.1093/ref:odnb/9780198614128.001.0001/odnb-9780198614128-e-59611?rskey=bnuXuv&result=2.

packet from the shop. After all, why should they use vegetable dyes? They were old-fashioned, troublesome to make, and they took a long time to gather and prepare."[58] Similar sentiments were made in Thurstan's book on the subject, *The Use of Vegetable Dyes* (first published in 1930), the introduction of which offers an elaboration on the same ideas of her lecture:

> -Is this "vegetable dyeing" that we are hearing so much about less trouble than chemical dyeing?
> -No, it is more trouble.
> -Is it, then, quicker?
> -No, it takes much longer.
> -Is it a faster dye?
> -No, a really fast chemical dye cannot be surpassed by any vegetable dye.
> -Is it cheaper?
> -No, the cheap chemical dyes in packets cost only a few pence.
> -Why, then, should anyone trouble to learn how to use vegetable dye?
> -Because of the beauty of its results. Those who use them claim that no chemical dye has that lustre, that under-glow of rich colour, that delicious aromatic smell, that soft light and shadow that give so much pleasure to the eye. These colours are *alive* as all beauty is alive; and that is why we would like every craftworker in general, and every weaver and embroiderer in particular, to learn something of vegetable dyeing.[59]

This excerpt expresses well the ineffable qualities of natural dyes that led Thurstan and Gahan to champion their use over the easier, cheaper, and more reliable aniline dyes: they were seen as alive, rich, even pleasurable. In order to further this cause, the IHS invested substantial effort to increase and improve usage of natural dyes.

As mentioned above, the IHS employed Thurstan on contract to provide dyeing demonstrations and lessons throughout Donegal. They also stocked high-quality dyes and mordants at their offices to be purchased by the rural producers. This was done to ensure

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[58] "Nothing Like Homespuns, Expert's Praise," *Irish Independent*, March 31, 1939.
[59] Violetta Thurstan, *The Use of Vegetable Dyes*, 13th ed. (Leicester: Dryad Press, 1972), 5.

that a desired outcome for final products could be met, in part, through access to quality-controlled materials. However, the IHS purposefully did not stock or offer for sale natural dyes which could easily be sourced and collected locally by rural producers, but only those non-native or not readily available from the land (indigo being the best example here).[60] Circulars were sent to producers advising them on dyeing materials and assistance offered by the IHS:

> We must again warn spinners about the dyes: 1. Use only good dyes and use sufficient and suitable mordants for fixing them. If you let us know what mordants you use we may be able to help. On account of the scarcity we have brought in a stock of alum, copras, and salts which we can supply at current prices. 2. Remember that natural sheep's grey and plain white or near white are always popular. Most popular of the colours is that from crottle, easiest and safest of dyes.[61]

The Homespun Society also frequently discussed various research paths that might be undertaken in the field of natural dyeing. Various entries in the IHS minutes book indicate the various possible routes considered:

> -June 21, 1939: "Professor T. Nolan UCD is to be asked in September if he will include in his research work experiments in vegetable dyes."
> -December 18, 1940: "Miss P Ryan has promised to get in touch with Dr Dillon U.C.G about dyes, also enquire about native red dye."
> -January 7, 1942: "Letter to be sent to Industrial Research Council suggesting use of native materials for dyes, that our workers could collect materials used."[62]

Unfortunately, the outcomes of these requests are not recorded in Society records. However, there is evidence that the IHS took it upon themselves to create a glossary list and information booklet for spinners on the various types and uses of local dyes; again,

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[60] "Nothing Like Homespuns, Expert's Praise," *Irish Independent*, March 31, 1939.

[61] Circular sent to rural producers announcing call for submissions to RDS Spring Show exhibition, June, 1942, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/21. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[62] All entries from handwritten meeting minutes. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

unfortunately, this document seems not to have been preserved.[63] The most well-documented dye programmes under the IHS were the collaboration with Thurstan in 1939, and a joint research project with the ICA in 1942. The latter was reported on extensively in the national press, such as in the *Irish Times* article "Lost Secrets of Ancient Irish Dyes," the language of which shows the deep imbrications of history, tradition, and the transmission of dyeing knowledges from past generations.[64]

Conclusion: The Qualities of Quality Homespun

A paramount concern of the Homespun Society was addressing widespread reports and complaints of the low standards and poor quality of homespun. Surprisingly, these issues were reported on quite frequently within the national press. The *Irish Independent* wrote that "Galway was considered most important [for intervention], seeing that there could be created a nucleus of considerable production, but design and quality were sadly lacking."[65] Homespun Society Secretary R.V. Stoney penned an editorial for the same publication in which he claimed that "a certain amount of material sent to us had to be rejected owing to its being of inferior quality."[66] A 1936 report on homespun quality from the IHS appeared in print in the *Irish Times*, with the categorical statement that the poor standard of quality of homespuns being sent for exhibition "emphasise[s that] there can be no revival in the trade in homespuns so long as indifferent material is turned out."[67] A

[63] Handwritten meeting minutes, September 29, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.
[64] "Lost Secrets of Ancient Irish Dyes," *Irish Times,* September 19, 1942.
[65] "Market for Tweeds: Society's Work," *Irish Independent*, July 24, 1936.
[66] R.V. Stoney, "Letter to the Editor," *Irish Independent*, March 29, 1938.
[67] "Irish Homespun Exhibition: Society's Comment on Quality," *Irish Times*, December 23, 1936.

commonality throughout all these reports is an insistent focus on the use of the term *quality* in reference to the spinning, dyeing, and weaving of homespun.

In addition to a high standard of production, the quality of homespun was also reliant on certain inherent *qualities* which made it a desirable product: durability, waterproofness, and an ability to provide warmth while also being flattering, distinctive, and exclusive. There was a strong belief among the IHS advocates that homespun, in recognition of its strong ties to rural tradition, should be non-commercial, handmade of native materials, and that it must necessarily also cost more than mass-produced, store-bought items. As this chapter has demonstrated, the all-important quality so desired by the Irish Homespun Society was in fact the confluence of a high standard of production with the more nebulous elements attributed to authentic production. For Gahan, Thurstan and other homespun advocates, quality became far more than an assessment of a textile's economic value or impact; rather, quality became an ideological construct that was projected onto the production and material existence of homespun as it was produced using traditional craft techniques and wholly situated in a homespun ecology reflective of Ingold's *taskscape*. The location-specificity of homespun production in the west of Ireland offered it a certain exoticism that made it popular with audiences beyond the western provinces, and indeed beyond the shores of Ireland itself. One of the primary drivers of public interest in homespun was the annual Spring Show craft exhibitions, hosted by the Homespun Society at the Royal Dublin Society in Ballsbridge, Co. Dublin

Chapter Two - Homespun on Show: Identity and Community at IHS Craft Exhibitions

Introduction

Founded in 1731 as the Dublin Society for promoting Husbandry and other useful Arts in Ireland, the Royal Dublin Society (RDS) encouraged intellectual and technological developments that would further Irish agriculture, sciences, arts, and manufacturing. By the 1930s, the Society's exhibition grounds in Dublin's affluent Ballsbridge district came to represent a liminal zone where urban spaces were occupied for the purposes of agricultural business, education, and display.[1] Further, when the Irish Homespun Society began to exhibit at the annual RDS shows, the exhibits and demonstrations of country crafts further underscored a focus on rural lives and livelihoods. In the 1936 RDS Spring Show exhibition catalogue, the IHS's main purpose was stated as being "the preservation and improvement of the hand spinning and weaving industries carried on in the homes of the people in country districts, and its interest extends to all traditional country crafts."[2] Collaboration with the RDS brought the work of the IHS—and therefore also of its rural producers—into the view of a much larger population, while at the same time using these exhibitions to target an already invested audience of agricultural fair attendees with the

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[1] The Society was granted use of the royal prefix in the mid-19th century under the patronage of King George IV. The RDS was instrumental in establishing Ireland's major cultural institutions including the National Museum, the National Gallery, the National Library, the National Botanical Gardens, and the National College of Art and Design. The importance of agriculture to the organisation is indicated by the predominance of husbandry in the title. Aiding and educating farmers, ranchers, and other agricultural workers would remain a fundamental function of the RDS to the present day. For an extended history of the RDS, see James Meenan and Desmond Clarke, *RDS: The Royal Dublin Society, 1731-1981* (Dublin: Royal Dublin Society, 1981). The IHS held a booth every year at the RDS between 1936 and 1946, apart from three years. In 1941, an outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth disease caused the IHS to cancel due to issues relating to transportation. In 1943, the IHS exhibition was cancelled due to a shortage of crafts, and in 1944 the entire RDS show was cancelled due to wartime restrictions.

[2] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1936* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Ltd. on behalf of the RDS, 1936), Exhibition catalogue, accessed May 6, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3382, xx.

predominant ideological discourse of rural fundamentalism and self-sufficiency. These craft displays were concrete demonstrations of the ways in which the Homespun Society carefully curated their exhibitions to be constitutive of the rural craft producers' identities. Homespun and other crafts were on display at the exhibitions, and so were agricultural ideals, traditional gender roles and family values, as well as anti-urban public health discourse.

The extensive exhibition spaces curated by the IHS in the Dublin Society's Members' Hall—frequently referred to in the national press as "Homespun Hall"—were not merely aesthetic displays of craft objects but were instead complex and holistic examples of entire craft ecologies. Alongside finished craft products, displays also included raw materials, historical images and artefacts, and demonstrations of craft skills and techniques performed by rural artisans for the viewing public. For instance, the display of sprigging at the 1936 Spring Show exhibited not only finished articles of fine embroidery on white linens, but also "the cultivation of flax, and its preparation for making linen by the old methods of the craftworker."[3] I contend that the Homespun Society favoured exhibitions demonstrative of holistic ecological perspectives on crafts. By refusing to segregate and/or elevate the craft object above its raw materials, historical context, and producers, the IHS instead situated traditional crafts within the context of their own production, considering nature and the local environment, community and rural Irish identity, and both the bodies and minds of those responsible for craft production.

This chapter takes these exhibitions as its object and analyses them as cultural

[3] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Ltd. on behalf of the RDS, 1937), Exhibition catalogue, accessed May 4, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3388, xx.

products understood through the lens of Janet Wolff's theory of the collective production of art. Drawing from the ideas of Marxist sociologist Lucien Goldman, Wolff argues that "ideas develop from social conditions, and that they are not individual but collective, or based in social groups." Therefore, she continues, "in certain historical conditions, these ideas cohere in an explicit 'world vision' or 'world view'."[4] Indeed, the IHS exhibitions, taken as a whole, function effectively as a microcosm of the dominant socio-political ideology of Éamon de Valera's Fianna Fáil government (1932-1948, 1951-53, and 1957-59). Formed in 1926 by radically nationalist members formerly of the political party Sinn Fein, the rural-centric and self-sufficient narratives espoused by Fianna Fáil allowed them to gain huge strides in political polls due largely to their engagement with citizens on a local level, especially those in regions outside of metropolitan Dublin.[5] The party's "Guiding Principle," as written in its *Brief Outline of the Aims and Programme of Fianna Fáil* pamphlet, was "the making of Ireland as self-contained and as self-sufficing as possible."[6] It was noted that "properly organised, the resources of Ireland are adequate to supply all the primary needs of the people—food, clothing and shelter," and several of the party's national aims directly implicated and advocated for the importance of agriculture to Irish socio-cultural self-identity. It was deemed desirable to "establish as many families as practicable on the land." Furthermore, it was seen as necessary "to promote the ruralisation of essential industries as opposed to their concentration in cities."[7] Several of the party's platform goals explicitly related to not only the importance of national agriculture, but also the role of Gaeltacht

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[4] Janet Wolff, *The Social Production of Art*, 2nd ed. (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 57.

[5] Timothy O Connor, Introduction to the Archives of the Fianna Fáil Party, P176, UCD Archives, 2001.

[6] Fianna Fáil, "A Brief Outline of the Aims and Programme of Fianna Fáil," Dublin: Fodhla Printing Co., ca. 1927. National Library of Ireland Ephemera Collection, EPH C641, 6.

[7] Fianna Fáil, 3.

regions in achieving these goals. The pamphlet included the following relevant points on how to improve conditions in Ireland:

> Develop the fishing and other industries suitable to the Gaeltacht so as to enable the young native speaker to live at home.
>
> Develop the natural resources of the country, including its mineral wealth and sources of power; encourage native industries that minister to the needs of the people, and protect them by adequate tariffs.
>
> Break up the large grazing ranches, and distribute them as economic farms amongst young farmers and agricultural labourers, such as those at present compelled to emigrate.[8]

Understood in this context, the IHS's country crafts exhibitions existed as material instances expressive of this dominant national ideology espoused by the governing party.

However, it cannot be presumed that the IHS exhibitions were only passively conditioned by governmental ideologies; instead, the evolution of IHS displays during their tenure at the RDS demonstrate a nuanced control of the cultural narrative. Tony Bennett's conception of the exhibitionary complex is helpful in this instance. Temporary exhibitions, Bennett argues, differ from the ossified permanent collections of museums by allowing for a strategic mobilisation "in relation to the more immediate ideological and political exigencies of that particular moment."[9] The sections in this chapter take on the task of interrogating several instances of IHS shows hosted by the Royal Dublin Society. The first two sections provide an in-depth examination of IHS-organized exhibitions at the 1936 and 1937 RDS Spring Shows, respectively. Next, a contextual exploration of the

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[8] Ibid.

[9] Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *Museums, Power, Knowledge: Selected Essays* (New York: Routledge, 2017), 45. Scholars who address this topic from a craft-specific perspective include Nicola Gordon Bowe, Elaine Cheasley Paterson, and Paul Greenhalgh. The methodology applied to RDS craft exhibitions could effectively be applied to other craft exhibitions, and would especially be interesting to explore in the case of Irish displays at World's Fairs and International Expositions.

popularity of folklife is explored in relation to national dress, traditional music, and a complementary museum exhibition hosted by the Irish Folklore Commission, a partner organization of the IHS. Finally, this chapter concludes by examining how broader socio-political changes in the 1950s and 1960s affected the exhibition practices of the Irish Homespun Society.

Primitivist Survival and Nostalgia on Display at the 1936 RDS Spring Show

The Irish Homespun Society forged a mutually beneficial relationship with the Royal Dublin Society by planning and executing displays of traditional craft objects at the annual Spring Shows, held in Dublin every May. The RDS Spring Show—despite its geographic removal from western regions—offered the ideal venue at which to exhibit and propagate the specific version of traditional craft ideology espoused by the IHS. The series of annual agricultural shows at the Royal Dublin Society drew large numbers of both participants and observers who already inherently valued and sought to maintain rural sectors of the Irish economy.[10] The Irish Homespun Society's decision to partner with the Royal Dublin Society laid the groundwork for the perpetuation of belief in the worthy work of saving traditional craft production as well as the livelihoods of craft's producers. By tailoring content to pique the interest of an already agro-centric audience, the IHS laid the groundwork for achieving this mandate. They also clearly had an intimate understanding of the fact that preserving and protecting homespun and craft industries would first require the creation and

[10] In fact, the Irish Homespun Society was formed explicitly so that Country Workers Ltd. could receive grants and exhibition space from the RDS. As a profit-making organisation operated through the Country Shop restaurant, the RDS was not able to give financial support to Country Workers; the establishment of the IHS provided a loophole. Muriel Gahan, "Notes on Handcraft Development, 1927-1970," ca. 1974. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. Royal Dublin Society, 1946-1985, MS 49,806/37. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

maintenance of public interest in such ventures. Rural dwellers, farmers, and others with a pre-existing interest in agricultural concerns were a readymade audience for craft exhibitions and demonstrations executed by the IHS.

The Homespun Society first exhibited at the Royal Dublin Society's Spring Show in 1936 with display booths located in the Members' Hall in the northeast corner of the Ballsbridge complex (see area highlighted in red on fig. 2.1).[11] Based on lengthy discussions held during IHS Executive Committee meetings, it was decided that twelve different country crafts would be included in the display. As outlined in the RDS catalogue, the crafts were "spinning, weaving, [*críos*] belt weaving, willow basketry, embroidery and lace, soft toys, rush basket weaving, wrought iron work, wood dish turning, sugán chair making[,] and pottery."[12] As the IHS was a brand new exhibitor in 1936, the catalogue also introduced visitors to the work of the Society, the Irish-language name of which was displayed on the page in Gaelic font: *An Cumann Sníomacáin* (fig. 2.2).[13] The textual discourse on crafts that appeared within the covers of the catalogue indicates the works were situated within a nationalist and traditionalist context, such as in the declaration that

> All over the world to-day, people are turning from the machine-made and the artificial to the hand-made and simple things of life, and in every country traditional handcrafts and old customs are being revived. In Ireland we still have many of our

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[11] The Royal Dublin Society moved from their previous location at Leinster House in Dublin's city centre to the Ballsbridge complex in the late 1870s. The grounds and buildings offered a spacious setting for horse jumping, livestock judging, and agricultural displays through a mix of indoor and outdoor spaces.

[12] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1936* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Ltd. on behalf of the RDS, 1936), Exhibition catalogue, accessed May 6, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3382, xx. Críos weaving is a form of traditional colourful belt weaving done by hand that was largely confined to the Aran Islands. Sugán is a rope made from twisted straw that was both flexible and durable enough to create baskets and furniture.

[13] The Horse and Spring Show exhibition catalogues have all been digitised and are openly accessible via the RDS Library and Archives. While there is not space to do so here, the exhibition catalogues themselves warrant an investigation, both of the huge research material afforded within them, but also as material and visual objects in their own right. For instance, the title pages within the exhibition catalogues all feature an image of a symbolically-laden allegorical female figure.

> old customs, and our country crafts are still alive. It is our object to preserve these things and to foster their production and use, so that they may take their place as a part of our national life.[14]

This exposition on the IHS continues to note that the organisation was "going some of the way towards solving one of Ireland's problems—that of keeping the people on the land where they belong," and in many instances the lands in question were specifically western lands such as the "cottages in remote mountain and sea districts chiefly in Donegal, Mayo, Galway, and Kerry" where the majority of homespun tweed was manufactured.[15]

Despite the targeted geographic focus on the west as the centre of traditional craft production, press coverage in the national newspapers indicate that there was a generalized nationwide interest in the work of the Society and their displays at the Spring Show. Both syndicated papers and local journals reported extensively on the Society's exhibits. The *Irish Press* reported on "the interesting exhibition [of] the Crafts of the Gaeltacht," despite the fact that both objects and demonstrators came from many places throughout the island.[16] The *Leitrim Observer*, a regional newspaper from the western province of Connacht reported that "visitors found the Gaedhealtacht cottage crafts display…supremely attractive," and the Northern Irish *Ulster Herald* predicted that the IHS stall would "prove one of the most interesting features of the show."[17] Overall, the Homespun Society's first foray into arranging a large exhibition of country crafts proved

[14] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1936*, xix.

[15] Ibid.

[16] "9,562 Attend Spring Show," *Irish Press*, May 6, 1936. Demonstrators' names and residences were recorded in the exhibition catalogue and indicate an inclusion of rural producers from across Ireland. For instance, Mr. J. O'Connor, the willow basket maker, came from Nenagh, Co. Tipperary and the lace display focused on Limerick lace by Mrs. K. Collins of 66 Mungret Street, Limerick. Rush basket weaving and soft toys were demonstrated and exhibited by members of the Irish Countrywomen's Association, rather than rural producers whose livelihood was based on producing such goods.

[17] "The Crafts of the Gaeltacht," *Leitrim Observer*, May 9, 1936; "Spring Show and Saorstat Industries Fair," *Ulster Herald*, May 2, 1936

supremely successful and well-attended. The IHS's goal to spark public interest in and raise awareness of traditional crafts was achieved on a mass scale. As the next section will explore, I contend that this publicity and awareness was achieved, in part, through the purposeful construction of an atmosphere of primitivist nostalgia, rural western symbolism, and the staging of a healthy competition between agriculture and modern industry.

Hard Primitivism and the Cultural Influence of Man of Aran (1934)

The most extensive coverage of the Homespun Society's exhibition at the 1936 RDS Spring Show was provided by the *Irish Press*, a national newspaper founded by future Taoiseach Éamon de Valera in 1931. The periodical's articles placed particular focus on the presence of Nannie Mullen, a handweaver from the Aran Islands who demonstrated the weaving of a *críos*, a colourful traditional woven belt worn by men and women on the three Aran Islands.[18] A photograph taken on Inis Meain documents this practice (fig. 2.3). Captured in 1928 by Frank Stephens, nephew of playwright J.M. Synge, this photo shows Aran *críos* weaver Cáit Ní Fháthartha using traditional techniques and positioning of her feet to hold tension on the warp threads while she weaves with her hands. The IHS's *críos* demonstrator Nannie Mullen was herself already a figure of national renown when she appeared at the Spring Show. She was wife to Patch Ruadh, a central character in filmmaker Robert Flaherty's 1934 ethno-fictional film *Man of Aran*.

Flaherty, a documentary filmmaker from the United States, had achieved success with his 1922 film *Nanook of the North* in which he followed an Inuk family in the Canadian

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[18] The Aran Islands are a cluster of islands off the western coast of Galway. From smallest the largest, the islands are Inis Oirr, Inis Meain, and Inis Mór.

arctic, as well as *Moana of the South Seas*, filmed in the South Pacific and released in 1926.[19] Cinema-going audiences of the time were stunned and intrigued by the ethnographic qualities of these films which tracked the lives and livelihoods of peoples in distant and different lands. With *Man of Aran*, Flaherty capitalised on public interest in what Luke Gibbons, borrowing from art historian Erwin Panofsky, calls "hard primitivism," a concept which "conceives of primitive life as an almost subhuman existence full of terrible hardships and devoid of all comforts—in other words, as civilised life stripped of its virtues."[20] Shunning the use of trained actors and instead hiring Aran locals to portray his characters, the pared back narrative of Flaherty's *Man of Aran* follows a husband, wife, and their young son as the family ekes out a living on the barren island by fishing in rough waters, breaking the stone landscape, producing arable land, and undertaking other dangerous tasks such as open-water hunting for basking sharks (see fig. 2.4). Upon the film's debut in Dublin in May 1934, public reception among the mainly urban audiences revealed a deep fascination with the lives of these rugged people. Perhaps more fundamentally, *Man of Aran* evoked a deep sense of national pride in the way Flaherty represented the Irish to international audiences. For instance, a letter to the editors of the *Irish Press* proclaimed,

> I was astounded at the result. Mr Flaherty has, in my opinion, done a great service to this country. He has shown the outside world what the people of this wee island can do to shake a living out of the sea and rocky land…To men and women who love the country of their birth and are proud of it, I would recommend them to see "Man of

[19] *Nanook of the North*, directed by Robert J. Flaherty (1922; United States: Pathé Exchange, Inc.) and *Moana of the South Seas*, directed by Robert J. Flaherty (1926; Famous Players-Lasky Corp.).

[20] Luke Gibbons, "Romanticism, Realism, and Irish Cinema," in *Cinema and Ireland*, edited by Kevin Rockett (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013), 200. See Erwin Panofsky, "Et in Arcadia Ego," *Meaning in the Visual Arts* (New York: Doubleday, 1955).

> Aran" and ponder on the life these people live and how proud they are of the piece of rock called Aran.[21]

In her review of the film, *Irish Independent* women's-interest writer Gertrude Gaffney wrote that female lead Maggie Dirrane's "beauty and exquisite naturalness have caused a revulsion from sophistication…in several of my men acquaintances."[22] The western seascapes and rural areas also received substantial commentary, many of which had been romanticised in Irish literature, such as W.B. Yeats' western-inflected poetry. However, the new medium of sound cinema brought purportedly objective reflections of Aran lives to international audiences. In Ireland, the film instilled a sense of urban pride and caused a revived interest in the rugged rural residents on western coasts. The Homespun Society took advantage of the film's continued popularity and the public's sustained interest in the lives of westerners by recreating these spaces in their exhibition stalls.

Thatched Cottages and Rocky Cliffs: Western Irish Rural Symbolism on Display

Nannie Mullen and her *críos* weaving in the "Gaedhealtacht cottage crafts display in the Members' Hall" was worthy of front-page mention in the *Irish Press*'s coverage of the Spring Show's opening day. As they reported, "Mullin's (*sic*) 'stall' is a realistic Aran Island cottage, complete with open fireplace, sugán chairs, etc."[23] Despite being a first for the Irish Homespun Society, the practice of recreating western spaces for the consumption of exhibition audiences was not new. In the late-nineteenth century two competing "Irish

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[21] "Letter to the Editor," *Irish Press*, May 9, 1934.

[22] Gertrude Gaffney, "Nazi Germany to be Shown How Irish Live," *Irish Independent*, May 11, 1934. Gaffney also notes that men were seemingly turned off of permed and coiffed feminine hairstyles. As exemplified by the title of this article, it is interesting to note that Gaffney frequently referred to Nazi Germany, and indeed Hitler himself, in a neutral or at times sympathetic tone in many of her reports during the 1930s and early-1940s. Ireland itself was officially neutral during WWII.

[23] "9,562 Attend Spring Show," *Irish Press*, May 6, 1936.

villages" were produced by Alice Hart and Ishbel Hamilton for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. Along with reconstructions of notable Irish landmarks such as Blarney Castle and the St. Lawrence Gate, the villages also included several white-washed thatched cottages, that ubiquitous symbol of idyllic rural Irish life. While these cottages dotted the Irish western landscape, it was Hart and Hamilton who popularised and internationalised this view of the quaint living conditions of many Irish. The Homespun Society, though operating nearly a half-century later, continued this symbolic use of the thatched cottage as a space for the practice of supposed authentic and essentialized Irish identity. In fact, the IHS's first commercial venture, the Country Shop Restaurant at #23 St Stephen's Green in Dublin used a miniature thatched cottage as its exterior sign. The Society's deployment of the cottage along with other symbols of rural life at the RDS exhibitions functioned to demarcate these spaces as both culturally specific but also temporally removed.

What occurred through the recreation of western spaces at the RDS was a multifaceted audience engagement which encouraged an affective response based on primitivist nostalgia—a deep-seated desire to experience, or re-experience, styles of supposedly primitive living.[24] Urban audiences at the RDS would have been exposed to traditions, practices, and living conditions which were at once contemporarily unfamiliar,

[24] In the 1930s, many rural residents across the nation would have lived in thatched cottages. George Stoney notes that Aran Islanders and many mainlanders, in fact, continued to live in these vernacular-style homes until well into the 1960s and 70s. Stoney, *Man of Aran: How the Myth was Made* (1978; Watertown, MA: Documentary Educational Resources). Therefore, this attention on the cottage-as-symbol of Irishness is seemingly more complex than it may at first appear. For a similar discussion of exhibitions in the context of Spain and the United Stated, see Mary Elizabeth Boone, *"The Spanish Element in Our Nationality": Spain and America at the World's Fairs and Centennial Celebrations, 1876-1915* (University Park, Penn.: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019).

ethnographically intriguing, and perhaps in some cases, evocative of previous experiences living or visiting such spaces. The Homespun Society, in planning their RDS display, took advantage of this interest that they knew existed in the public, and included many material and visual examples of rustic, rural living. The exhibition catalogue describes an installation inside one of the display cottages that contained "a group of Irish folk dolls, modelled from life in the Aran Islands by Miss Violet Powell, and now shown for the first time. All the clothes, and model curraghs, creels and furniture, etc. have been made by the islanders, and are true to detail in every respect."[25] Both the creation of these tableaus and the intense public interest in them draws attention to the complexities of this symbolic essentialized Irishness. In this instance, audience members were primed to encounter feelings of primitivist nostalgia. This was demonstrated in 1936 not only, for example, through the visual representation of folk doll families, but also through the knowledge that the producers of these objects were intimately familiar with such a lifestyle. The cottage installation functioned as an indicator to an only-just-bygone era. For many Irish, visiting the installation would have provided an authentic experience of a paradoxical form of existence which both had passed away in urban regions, but thrived in remote, rural areas.[26]

Competing Interests: Agriculture and Industry at the Royal Dublin Society

The Homespun Society booths at the RDS, especially the 1936 Spring Show, typically included reconstructions of rural western spaces, re-enactments of rural livelihoods, and

[25] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1936*, xxi.

[26] See below for an extended discussion of the dire state of agricultural employment during this period. Table 2.2 compiles census employment data to indicate that the real population of those engaged in agricultural employment dropped significantly in this period.

the presence of authentic rural residents. There was a perception in this period that despite being desperately poor, those on the western coasts of Ireland were of a noble and rugged sort whose poverty was the direct result, not of a lack in the people, but of Ireland's colonial history that had pushed the Irish off good, arable lands in the east and forced them to eke out meagre livings on the rocky, soil-less western coasts. In this sense, rather than the people themselves, historical conditions of subjugation were to blame for the desperate poverty of those in the rural west. The IHS functioned on the premise that the people needed only be provided with employment opportunities and markets for their goods in order to pull themselves out of poverty. These attitudes pervaded the Society's exhibitions and resulted in the expansion of scope of the displays. For instance, in 1939 the usual handicrafts on display—homespun, weaving, basket making, vegetable dyeing, and iron work—were also supplemented with bacon curing, sheepskin preparation, and a thatcher demonstrating the traditional way to roof a cottage.[27] The exhibit booths of the Homespun Society were demarcated as decidedly rural, agricultural spaces, despite an ongoing shift within the Royal Dublin Society itself which saw ever-increasing focus being placed on industry.

At their foundation, the Royal Dublin Society shows were agricultural fairs on a national level. The main impetus was for the showing and sale of livestock and for those engaged in agriculture to view new equipment and technologies. However, by the late 1930s questions were being raised as to whether agriculture was the main draw of the shows. One of the largest exhibition spaces at the annual shows was the Saorstát Hall of

[27] This expansion in scope of the exhibition foreshadows the Society's eventual shift away from the RDS in the mid-1940s, and the move to establish markets in rural areas and towns. This coincides with the establishment of Country Markets Ltd. and will be explored in later chapters.

Industries where companies displayed their modern factory-produced products and firms demonstrated the latest technical innovations in manufacturing. As the *Irish Times* reported in 1939,

> Walking around the Show…one was inclined to wonder if the Show to-day does mean as much to the man in the country as it did a few years ago. The rapid industrial expansion programme has brought a "second string" of the Royal Dublin Society's ideals to the forefront—industry—and it seemed that industry was in danger of becoming more important than agriculture. About three hundred firms are exhibiting industrial goods of one kind or another at the Show, while in several sections the exhibits of live stock were below the average of the past few years.[28]

Despite the massive size of the industrial exhibition, the *Irish Press,* at the same time, reported on the competition between the "Hall of Industries" and the so-called "Homespun Hall" in an article titled "Homecraft Beauty Caught the Eye":

[A] favourite scene for the early crowds was the Irish Homespun Society Hall, where the hand-made goods of cotters of all the Gaeltachta (except, strangely, the new Gaeltachta of the Midlands), savour less of straight commerciality than the orderly, but staid, array of mass-produced materials in the Main Industrial Hall. The Homespun Hall certainly secured more patrons, comparatively, than any other centre throughout the day.[29]

The Homespun Society seemed to have been acutely aware of the demarcation between industrial manufacturing and home production; for instance, an entry in the Society's minutes book noted that "letters [having been sent to the Society] from firms and teachers…to be answered saying only traditional rural craftwork made of natural materials would be accepted, no commercial firms or classes."[30]

The strong anti-industrial discourse coming from the Homespun Society is one indication of their rural fundamentalist and antimodern attitudes. These ideas, however, do

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[28] "Glance Round Stands and Stalls with a Peep at the Jumping Enclosure," *Irish Times*, May 3, 1939.

[29] "Homecraft Beauty Caught the Eye," *Irish Press*, May 3, 1939, 6.

[30] Emphasis added, Handwritten meeting minutes, January 22, 1941. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

not seem to offer the entire picture. Within their reporting on the opening of the 1936 Spring Show at Ballsbridge, the *Irish Press* included a simple line illustration (fig. 2.5) in which agriculture and industry seem to be given equality in terms of formal representation. The streamlined Art Deco inspired lines reflect the popularity of this industrial style, similar to earlier fair advertisements such as that for the 1932 Irish Industrial and Agricultural Fair held in Cork City (fig. 2.6).[31] However, whereas the Cork poster utilizes a representation style similar to that of post-WWI classicism in the depiction of large-scale male and female workers, the *Irish Press* illustration focuses on a simplistic representation of the land and infrastructure of Irish industry and agriculture.

The rectangular shape of the *Irish Press* illustration contains within it a cloud-like form which extends above a darkened, horizontally banded sky. Held within the cloud are vertically symmetrical sections dedicated to industry on left, and agriculture on right. Each are given equal space and, despite a vertical line at centre which bisects the composition, there is an overall cohesiveness which connects both sides of the work. The balance and symmetry of the illustration signal an interconnectivity and relative equality of the two important national economic elements; the visual aspects of this image indicate symbiosis, rather than direct competition. The lines of agricultural fence and field merge near-seamlessly with the roadways and railcars of the industrial half. Emissions from the triad of imposing industrial stacks flow across the midline just as agriculture's horse, ploughman, and flock of birds move towards, rather than away from, industry. Similarly, the textual

[31] As Billy Shortall notes in "Marketing the Free State in Britain," the 1932 Cork fair was intended as a major exhibition of Irish manufacturing's self-sufficiency in both food and industrial production. This coincided with the so-called Economic War with Britain, which only further drove the desire of protectionist national manufacturing. Billy Shortall, "Marketing the Free State in Britain," *History Ireland* 28, no. 5 (Sept/Oct 2020), 39.

components may be interpreted as both leading into and growing from one another. The capital I and terminal E of the lettering form part of the illustration's border and both words ebb in size at middle to create triangular corners and the strong diagonal lines that begin at bottom centre and move upward and back. Were the illustrator to have either reversed the direction of letter scale or place agriculture to the left of industry, a very different interpretation may have emerged. Indeed, if one were to imagine an alternative compositional arrangement in which agriculture appears on the left, it might be interpreted as a linear visualisation of progress in which agriculture leads to and also gives way to modern industrial production. However, such evolutionary prognostication is denied here; instead, we have a cohesive image of two interrelated and equitable contributors to the national economy. Agriculture is given equal status in relation to industry, despite the ongoing loss of farms and farmers.[32]

Whereas the 1936 Spring Show inaugurated the Homespun Society's decade-long presence of agricultural and rural exhibitions at the Royal Dublin Society, displays in subsequent years would become increasingly focused on agricultural production and maintaining linkages with traditional practices and intangible cultural heritage. Not only did IHS exhibitions celebrate and consolidate historical agricultural implements, they also advocated for the inherent superiority of rural living over urban areas based on dominant national ideologies of self-sufficiency.

[32] See below for an extended discussion of the dire state of agricultural employment during this period. Table 2.2 compiles census employment data to indicate that the real population of those engaged in agricultural employment decreased by more than 26,000 in the span of a single decade, 1926-36.

Heritage, Object Lessons, and Home Truths: The Irish Homespun Society at the 1937 RDS Spring Show

The 1936 exhibition of country crafts opened the attending public's eyes to the lives of rural western producers, albeit in a limited and, at times, idealised form. Visual media were incorporated into the show as a tool to contextualize the artisans. For instance, the IHS entry in the exhibition catalogue mentions "a photographic exhibit of Irish country life and crafts kindly arranged by Mr. Mason,"[33] and the newspapers reported on "a series of educational films" shown at interval in the Homespun Hall, "in connection with the Society's new sound film apparatus."[34] At this point, the photographs and films appear to have been tangential attractions; however, the IHS's stalls at the 1937 Spring Show foregrounded education; visual media—particularly photographs—were wholly incorporated into the design and execution of the displays.

The 1937 Spring Show catalogue introduced the exhibition through allusion to the previous year:

> The splendid support given to the Country Craft exhibition last year, both by the public and the press, proved that people were intensely interested, but it was evident that the majority of them had no knowledge of the nature of the crafts represented. In this exhibition, therefore, the Homespun Society has aimed at showing each craft in detail, so that it may be better understood by the public, and in particular by people living in the country, to enable them to help the craftsmen in their own districts.[35]

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[33] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1936*, xxii.

[34] "Spring Show and Saorstat Industries Fair," *Ulster Herald*, May 2, 1936. It is unclear from the press and archives if the film apparatus belonged to the RDS or the IHS. Interestingly, there is extended discussion in the IHS meeting minutes regarding the possibility of creating a series of films documenting country crafts; however, it seems that sufficient funding was never achieved to undertake this project.

[35] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937*, xix. Muriel Gahan was employed by the RDS as a crafts expert who travelled around to different regions as part of the RDS's Extension Lecture series. She frequently noted in her lecture reports that, even in rural areas, residents had very little knowledge of either the crafts being made or the people producing them. For instance, she wrote of Rathowen, Co. Westmeath that "for such a completely rural district, it was a matter of interest that the subject of the lecture [Irish Country Crafts, or Irish Handweaving] was one of which the audience had no knowledge whatsoever, nor any knowledge of any

Planning documents for the Spring Show display indicates that the IHS intended to use a "sample, illustration and demonstration" model in order to situate the "more important crafts" in an "educational and historical viewpoint."[36] In order to undertake such an immersive form of exhibition, the IHS decreased the number of crafts on display. From the twelve different crafts demonstrated the previous year, only five were highlighted: homespuns, pottery, basket work, wrought iron work, and sprigging. As the catalogue noted, each craft was to be highly contextualized and situated within its own broader craft ecology. For instance, the homespun display included two spinners—from Newport, Co. Mayo, and Gortahork, Co. Donegal—and a hand weaver from North Donegal. It was also stated that "the exhibit included facts about wool, specimens of native vegetable dyes, varieties of wheels and looms, and the history of spinning and weaving."[37] The agricultural origins of craft materials were foregrounded for all the crafts, such as willow cultivation for baskets, different types of clay available in Ireland for pottery, and "the cultivation of flax, and its preparation for making into linen."[38] Alongside descriptions and samples of raw materials, the displays also contained historical photographs and artefacts "of old

craftsmen in their neighbourhood." Muriel Gahan, "Extension Lectures, 1946," October, 1946, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. Royal Dublin Society, 1946-1985, MS 49,806/32. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Similarly, she wrote of Wexford Town, Co. Wexford that "it was quite true…that not one member of the audience knew of even the Wexford crafts carried on less than ten miles from the town, nor did anyone seem to have considered craft work except as the making of some more or less unnecessary object as quickly and with as little study as possible." Muriel Gahan, "Royal Dublin Society Extension Lectures," 1947, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. Royal Dublin Society, 1946-1985, MS 49,806/32. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[36] "Irish Homespun Society," *Irish Times*, Apr. 19, 1937.

[37] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937*, xix.

[38] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937*, xix-xx. The research undertaken in preparation for these exhibitions is clear from the archival materials preserved. For instance, a letter from the Department of Agriculture received by the IHS in March 1937 includes an extensive "Memorandum on Flax Growing," as well as letters from the Linen Industry Research Association of Belfast and the Belfast College of Technology (the relevance here being that flax growing and linen production had historically been centred in Belfast). For these documents, see Muriel Gahan Papers, MS 49,806/20 and 21. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

craftsworkers' tools and primitive machinery found in the west of Ireland," on loan from a Mr. O'Carroll and the Irish Folklore Society.[39] Despite the proliferation of additional educational media incorporated into the 1937 displays, the central focus was still on rural fundamentalist ideologies and craft manufacture demonstrations.

Object Lessons and Home Truths: Farmwives, Public Health, and the 1937 IHS Self-Supporting Farm

While the Royal Dublin Society appeared to be expanding beyond and moving away from an exclusive focus on national agriculture, the Irish Homespun Society carefully curated exhibitions that foregrounded country living and represented social spaces in line with dominant ideologies that favoured rural life and livelihoods. Most notably, perhaps, was the appearance of a model farm at the 1937 Spring Show, based on a twenty-nine-acre farm in Castlebar, Co. Mayo owned by a Mr. T. McNichol. The "self-supporting farm" was the central feature of the IHS's exhibition that year, and as the RDS catalogue noted, "the welfare of the agricultural community is of vital importance to the rest of the country, and it should be a matter of concern to all, to know how a small farmer can get a decent living from his holding, for himself and his family."[40] The farm exhibit was organized to show how a relatively small, independent farm could provide for all the immediate needs of the family, including food, shelter, heat, light, clothing, farm and household implements, and other necessities of life. Gertrude Gaffney reported extensively on the farm, noting that an illustration of the model farm was "mapped out into fields and gardens, 25 acres surrounding the house and out-offices, enough to set half the bachelors in the country

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[39] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937*, xx.

[40] Royal Dublin Society, Spring Show 1937 (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Ltd. on behalf of the RDS, 1937), Exhibition catalogue, accessed May 4, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3388, xx.

saving to buy small farms."[41] Gaffney provided a detailed breakdown of how the exhibition recommended land on the self-sufficient farm be allocated, as seen in the table below.

Farm Allocations	Acre	Rood	Perch
Garden	0	1	20
Bee Garden	0	0	5
Orchard	0	2	0
Potatoes	2	0	0
Beet	1	3	0
Turnips	1	0	0
Mangolds	0	3	0
Wheat	2	0	0
Meadow	4	0	0
Pasture	11	2	0
Callows	1	0	0
Bog Garden (Potatoes and Cabbage)	0	1	3
Cabbage Plants	0	0	2
Turbary and Spread Ground	1	0	0

Table 2.1
Desirable allocations for a self-sufficient farm

It was recommended that a farmer should also stock his land with "2-3 cows, 5-7 stores [*sic*?], 12 sheep, 1 sow, 1 horse, 12 ducks, 8-12 geese, 5 hives of bees, and 1 donkey."[43] Gaffney drew attention to what she referred to as "The Snag!" of the self-sufficient farm: the need for farmers "to select wives capable of converting the farm produce into the

[41] Gertrude Gaffney, "A Woman Looks at the Spring Show," *Irish Independent*, May 5, 1937.
[42] Acre, rood, and perch are ancient topographical measurements. According to Lochista.com, an online historical research resource on early Sydney, Australia (to where many Irish were forcibly emigrated), there are 40 perches in a rood, and 4 roods in an acre. https://lochista.com/understanding-acres-perches/#:~:text=These%20are%20subdivisions%20of%20an,size%20of%20two%20tennis%20courts.
[43] Gertrude Gaffney, "A Woman Looks at the Spring Show," *Irish Independent*, May 5, 1937.

delectable edibles ranged in the vicinity."[44] While the model farm on display was advertised as the realm of the small-holding farmer, much of the produce of the land required the highly-skilled—and highly gendered—work of the farmer's wife.

The *Irish Press* reported on the self-sufficient farm by also drawing attention to the necessarily gendered interventions required to subsist by these agricultural methods. According to this paper, the "housewife's art" was on display on the shelves of the IHS booth and included "preserves, jam, bottled fruits, pickles, potted vegetables, home made wines, meat preserves, herbs, jellies," as well as homemade corn bread, oat porridge, and of course the ubiquitous homespun woollen clothing.[45] While the model of the self-supporting farm was exemplary of the possibilities for those with access to a relatively small holding of land, it was also obvious that this type of lifestyle necessitated great knowledge, skill, and experience, as well as the investment of an inordinate amount of time that may have been prohibitive for anyone, male or female, who was employed outside of the homestead or farm. Perhaps the best indication of the required knowledge is evidenced by the display's organiser, Mrs. Stoney, who demonstrated how diseases could be treated and cured with local plants and weeds: "elder berries mixed with peppermint and boiled is a good medicine for influenza; that foxglove is good for the heart; and the common yarrow a cure for measles and feverish complaints."[46] Not only was skill and knowledge needed by the farmer to turn a plot of land into productive soil, but the domestic work of turning raw produce into edible and usable goods was equally as demanding.

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[44] Ibid.

[45] "Ladies Day at Show," *Irish Press*, May 7, 1937.

[46] Ibid. Foxglove, as is well known today, is highly poisonous to humans, and in only small amounts can prove fatal. It is interesting to note that both influenza and measles were yet to have developed vaccines in the 1930s.

Alongside the model of the self-supporting farm and jarred examples of its produce was displayed a fascinating combination of craft and public health discourse. A small model featured two families of dolls, each gathered around a respective miniature dining table. The display was intended to educate the public on the importance of healthy foods in the development of healthy families. Before a "hale and healthy woman, and her big, healthy, strapping sons and daughters" sat a hearty meal of "good fresh eggs, wholemeal bread, lettuce, potatoes, cheese, honey and creamy milk."[47] Alternatively, the second tableau featured a "fat, white-faced, flabby-looking woman, her nose red from indigestion, presiding over a family of pasty-faced, under-sized children" who were all feeding on a meagre meal of potatoes, bacon, white bread and butter and steeped black tea. As Gaffney noted of the display, "don't miss having a look at them, for besides being an object lesson they are a work of art."[48] The *Irish Press* similarly described the doll families, noting that the second was captioned with a warning: "Farmers know that their cattle must have a balanced ration to make good frames and firm flesh. These children live almost entirely on starch. Results: bad teeth, bone malformation, undersize, lack of stamina, and low vitality."[49] The knowledge imbued within this family display was aptly condensed by the *Irish Press* as the simple concept of "hometruths."

The overriding message of the Homespun Society's 1937 exhibition was one that championed the artisanal products of rural workers, but also the very livelihoods of rural

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[47] The article introduces these models by stating that "a salutary lesson is given to the mistress of the farm on the feeding of her family," indicating that these contrasting families are both intended to be farm families. Gertrude Gaffney, "A Woman Looks at the Spring Show," Irish Independent, May 5, 1937.

[48] Ibid. Unfortunately, no images of these models were printed in the local media nor seem to have survived in the form of obtainable photographs.

[49] "The Irish Homespun Society: An Interesting Section of the Spring Show," *Irish Press*, May 7, 1937.

inhabitants. Rural living, when done correctly, was presented as healthy and fulfilling, albeit requiring copious amounts of dedication, hard work, and skill. This coincided well with *Fianna Fáil's* national ideal and was also informed by historical public health discourses that were many decades old by this time. For instance, Gillian Allmond has researched how the benefits of rural living influenced the construction of the Purdysburn Villa Colony in the late nineteenth century. This complex was a residential mental health facility located on five hundred acres of land in a relatively isolated location outside of urban Belfast that included a working dairy farm and extensive fields for the cultivation of crops.[50] Drawing on the 1900 Annual Report of the Belfast Lunatic Asylums, Allmond cites medical superintendent William Graham, whom noted that the poor were more prone to mental illness, particularly those who lived in unhealthy, unhygienic and over-crowded conditions. Graham recommended that the mentally ill be exposed to nature and fresh air, which provided "steadiness, poise, and balance, the soil being 'a permanent source of recreative energy.'"[51] Quoting from Graham's report, Allmond continues, "among the poorer classes there had been an ongoing process of degeneration in those whose food and environment were defective, producing the 'thin, stunted, anemic figures that populate the lower quarters of our great cities."[52] This short description matches with the nutritionally-deficient family of dolls on display at the 1937 Spring Show, but in this instance there is an explicit connection being made between poor health and living in urban areas.

[50] Gillian Almond, "Levelling Up the Lower Deeps: Rural and Suburban Spaces at an Edwardian Asylum," *Urban Spaces in Nineteenth-Century Ireland*, edited by Georgina Laragy, Olwen Purdue and Jonathan Jeffrey Wright (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 131.

[51] Allmond, 133.

[52] Ibid.

The social spaces manufactured at the RDS for the Homespun Society were spaces that were distinctly rural in nature and which forwarded an agenda in favour of rural lives. Despite the advocacy work of the Society to improve the lives of the poorer people in Ireland, the practices of the organisation favoured—and romanticised—the rural poor, and all but excluded the droves of impoverished residents in major urban centres. Dublin continued to have some of the worst tenements in all of Europe well into the 1930s and 1940s. Many areas of the inner-city were intensely overcrowded, with once-grand Georgian townhomes converted into slums housing multiple families under one roof. It was noted in the 1936 census that nearly one in five Dubliners (80,997 people) lived in dwellings of just one room, and the majority of the city's population (52.8 per cent, or 103,404 people) lived in three rooms or less.[53] Joseph Brady notes that tenement conditions were particularly bad in areas surrounding St. Stephen's Green and westward, very near the offices of the Homespun Society and The Country Shop restaurant (#23 St. Stephen's Green). Conditions were so bad in some urban areas that the *Irish Press* undertook a survey of slums during the years 1934-36. While at times exploitative, and certainly an example of sensationalist journalism, the "Slum Crusade" highlighted the destitute conditions of many residing in unacceptable conditions in Dublin, in particular, but also in the tenement slums of Cork City and Limerick. While it must be recognized that the Homespun Society did excellent work in drawing attention to and working to improve the conditions of the poor in Gaeltacht and rural regions, there was a blind spot for the urban poor. This is not to say that one organisation should be expected to meet the needs of such diverse populations; however, it

[53] Joseph Brady, *Dublin, 1930-1950: The Emergence of the Modern City* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2014), 48.

does indicate that the Homespun Society was both influenced by discourses on poverty at the same time that their actions furthered the rural agenda nationally, very much at the expense of the supposedly "unworthy" urban poor.

Despite great effort by the IHS and like organisations, poor living and working conditions did in fact persist for those living in impoverished rural regions. Alongside their work in advocating the benefits of rural living to the general public, the IHS invested in directly easing the conditions for those rural people. Gertrude Gaffney illustratively described the dire conditions faced by Donegal embroiderers, for instance:

> Women, pale from constant confinement to the house and lack of the exercise that household provides, sat all day and far into the night, peering over the white linen in the flickering candlelight or in the dim light of a smoky oil lamp, to finish the 'bag' to take back to the agent at the week-end. The work in stuffy rooms affected their health: the bad light affected their eyes; and their menfolk were perhaps too prone to depend on them as providers for the family.[54]

Gaffney's article appeared as the first of a trio decrying the poor conditions and loss of work for Donegal embroiderers, but could just as easily apply to female spinners and knitters as well. While the IHS at times encouraged craft techniques that increased the work of artisans—such as the labour-intensive use of natural vegetable dyes—when possible, they also made provision to alleviate unnecessarily heavy work. As rural areas received electricity it was incorporated into craft production techniques, such as a "modern incident" that occurred at the 1939 Spring Show when electricity was used, rather than the hearth, to heat vegetable dyes.[55] The Society encouraged the use of machinery in some instances, such as in a report sent to vocational educational authorities in the west of

[54] Gertrude Gaffney, "The Chinese Embroider Irish Linen! While Industry Dies at Home," *Irish Independent*, March 15, 1938.

[55] "Glance Around Stands and Stall with a Peep at the Jumping Enclosure," *Irish Times*, May 3, 1939.

Ireland in 1936, which recommended that bracking machines be supplied to homeworkers to "cut out the drudgery of the rough carding" of fine wool fibres.[56] In order to encourage rural workers to continue to live in rural areas and produce traditional crafts, there was a recognition that conditions needed to improve to rival those that may be met by emigration abroad. However, by the 1950s, conditions for many of these workers did seem to have improved such that Seán Moylan, Minister of Education could note that the incorporation of modern technologies and amenities into rural homes had not only reduced the "drudgery imposed on women in the land," but had paved the way for "interesting leisure time occupation."[57] Within the frame of roughly fifteen years, public discourse concerning home handicrafts and rural artisanship seems to have shifted from a matter of subsistence to one of leisure, pleasure, and aesthetic enjoyment.

Intangible Cultural Heritage and the Artisanal Body on Display

The presence of rural artisans at IHS shows and their demonstrations of craft production techniques indicate a desire to represent not only the craft objects themselves, but also the intangible cultural heritage embodied by the producers and expressed in the practice of craft skill. These types of skills are based not on forms of cultured learning, but instead on the intergenerational transmission of skills and techniques that, as the IHS was keen to note, predated modern Irish society.[58] Discourse on linkages to ancient Irish tradition can be read throughout the catalogue entries; they construct a deep-time

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[56] "Irish Homespun Industry, Efforts to Improve Methods in West," *Evening Herald*, January 28, 1936.

[57] "Reviving Pride in Rural Arts," *Irish Times*, March 20, 1953.

[58] There is a large literature on the embodied nature of craft skill. See Bruce Metcalf and Peter Dormer's contributions in *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, edited by Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), and Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008).

narrative for the crafts on display. Hand-spinning and weaving are noted to be "6,000-year-old-crafts," and pottery is introduced through mention of "recent excavations in Ur of the Chaldees" which "brought to light a potter's wheel, dated 4,000 years before Christ."[59] The role of the blacksmith is noted as being "famous all through the ages" and present within "Irish tales…filled with his prowess"; even the newest of the crafts on display, sprigging, was still given ample provenance through a note that it had "been introduced at the time of the famine, 100 years ago."[60] The *Irish Press* latched onto this historical narrative in their reporting on the show. It was noted that the blacksmith was a welcome addition to the display as "in ancient Ireland the smith was held in very high esteem, indeed, and had his settled rank as a super craftsman."[61] Similarly, the potter "in ancient times…hardly less important" was able to "hold his audience with ease."[62] Basing the traditional crafts in the deep time of Irish history—even to the level of legend and mythology—worked to foreground the importance of the crafts in Irish culture, and therefore stoke and sustain an interest in their protection and preservation. The IHS display spaces at the 1937 RDS Spring Show worked to produce concrete temporal linkages between contemporary traditional craft producers and the tacit knowledge of craftspeople of the remote and imagined Irish past.

The IHS's Homespun Hall was by no means the largest exhibition at the Spring Show. It was, however, reported on as being one of the most popular, and this ensured it would be discussed comparatively with another popular attraction: the industrial displays.

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[59] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937*, xix.
[60] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1937*, xx.
[61] "The Irish Homespun Society," *Irish Press*, May 7, 1937.
[62] Ibid.

While an *Irish Press* reporter noted that the industrial exhibits on display in the Saorstát Industries Hall "indicate our up-to-date development as a self-supporting and efficiently organised country," there was something inherent within the traditional craft demonstrations and exhibitions that drew visitors in throngs to the IHS booths.[63] An *Irish Examiner* reporter wrote that "at times throughout the day it was well-nigh impossible to get within viewing distance of the various displays of the Irish Homespun Society in the members hall. *So general was the desire to watch experts giving their demonstrations of village handicrafts that numbers of visitors had to wait quite a while for their turn to get near enough to see what was going on*."[64] Through their decision to reduce the number of crafts on display while at the same time broadening the contextualization of those crafts, the IHS not only created a successful exhibition but also exposed a large audience to the continuing work of craft artisans whose work was increasingly threatened by industrialization and urbanization. On the topic of the Spring Show, IHS President Agnes O'Farrelly alluded to the intangible aspects of the crafts when she stated that "the great aim" of the exhibition had been to "show the nobility of the work of the hand in the making of beautiful things, which will raise the status of the country."[65] While the IHS construction of a social space of rural production at Ballsbridge participated within a culturally nationalistic trend that valorized Irish agriculture and traditions, it was also influenced by more international trends of the intensive popularization of national folk histories, arts, and material culture.

[63] "The Irish Homespun Society," *Irish Press*, May 7, 1937.
[64] Emphasis added, "Dublin Spring Show," *Irish Examiner*, May 6, 1937.
[65] "The Irish Homespun Society," *Irish Press*, May 7, 1937.

Folk on Display: The IHS in Context of Wider Folklife Trends

Alongside its educational deep-time exhibits at the 1937 Spring Show, the Homespun Society displayed "some lovely old Polish linen" which had been loaned by the Polish Consul. Gertrude Gaffney commented that "sometimes side by side with the native product we are shown what other countries have produced in the same line, and this is a useful illustration."[66] This small instance of national comparison alludes to the larger popularity of folk art and folklife that pervaded much of Europe during the 1920s and 1930s. The intensive redrawing of European borders following WWI and the independence of ethnic nations—including Armenia, Azerbaijan, Estonia, Finland, Georgia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland, among others—led to a concerted effort to study, document, sustain, and assert national folk histories. This "folk consciousness," according to Jim Brown, took five pathways: language revival, national literary revival and literature creation, traditional music revival and creation, recovery of national history, and the development of "a cult of physical fitness."[67] These ideas, while still paramount in European discourses in the 1930s, were by no means new. Bjarne Stoklund argues that interest in European, particularly Scandinavian and Germanic, folk cultures was born from the romantic mood of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, and began with a focus on the oral culture or linguistic expressions such as "folk songs, folk tales, legends and similar kinds of oral traditions."[68] However, Stoklund argues, by the later decades of the nineteenth century,

[66] Gertrude Gaffney, "A Woman Looks at the Spring Show," *Irish Independent*, May 5, 1937.

[67] Jim Brown, "The Role of Folk Consciousness in the Modern State: Its Efficacy, Use and Abuse," *Storytelling, Self, Society*, vol. 6, no. 1 (2009), 45-6.

[68] Alluding to influences from the Romantic movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Stoklund notes that emerging nation-states "had to prove that [they] possessed a peculiar historically rooted and aesthetically valuable national culture. And what was—seen in the light of the romantic ideas of the

particularly following the Paris Exhibition of 1867, there was a noted shift from oral to material cultures in light of the increasing practice of placing national cultures on display. One of the most persistent and frequently exhibited forms of folk culture was traditional national dress, and in Ireland this most visual of national symbols circulated in public discourses on how to exhibit and maintain a distinct national and nationalist identity.

Irish National Dress and Identity

In 1935, Erskine Childers penned an editorial that was syndicated nationwide in which he proclaimed that supporting native homespun production— "the most Irish of our industries"—should go hand-in-hand with strengthening the visibility and celebration of a distinct Irish national folk dress. A prime characteristic of homespun, he noted, was that it "gives distinction to the man or woman who wears it"; however, he continued,

> at present we slavishly copy English fashions. Not so the German, Austrian, Hungarians and people of other nations. In Austria the richest and the poorest man will have at least one typical native suit of homespun material. In the best hotels in Austria one can find bankers, princes and professional men wearing native costume. A very powerful Society for the preservation of Austrian dress maintains this tradition. The situation is very different in Ireland. Our most ardent nationalists appear in blue serge suits. Irish homespun is far more appreciated in England than it is here…Conservatism, inferiority complex, the difficulties of tailors in stitching and cutting homespun should not stand in the way. What is possible in other countries is possible here.[69]

For Childers, the resurrection of traditional dress was a necessary component of Irish folk consciousness; however, what he omitted from his discussion is that Ireland had not had a prevalent traditional dress for many centuries, apart from small pockets in isolated regions. In 1944, the Homespun Society hosted a lantern slide lecture given by Major H.F.

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period—more genuinely national than the so-called 'folk culture' with its supposed timelessness, continuity and independence of international fashions." Bjarne Stoklund, "How the Peasant House Became a National Symbol: A Chapter in the History of Museums and Nation-Building," *Ethnologia Europaea* vol. 29 (1999), 6.

[69] Erskine H. Childers, "Irish Homespuns. Need for Public Support" *Tuam Herald*, November 9, 1935.

McClintock who spoke on the topic of "Old Irish and Hyland Dress." As he argued, Irish traditional clothing had been "remarkable for its continuity from about 800 or 900 A.D. down to about the year 1600, when it was suppressed and died out."[70] For most Irish people, therefore, the adoption of traditional native costume, as advocated by Childers, would involve not re-embracing a recently passed trend, but a complete rejection of modern silhouettes and fashions in favour of an early modern aesthetic.

According to McClintock's *Old Irish and Highland Dress*, the 1943 book on which his lantern slide lecture was based, a modern revival of traditional Irish dress for men would take the form of a full-bottomed linen tunic over a skirt (vaguely reminiscent of a Scottish kilt) and trews gartered below the knee.[71] A practical cloak, or mantle, would be worn outdoors along with either a tall, tufted hat or a close-fitting cap with ear flaps. McClintock's research included the examination of extant textile objects from the collections of the National Museum of Ireland, including a suit and jacket ensemble that dated to the sixteenth century (fig. 2.7). Despite McClintock's scholarship and advocacy, Childers's comments, mentioned above, do not seem to indicate that he desired a return to this form of traditional dress, and in fact he only insisted that "our object should be to persuade every young man…to possess one homespun suit or an overcoat, or both."[72] Childers ardently believed that the materials and production of clothing garments must support Irish industry and makers, but the form or style of the clothing itself was not

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[70] "Spinning Display for RDS Show," *Irish Press*, March 21, 1944.

[71] H.F. McClintock, *Old Irish Dress and That of the Isle of Man: With a chapter on pre-Norman dress as described in early Irish Literature / by F. Shaw* (Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalgan Press, 1950), xx.

[72] Erskine H. Childers, "Irish Homespuns. Need for Public Support" *Tuam Herald*, November 9, 1935.

clearly articulated or mandated. In this way, the connection back to the Irish "folk" could take on many forms, rather than being tied to specific historical artefacts and styles.

Historical examples of traditional Irish women's wear, according to McClintock, were far rarer to discover, but it had been clear to him that crimson petticoats and shawls had been common throughout the west, particularly in County Galway, for many centuries.[73] This style persisted into the contemporary period and could still be found in the dress of Connemara women as seen, for instance, in Marguerite Mespoulet's autochrome photograph of Mian Kelly from the Claddagh region of Galway in 1913.[74] Pragmatically, McClintock noted that this form of dress might be maintained for women in certain settings, such as for "ordinary occasions and for Irish dance teams."[75] Similarly, Childers noted that there was "much scope for development" of the use of traditional dress at ceilidh. Both men here allude to perhaps the most prevalent folk element celebrated in Ireland, both in the 1930s and today: traditional Irish music.

Staging a Ceilidh: Traditional Music at the Royal Dublin Society Spring Shows

In this Irish context, musician and musicologist Don Meade defines traditional music as being "old-fashioned, country-dance tunes and unaccompanied singing, both in English

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[73] McClintock, 126.

[74] As Cally Blackman notes, these photographs are indicative of a traditional form of dress that persisted into the 20th century; however, the photographs are highly staged and composed and should not be taken as the everyday form of Connemara dress at the time. See Blackman, "Colouring the Claddagh: A Distorted View?" *Costume*, vol. 48, no. 2 (2014): 213-35. The root of the madder plant (*rubia tinctorum*) was historically used as the natural dye to produce the deep crimson of these petticoats. However, Blackman also cites a dye recipe with calls for "3 ozs. Cardinal Red from the Crystal Dye Co., Hull, England." (225). According to the website *Wildflowers of Ireland*, Wild Madder is native to Ireland and grows wild on the Aran Islands, the Burren, Co. Clare, and other western and southern coastal regions, http://www.wildflowersofireland.net/plant_detail.php?id_flower=480#glos.

[75] McClintock, 126.

and the Irish language *sean-nós* ('old style')."[76] Traditional Irish music includes reels, jigs, and hornpipes which are compositionally simple, generally involving only two parts and most frequently played on "the oldest diatonic instruments in the Irish tradition—the Celtic harp, uilleann pipes, tin whistle, and keyless wooden flute."[77] Despite its international popularity today, traditional music in the 1930s was only infrequently heard outside of isolated rural regions; however, it—as with many other vernacular cultural elements—gained public attention as part of the larger cultural nationalist agenda of the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Céilí, defined by dance scholar Catherine E. Foley as "a participatory, vernacular dance event where people—male and female—go to dance socially to the accompaniment of live Irish traditional dance music played by an Irish céilí band," were appropriated by the Irish Gaelic League from Scottish tradition.[78] According to Foley,

> In keeping with other new emerging nation-states, the ideological objective of the Gaelic League was to promote, both to the Irish themselves and to others, a positive and culturally unified image of Ireland. The céilí event was an ideal site for the construction of this Irish unified community and the actual dances provided a site where this unity could be experienced and felt…The reference and link to the past was supplied by the use of the Irish language, the accompaniment of Irish traditional dance music, and communal dances which were collected from unspoilt, rural areas, predominantly in the west of Ireland.[79]

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[76] Don Meade, "The Composition of Irish Traditional Music," *Current Musicology*, vols. 67 and 68 (2002), 297. Meade differentiates traditional music from what he terms "folk music," the "guitar-backed 'ballad groups' of the type pioneered in the 1960s by The Dubliners and the Clancy Brothers and Tommy Maken." (ibid).

[77] Meade, 291. The author notes that other common instruments imported into Irish musical traditions include the fiddle, concertina, banjo, and accordion.

[78] Catherine E. Foley, "The Irish *Céilí*: A Site for Constructing, Experiencing, and Negotiating a Sense of Community and Identity," *Dance Research* vol. 29, no. 1 (2011), 44-5.

[79] Foley, 45-6.

Meade argues that "during the nineteenth-century, traditional musicians rarely played in groups," but with the growth in popularity of céilídh in the 1920s and 1930s, larger bands formed to meet the demand.[80] As both Foley and Meade note, it wasn't until the 1970s that Irish traditional music gained the global popularity it maintains to this day, and in fact, "it was a rare Irish pub owner, either in Ireland or abroad, who wanted traditional music in his establishment. Traditional music was associated with rural backwardness, and most Irish people had as much enthusiasm for it as most Americans had for old-time 'hillbilly' music."[81] However, in line with its mandate to uplift and popularize the traditions of rural Ireland, traditional music came to play an important role in the RDS exhibitions of the Homespun Society.

Of the seven crafts on display at the 1938 Spring Show, the IHS this time had included fiddle-making. The catalogue entry for this craft read that

> There is no part of Ireland which does not enjoy its Ceilidhe, and no Ceilidhe which is complete without its fiddler to accompany the dancers. The love of dancing and the sense of rhythm are still prominent features of the countryside as they have been from very early times, and there is a surprising proportion of ceilidhe musicians in every countryside. It is, therefore, not surprising to learn that a great number of their instruments are home-made and a branch lopped from a tree in the cottage orchard is often formed into the ceilidhe fiddle.[82]

Fiddle-making demonstrations were provided by a Mr. Hartnet and complemented another new feature of the IHS exhibition: the presence of a céilí band from Co. Leitrim that played in intervals in the Members' Hall alongside the craft demonstrations and objects on display.

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[80] Meade, 294.

[81] Meade, 294.

[82] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1938* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Ltd. on behalf of the RDS, 1938), Exhibition catalogue, accessed May 17, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3395, 23. The other crafts displayed at this show were, of course, homespun, as well as pottery, basket work, knitting, wooden bowl turning, and stone-masonry.

The band was directed by Reverend Peter Conefrey (1890-1939), an outspoken advocate of traditional crafts and rural living who regularly participated in IHS lectures and events. The addition of the band was well-received by audiences and the press and was perceived as adding an extra element of cultural authenticity to the space. For instance, the *Irish Times* wrote that "the delights of the rural scene were complete when the strains of 'Jenny Dang the Weaver' mingled with the sound of the shuttle, and the 'Blackbird' trilled over the woodland lathe turning out its dishes for the kitchen and dairy."[83] The musical element added to the already romanticised setting of the IHS exhibitions, and the Co. Leitrim céilí band returned for subsequent RDS shows, despite the untimely death of Conefrey in early 1939.

Kindred Intentions: The Irish Folklore Commission's 1937 Rural Life in Ireland Exhibition

While the discourses on national dress and enthusiasm for traditional music indicate an undercurrent of prevalent interest in folklife and culture, the most obvious national example of this trend was the establishment of the state-sponsored Irish Folklore Commission (IFC) in 1935. Successor to the more modest Irish Folklore Institute (1930-35), the IFC was founded on a limited five-year term with an annual grant of £3,250.[84] In 1944, Jesuit priest and Celtic scholar Francis Shaw noted that as the Commission's main focuses were on the collection and classification of national folklore, "to Sweden, then, the acknowledged head of the new science, the Irish folklorists looked for guidance."[85] In 1928,

[83] "Irish Homespun Society Success of Spring Show Display," *Irish Times*, May 28, 1939. An example of this tune can be heard here: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=roJgBavr9_A.

[84] According to the Central Statistics Office of Ireland, £3,250 in 1935, factoring in inflation, is the equivalent of €213,900 today. https://www.cso.ie/en/interactivezone/visualisationtools/cpiinflationcalculator/.

[85] Francis Shaw, "The Irish Folklore Commission," *An Irish Quarterly Review*, vol. 33, no. 129 (1944), 33.

Séamus Ó Duilearga—editor of the Folklore of Ireland Society's journal *Béaloideas* and future director of the IFC— accepted "an invitation to study Folklore and also Scandinavian languages during the period April-October" in Sweden and Norway, where he networked with several important folklorists including Dr. Carl Wilhelm von Sydow (1878-1952) of Lund, Sweden.[86] Arising from contact made during his Scandinavian study trip, Ó Duilearga invited Swedish ethnologist Åke Campbell to Ireland to complete an extensive ethnological survey of the nation.[87] During the summers of 1934 and 1935, Campbell and his colleague Albert Nilsson travelled extensively and documented many aspects of traditional life in rural Ireland.[88] The findings of the Swedish ethnologists were presented in 1937, forming the first ever exhibition of Irish folk culture to be held at the National Museum of Ireland.

Opened at the NMI's Kildare Street building by President de Valera on May 26, 1937, the *Rural Culture in Ireland* exhibition included over two hundred drawings and dozens of photographs taken by Campbell and Nilsson during their survey. Figures 2.8, 2.9, and 2.10 show examples of drawings done by the Swedish ethnologists depicting examples of vernacular architecture. The *Irish Times* reported extensively on the opening:

> The exhibition really commences with photographs of harbours, natural and constructed, boats, villages or settlements, and the method of building the fisherman's house. Then follow photographs of areas where fishing is combined with cattle-breeding, and from that the visitor proceeds to a chart showing the various types of single-step spades used in parts of Ireland, as distinct from the English double-step spade. The single step spade is found also in the Scottish Highlands. There are pictures of curraghs, of inland fishing boats, fishing gear and lobster pots…Pictures of pastoral landscape showed meadows predominating, and there were views of different types of haystacks…Turf cutting, smithy work and boat

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[86] Séamus Ó Duilearga, "Ón Eagarthóir (Editorial)," *Bealóideas*, vol. 1, no. 3 (1928), 308.

[87] Patricia Lysaght, "From 'Collect the Fragments…' to 'Memory of the World'—Collecting the Folklore of Ireland, 1927-70: Aims, Achievement, Legacy," *Folklore*, vol. 130, no.1 (2019), 19-20.

[88] Campbell's trip was largely restricted to the vibrant and rich area of Connemara where traditions flourished. Nilsson travelled more extensively, covering most of the southern coast from Dublin to Galway.

building are illustrated and there is a big section devoted to the Irish house.[89] In advance of the opening, it was reported that "considerable interest was aroused in the country during the preliminary investigations of which this exhibition was the outcome," and a promotional discussion between Campbell and NMI Director Adolf Mahr was broadcast by Radio Athlone during which time it was noted that plans were being made to open a folklore museum in Dublin's Phoenix Park.[90]

The *Rural Culture* exhibition remained open for two months before travelling with Campbell to Edinburgh for the Folklore Congress in July, where it was met with great acclaim. A review published in *Nature* claimed that "the outstanding feature" of the conference was "the display of photographs and drawings of house-types and domestic and agricultural implements selected from the collection of the Irish Folklore Commission."[91] Åke Campbell's lecture on "The Irish House" was also designated a "paper of technological and museum interest."[92] Despite all the interest and publicity surrounding this successful exhibition, the envisioned folk museum in Dublin did not materialize; however, in the following years Muriel Gahan and the IHS would play an important role in the creation of a folk collection within the National Museum.[93]

In conclusion, the Irish Homespun Society's early annual exhibitions at the Royal Dublin Society were influenced by popular discourse on, and celebration of, national vernacular and folk identities. The international image of the Irish put forward by

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[89] "Rural Culture in Ireland Exhibit in Dublin," *Irish Times*, May 26, 1937.

[90] Exhibition to Show Work of Swedish Commission," *Irish Press,* May 25, 1937; "Expert's Plea: Speed Up Collecting of Folklore!" *Evening Herald*, May 27, 1937.

[91] "International Association for European Ethnology and Folklore," *Nature*, July 31, 1937, 206.

[92] Ibid.

[93] See the concluding chapter for an extended discussion of the IHS's intentions and motivations for building a collection of folklife objects.

Flaherty's *Man of Aran* (1934) provided a visual framework for how urban audiences (within Ireland and internationally) were introduced to contemporary life on the rugged western coasts. Similarly, the popularity of "folk consciousness" among a 1930s European audience encouraged the compilation, preservation, and exhibition of disused and disappearing folk and farm implements. This was seen most clearly in the foundation of the Irish Folklore Commission and their curation of the *Rural Life in Ireland* exhibition; however, the Homespun Society worked closely with many IFC members and produced exhibitions of their own, though on a smaller scale. These exhibitions constructed spaces for the performance of traditional craft skills by authentic artisans and perhaps more importantly, they functioned as strong indicators of the privileged position held by rural-living ideologies in the minds of exhibition organizers.

Gallerization beyond the Royal Dublin Society

Community and identity were clearly on display in IHS exhibitions at the Royal Dublin Society; however, over time the importance placed on this primitivist form of living was superseded by other styles of exhibition while homespun and traditional crafts were left behind by the inescapable forward-march of time, industrial development, and the ever-changing aesthetic preferences of the exhibition-going population. The idea that the production of crafts in the home might function as a form of leisure existed parallel with the movement to encourage crafts as an income-generating occupation. For instance, after viewing the 1938 Homespun Society display at the RDS Spring Show, an *Irish Times* reporter commented that though "town cousins may go to the pictures or the theatre…on the farmstead there is an opportunity for each member of the family to do something more useful with their hands—surely the most satisfying form of pastime for man, woman or

child."[94] However, as the Irish Homespun Society transitioned to become Country Markets Ltd. in the late 1940s, there was also a noted change in the tone of the smaller and more infrequent exhibitions that did take place in Dublin. The large displays and demonstrations carried on by authentic westerners were replaced by smaller exhibits of craft objects created in the main by members of regional branches of the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA) guilds.

The Irish Countrywomen's Association stepped in to partially fill the void left behind after the Irish Homespun Society's withdrawal from all further Royal Dublin Society annual shows, but on a greatly reduced scale. Rather than experiential tableaus and artisan demonstrations, the ICA exhibits were generally smaller in scale with no emphasis on artisanal production; rather, the ICA used the RDS shows as a venue to hawk material goods produced by their own guild members. While the boundaries of these organisations (the Homespun Society, ICA, and their joint venture Country Markets Ltd.) were porous with many of the same individuals participating in all three, it was the sudden shift away from homespun which is of greatest interest here. The Royal Dublin Society show catalogues from the years 1947-49 indicate the absence of the once-celebrated "Homespun Hall," replaced instead by a single booth in the annex of the Main Hall. In 1949, for example, *Buntracht na Tuatha* (the Irish Countrywomen's Association) occupied Stand No. 121 where they displayed "Articles of Craftwork: Baskets, Table Mats and Rush Work of all kinds. Cured Skins and articles made from them, Floor Rugs, Children's Dresses and Knitted Garments, Gardening Aprons, Gloves, Shopping Bags."[95] In fact, the only mention of

[94] "Spring Show Week's Fine Opening," *Irish Times*, May 4, 1938.

[95] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1949* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan Ltd. on behalf of the RDS, 1949), Exhibition catalogue, accessed May 20, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3468, lix.

homespun in the entire catalogue appears in the description for Gaeltarra Éireann's booth at Stand No. 146 in the Industries Hall where they were selling "handwoven millspun tweed" and "homespun tweed" alongside other products of the Gaeltacht Services subsidized programmes.[96] The decreased presence of homespun at the RDS shows appears as a single instance of much larger socioeconomic changes that were underway in Ireland at mid-century.

The work of the Homespun Society had always been aimed at improving the living conditions of rural producers by encouraging the manufacture of quality items and finding markets for their sale. This remained the objective of the new Country Markets Ltd. also, perhaps more so as expressed by its shift away from urban regions to work directly within rural communities. However, by the 1950s the cottage and country crafts occupations were in a dire situation indeed.[97] The IHS Secretary's Report for 1950-51 stated discouragingly that "it has been apparent for some time that owing to the production of new varieties of materials and changing tastes the demand for homespun material for clothing is diminishing."[98] Political Scientist Brian Girvin has analyzed de Valera's economic policies in the middle decades of the twentieth century and concluded that Ireland's ideology of an agricultural, rural, and self-sufficient nation and its exclusion of international investments

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[96] Royal Dublin Society, *Spring Show 1949*, lxvii.

[97] As noted in Chapter One, Gaeltacht Services frequently operated at an economic loss.

[98] "Irish Homespun Society, Secretary's Report, 1950-51," 1951, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/28. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Similar sentiments were raised in a memorandum sent to the Conor Magee Trust on the possibilities of establishing new production methods—particularly the weaving of rugs and furnishing textiles—in Donegal and Galway *gaeltachta*: "it has been evident for some time that with the decline of the demand for homespun tweed, owing to causes outside the control of the producers, it is essential for them to find some alternative form of homespun production if the craft is to be preserved in the Gaeltacht," typewritten document, ca. 1951. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/29. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

and foreign capital led to a deep economic depression at the same time that most other western European nations were experiencing unprecedented prosperity in the post-war years, brought on largely by massive growth in the industrial and manufacturing sectors.[99] Despite an expansion of Irish manufacturing by roughly 25 per cent between the end of WWII and 1960, all other economic sectors contracted, according to Girvin. Agriculture was especially hard hit and despite heavy government intervention, Ireland lost 150,000 agricultural workers in the same period, most to emigration abroad. The table below shows the declining agricultural labour pool, drawn from census data:

Census Year	Population Engaged in Agricultural Employment	Total Population	Percentage of Total Population Engaged in Agricultural Employment
1926	670,076	2,971,992	22.54
1936	643,965	2,968,420	21.69
1946	593,653	2,955,107	20.08
1951	512,510	2,960,593	17.31
1961	392,675	2,818,341	13.93
1966	345,008	2,884,002	11.96

Table 2.2
Declining pool of available agricultural labour in Ireland according to census data, 1926-66

While the Irish Homespun Society and its partner organisations continued to help those who remained engaged and active in rural agricultural work, I contend that this overall shift in the economic conditions of Ireland led to a contraction in the Society's outward advocacy for what must have been perceived as a dying industry.

[99] Brian Girvin, "Economic Policy, Continuity, and Crisis in de Valera's Ireland, 1945-1961," *Irish Economic & Social History* 38 (2011), 38-42.

According to Janet Wolff's theory of the collective production of art, cultural objects of a given society are influenced by and constituted from, in part, the "mediating influences" of the dominant ideology in the society.[100] She argues that "the way in which the ideology of a class or other is expressed in literature or painting will be affected, or mediated, by two sets of the conditions at the aesthetic level…(i) the conditions of the production of works of art, and (ii) the existing aesthetic conventions."[101] Using this logic, it is understandable that in Ireland of the 1930s and 1940s, crafts would be valued for their utility, both in terms of use-value and the possibility of providing a form of employment that was lucrative and allowed for worker independence and agency. During these times, traditional crafts as exhibited by the Irish Homespun Society were contextualized by their adherence to these dominant values; however, as socio-economic changes took place during the 1950s and 1960s, the position of traditional crafts also changed. Later exhibitions of traditional crafts are indicative of the fluctuating meanings attached to these objects.

In 1941, the IHS display at the RDS Spring Show was cancelled due to transportation issues caused by a nationwide outbreak of Foot-and-Mouth disease. Worried about the lacunae left by the absence of this ever-popular exhibition, the RDS quickly undertook to develop an alternative, which took the form of an exhibition of contemporary Irish art and a retrospective of Taylor Prize winners, the RDS's scholarship for artistic achievements that had been running for two hundred years.[102] It is interesting that, despite the main focus of

[100] Wolff, 64-5.

[101] Wolff, 61.

[102] The RDS operated a drawing school since the mid-eighteenth century that focused on "figure drawing, landscape and ornament, with architectural drawing added in the 1760s." The Taylor Art prize was

the show being agricultural and industrial, the decided substitute was an exhibition of the visual arts; this indicates that, at least in the mind of show organizers, there was a natural relationship between the traditional craft displays and fine arts. By the end of the decade, the imbrication of country crafts and art became more pronounced in subtle but telling ways.

An exhibition of wrought iron craftwork was held at the Country Shop in April 1954. As with previous IHS shows, a predominant political and national figure was present to open the exhibition. Rather than a Minister for Agriculture or Vocational Education, as had previously been the case, this show was officially opened by P.J. Little, Director of the newly established Arts Council of Ireland.[103] In his opening address, as reported in the *Irish Times*, Little kept to the standard discourse on drawing attention to wrought iron in order to create a market for such work; however, he refers to iron work, not as a traditional or country craft, but as an "applied art."[104] Further, he emphasized the decorative qualities of wrought iron, particularly in his laments on the continued loss of historic iron lamp-standards throughout central Dublin, which were steadily being replaced by concrete posts. He spoke out against mass-production and the importation of wrought ironwork from other nations. While not stated outright in the exhibition itself, the context of this exhibition leads to the conclusion that wrought iron was situated as a decorative or applied art (rather than as a traditional craft) and was something that fulfilled an aesthetic role,

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inaugurated in 1878 which offered prestige and cash awards to the top artists from the Dublin Metropolitan School of Art (now the College of Art and Design). Notable winners of the Taylor Prize have included Seán Keating, William Orpen, and Mainie Jellett ("Our History: Visual Arts," *Royal Dublin Society*, https://www.rds.ie/about-rds/governance/rds-history, accessed July 19, 2021.

[103] Muriel Gahan had been elected to the Arts Council in January of the previous year, along with Professor Daniel Corkery, Senator E.A. McGuire, and Séamus Ó Duilearga, of the Irish Folklore Commission.

[104] "Exhibition of Wrought Iron Work," *Irish Times*, April 22, 1954.

rather than the previously foregrounded utilitarian and pragmatic aspects of traditional crafts.

In small increments, the scaled-back post-RDS exhibitions of the IHS and Country Markets began to display the characteristics of an art gallery or museum installation rather than the more immediate demonstrations and sales formats of previous shows. In 1962, Country Markets Ltd. organized an "exhibition of art and craftwork in wood" at the Country Shop, the atmosphere of which appears to have been one of a more restrained and sterile gallery space. Far fewer of the displays were available for purchase, and the inclusion of an increased number of historical artefacts as opposed to objects created by contemporary workers underlined the shift away from outright craft advocacy. The *Irish Independent* reported that "for many years now," the Society had been "arranging displays of this kind in an effort to preserve the traditional crafts and encourage their continued development."[105] However, a large portion of the exhibition was given over to the display of artefacts indicative of a disappearing, or already dead, craft: coopering. The exhibition was opened by Lord Moyne, the Chairman of Guinness Brewing Co., and items on display had been lent by over eighty coopers who had been previously employed by Guinness but made redundant when the company switched from wooden casks to metal kegs. On display were innovative examples of repurposed stout casks transformed by coopers, including "stool, chairs, umbrella stands, tub plants, even a table lamp with a miniature barrel as its base."[106] Renowned Irish sculptor Oisín Kelly (1915-81) had work on display showing how he imaginatively transformed a disused barrel into a religious object by carving a crucifix into

[105] "Beer Barrels and Bog Oak in Arts and Crafts," *Irish Independent*, April 6, 1961.
[106] Ibid.

one of the vertical staves. In a nod to more pragmatic purposes, Kelly also exhibited a rocking chair fashioned from old casks. This item proved to be particularly popular with crowds due to the renewed popularity of rocking chairs in Ireland brought on by Irish-American John F. Kennedy's use of one at the White House. Other examples of art-inclined wooden objects on display were carved sculptures by Hilary Heron, wooden Irish saints by Ian Stuart, Elizabeth Rivers's original woodcut blocks created to illustrate Ethel Mannin's autobiographical *Connemara Journal*, and a squirrel carved from bog oak by "woman artist" Miss Nancy Evans of Ashford, Co. Wicklow, who, it was noted, had received artistic training in Liverpool.[107] While this exhibition of carved wooden objects and repurposed coopers' barrels still indicates a focus on traditional crafts, there is a noted shift away from utility and towards appreciation. In this way, just as the 1941 RDS organizing committee saw an art exhibition as an appropriate substitute for Homespun Hall, these later displays of the IHS and Country Markets Ltd. "gallerized" the crafts, contributing towards their decontextualization and removal from the immediate needs of the producer.

Conclusion

The scale of the RDS exhibitions in the 1930s allowed the Homespun Society to market and sell rural goods to a much larger audience. Each year the Society advertised for rural makers to send in items for exhibition and sale, with producers setting the price for their goods. Prices were monitored and advised by the IHS, such as noted in a 1938 advertisement in the *Irish Press* that read that the Society "wishes to get in touch with isolated craftsmen with whom it has not been in contact already," and as IHS Secretary R.V.

[107] Ibid.

Stoney stated, "it has been found that there is a ready market for properly-produced and originally-designed goods, provided the price is reasonable."[108] Following its first showing at the 1936 Spring Show, the Society reported sending £500 from sales back to rural producers, and noted that orders had been received that would keep several of those producers engaged for months.[109] By the end of the Society's first year, reports noted that £930 from sales had been sent back to workers.[110] By 1940, the Spring Show was regularly earning workers over £500-£600, with cheques ranging from £3 to £58.[111] In 1942, the *Irish Times* reported that over the six years of its existence, the IHS had provided the means for rural producers, many in impoverished Gaeltacht regions, to sell their materials for a combined £3,000.[112]

In addition to the economic benefits, the Irish Homespun Society hosted exhibitions which were celebrated for the ways in which the personhood and skill of the artisan were foregrounded alongside the objects of their labour. However, whether incidentally or strategically, as the effects of *Fianna Fáil*'s ideological strictures on agricultural and rural life inhibited Ireland's economic growth into the 1960s, there was a noted shift from producer to object, and an increased emphasis on the aesthetic and decorative elements of traditional crafts, rather than production and employment. By the 1950s, the Irish Free State had achieved Republic status, and was well-established enough to attend to the long-neglected arts and culture sectors, evidenced through the establishment of a national arts

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[108] "Seeking More Rural Craftsmen," *Irish Press*, January 24, 1938.
[109] "Homespun Society and Show Result," *Irish Independent*, May 21, 1936.
[110] "Homespun Society," *Irish Independent*, December 23, 1936.
[111] "Homespun Society's Show Report," *Irish Press*, June 7, 1940.
[112] J.A. Smith, "Beauty from Cottages," *Irish Times,* May 16, 1942. Accounting for historical inflation rates and the shift from the Irish Pound to the Euro, the equivalent amount in today's currency would be over €150,000, or roughly $220,000CAD. Source: http://www.hargaden.com/enda/inflation/calculator.html.

council in 1951. While the Irish Homespun Society and the Irish Countrywomen's Association continued to advocate for rural producers through their joint venture, Country Markets Ltd., their work took place in rural areas, and was less prominent in urban spaces such as the Royal Dublin Society and its national platforms.

Chapter Three – Skill: Craft, Bodies, and the Artisanal Workshop

Introduction

Throughout the middle years of the 1940s, the Irish Homespun Society engaged Chrissie O'Gorman—a fellow crafts enthusiast and amateur textile artisan—to complete a comprehensive survey of practicing craftspeople in all 32 counties of the Irish island.[1] O'Gorman's nearly four years-long travels throughout Ireland—Northern Ireland was never completed due to a lack of funds—allowed her to engage one-on-one with the nationwide community of craftspeople. The craft survey was also a necessary fact-finding mission for the IHS in that it brought to light the numbers of people engaged in the production of traditional crafts and those using traditional techniques of production; as Homespun Society meeting minutes of 7 January 1943 detail, the impetus for the craft survey was "the difficulties of getting into touch with rural craftworkers."[2] Miss O'Gorman—an Irish-language speaker in her mid-30s—began her work with the IHS on March 1st, 1943 by meeting with Gahan to discuss the current state of crafts as well as visit a folk exhibition hosted by the National Museum.[3] She began the craft survey proper a few days later in Co. Carlow. As she travelled throughout the Irish craft hinterlands, O'Gorman frequently sent reports back to Gahan including, at times, physical examples of crafts

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[1] The Republic of Ireland—then as now—is comprised of 26 counties. Northern Ireland, part of the United Kingdom, makes up the remaining 6 counties. Reference to the "32 counties" has historically been imbued with an underlying nationalist impulse based on the desire to end union with the UK and reunite the 32 counties.

[2] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 7, 1943. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[3] Handwritten meeting minutes, February 2, 1943. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

objects.[4] Over the next four years O'Gorman would travel to and speak with over 1,000 craftspeople throughout Ireland. From a twenty-first century perspective, the systematic documenting of craftspeople and the compilation of a clear mapping of the traditional crafts in Ireland can be understood as a form of care for the crafts community in Ireland. [5] Just as Homespun Society interest celebrated the local flora and fauna of homespun production, and IHS exhibitions foregrounded community and national identity, so too did the organisation's work prioritize the well-being—physical and intellectual—of its all-important craft producers.

At roughly the same time that the Irish Homespun Society was founded in Dublin—nearly a decade before O'Gorman began her survey— philosopher of technology Lewis Mumford published his tome *Technics and Civilization* (1934) in England and the United States[6]. By his analysis, he ascertained that there exists a difference between allowing machines—as a tool—to assist workers in craft production, and the all-consuming system of capitalist production which exploits and alienates the worker. As craft historian Antonia

[4] Meeting minutes report on April 9th, 1943, that "Miss O'Gorman sent reports of visits to districts in Carlow where she has found basket makers, smiths, saddlers, carpenters. Samples, sketches, names of articles and implements and of craftworkers are sent with report. She has now gone on to Kilkenny." [Handwritten meeting minutes, April 9, 1943. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[5] The Muriel Gahan Papers archive contains a handwritten address book with an extensive contact list of craftworkers throughout Ireland; presumably many of these contacts were made initially by Chrissie O'Gorman on the nationwide craft survey. [Craftworker Address Book, no date. Muriel Gahan Papers IX. Additional Papers of Muriel Gahan, MS 49,806/80. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Thanks to Mary Elizabeth Boone who noted similarities of this craft survey to the larger and more institutionalized indices and databases that were begun in roughly the same time period. For example, the Index of American Design, compiled between 1935 and 1942, was a Federal Art Project relief project that saw the compilation of nearly 20,000 watercolour depictions of "folk and decorative arts objects from the colonial period through 1900." According to Washington's National Gallery of Art, the Index was "conceived as an effort to identify and preserve a national, ancestral aesthetic." [Aleesa Pitchamarn Alexander, "Index of American Design," accessed September 28, 2023, https://www.nga.gov/features/exhibitions/outliers-and-american-vanguard-artist-biographies/index-of-american-design.html].

[6] Lewis Mumford, *Technics and Civilization* (London: Routledge, 1934).

Behan so aptly notes, "for Mumford, mechanization…was not itself inherently exploitative; in this way, he left an opening for redefining and reappropriating technology."[7] Thus, any so-perceived antimodernist bias towards antiquated traditional craft techniques in Mumford's writing was tempered by a willingness to cede space for the conscientious application of mechanization for the benefit of crafts and their producers.[8] However, the Irish Homespun Society was not so willing to accommodate factory production into the traditional manufacturing—read: true hand production—systems they advocated in the west of Ireland.

On the surface, the Irish Homespun Society's public work and curatorial vision forwarded a very public antimodernist agenda which had as its impetus the desire to slow or—ideally—halt the loss of traditional craft production techniques in Ireland. This manifested within the IHS as a diatribe on the evils of modern factory production and the attendant loss of traditional social values. However, the actual evidence of IHS work and engagement with craftspeople indicates a much more complex and nuanced relationship with mechanization and technology. It may at first glance appear that the Irish Homespun Society may be understood as a direct contrast to the somewhat avant-garde ideas of Mumford and others who saw value in farming out aspects of human labour to machines; in reality, the situation was far more dynamic and complex than this simple dichotomy allows.

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[7] Behan, 214.

[8] Lewis Mumford's reputation has undergone a reassessment in recent years based on aspects of his personal life. He is, however, important for the purposes of this dissertation to highlight the variance in opinion on the issue of mechanized labour in manufacturing. Mumford's contribution is to allow the relationship between humans and machines to be seen as a spectrum, rather than a rigid dichotomy. More importantly, Mumford is used here to introduce a key figure in weaving and homespun advocacy: Ethel Mairet, a theorist and artisan who will be explored later in this chapter. For more on Mumford's legacy, see Rosalind Williams, "Classics Revisited: Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization*," *Technology & Culture* 43, no. 1 (January 2002): 139-49.

Building on the previous chapters which examined the local environment and natural resources (Chapter 1) and the role of community in homespun exhibitions (Chapter 2), the remaining two chapters of this dissertation will explore in detail the craft producers themselves. These interrelated yet distinct chapters on body and mind, respectively, will be contextualized through the lens of two site-specific loci of practice: the workshop and the classroom. This chapter examines a transitional moment in Irish manufacturing history in the 1920s and 30s when labour historically and traditionally done by human hands was being rapidly supplemented and replaced by the mechanization of labour in homes and, more commonly, small to medium-sized factories which proliferated across Ireland. Despite being vocally resistant to and active against encroaching mechanization that threatened artisanal jobs, the Irish Homespun Society at times allowed concessions when it provided labour savings or other tangible benefit. It is the claim of this chapter that the Irish Homespun Society's inflexible attitudes towards factory production were primarily ideological even if, at times, they were also qualitative and procedural. Therefore, a holistic understanding of the IHS's work and legacy must consider not only what was promised, but also what was done.

This chapter begins with an assessment of the Irish Homespun Society's advocacy for a system of holistic production that privileged true hand production to battle the loss of jobs in the traditional crafts. The IHS is then situated within a broader ideological field which included advocates of antimodernism such as the British Arts & Crafts movement. Expanding on the notion of holistic homespun production, the middle section of this chapter delves into a document produced by Muriel Gahan which outlines the preferred holistic system of manufacture for Irish homespun. This document is examined through the

lens of *taskscapes* and *rhythmpatterns* of nature, concepts borrowed from Tim Ingold used here to situate the production of homespun within a holistic ecological field of reference. From this perspective, a conflicted and somewhat inconsistently applied vision of IHS ideology on technology emerges; this nexus of conflict opens new avenues for assessing the impact and legacy of the Homespun Society. The final section of this chapter will introduce a few other contradictions, specifically as they relate to female labour under a modern system of industrial enclosures. Try as they may to fight it, the Irish Homespun Society and its homespun producers were at the mercy of an ever-forward marching modernity that saw increasing mechanisation that was perceived to be at threat of subsuming traditional manufacture.

Holistic Production & Embodied Knowledges

The system of production advocated for by the Irish Homespun Society is what I would term *holistic production*; that is, a comprehensive and unified system of technical manufacture which offered dignifying, unalienated labour for artisans and ensured the perpetuation of these skills intergenerationally. Holism is a philosophical term defined in the New Oxford American Dictionary as "the theory that parts of a whole are in intimate interconnection, such that they cannot exist independently of the whole, or cannot be understood without reference to the whole, which is thus regarded as greater than the sum of its parts."[9] In the context of traditional crafts and the Irish Homespun Society, holism is evident in the practice of refusing to segregate and/or elevate the craft object above its raw materials, makers, or eventual users. In many ways, this placed the IHS at odds with the

[9] "Holism," The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English, *Encyclopedia.com*, accessed May 18, 2023, https://www.encyclopedia.com/humanities/dictionaries-thesauruses-pictures-and-press-releases/holism-0.

somewhat avant-garde ideas of Mumford and others who saw value in farming out aspects of human labour to machines.

Through its public work with homespun producers, it became very clear to the Irish Homespun Society that the traditional crafts of Ireland were in a desperate position, being at significant risk of extinction. Chrissie O'Gorman's diary from her time spent travelling the country on the IHS Craft Survey betrays her pessimism about the future of crafts. In a letter to Muriel Gahan, O'Gorman worried about the future of card-making, a craft industry that manufactured the large flat brushes used for combing wool prior to spinning (see figs. 3.5 and 3.6). She wrote that "in time to come there will be no-one left in Ireland who will be able to make cards. But I'm thinking there'll be hardly any need for them then either."[10] Even the ever-optimistic Muriel Gahan expressed concerns regarding the status of craftspeople in modern society. During a seminar on country crafts given to the Galway branch of *Muintir na Tíre* in 1936, Gahan commented that "we have forgotten for so long that they are skilled craftsmen that they are near to forgetting it themselves."[11] She identifies a broader cultural issue of the contemporary period: denigration or ignorance of intangible cultural heritage surrounding traditional crafts.[12] As modernisation and

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[10] Mitchell, *Deeds Not Words*, 128.

[11] "Country Crafts, Seminar 1936, Galway Muintir na Tíre," 1936, Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49, 806/66. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Muintir na Tíre, Irish for "people of the land", was a grassroots community organization founded by John M Canon Hayes in Tipperary Town, 1937. As the organisation's website states, their mandate was and is local improvement, particularly in rural areas, focusing on "social, economic, cultural, and recreational" development. Gahan and the IHS had multiple interactions with MnT, though the two were never explicitly linked. See "History of Muintir na Tíre," *Muintir na Tíre: National Association for the Promotion of Community Development in Ireland*, accessed May 18, 2023, https://www.muintir.ie/about-us/history-of-muintir-na-tire/.

[12] "Intangible cultural heritage" is defined by UNESCO as "the practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, skills—as well as the instruments, objects, artefacts and cultural spaces associated therewith—that communities, groups, and in some cases, individuals recognize as part of their cultural heritage. This intangible cultural heritage, transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by

urbanisation increased in the twentieth century, the wares and skills of craftspeople were in less demand; as the general public forgets about the crafts, craftspeople themselves lose faith in the value of their practices and, ultimately, the craft will become extinct along with the embodied knowledge and history held by the craftsperson. Fighting against this imminent extinction, the Homespun Society pored focus into safeguarding crafts, the most endangered of which—homespun—was obviously the central concern.

A striking feature of the Muriel Gahan Papers is the persistent emphasis on hand production. She takes the etymological meaning of manufacture seriously, in that there should be a direct physical connection between the hands of the craftsperson and the object being made. Scattered throughout the typed and handwritten notes of Gahan's papers are carefully prefaced words underscoring manufacture: handspinning, handweaving, hand carving, handcrafts, handwork, etc. In fact, the meeting minutes of the first IHS informal gathering show that this was a primary concern from the beginning:

> It was pointed out by various speakers that great harm had been done to the Irish homespun industry in recent years by the extensive sale of hand woven tweeds that were made of factory spun yarn. These tweeds were bought by the public under the impression they were homespun, while in actual fact the word homespun meant one thing only, woollen material made from hand woven yarn that was also hand spun."[13]

There are two factors of hand production to which the Homespun Society consistently returned. First, the yarn spun in mills and factories was inferior in quality to that of handspun yarns. Secondly, quality traditional crafts—such as homespun—required a

communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity, this promoting respect for cultural diversity and human creativity." [*Basic Texts of the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage,* UNESCO, 2022 ed., accessed September 28, 2023, https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention#art2.

[13] Untitled type-written and hand-annotated document, 1935. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, MS 49,806/17. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

tangible physical connection between producer and craft. Hand production was obviously more labour intensive, slower, and more expensive than millspun yarn. The Homespun Society reported on tweed output for the year 1946, with 2,500-3,000 yards of genuine homespun compared to 13,000 yards of tweed made using homespun weft but millspun warp.[14] The disparity in these numbers indicates that hand production was obviously more labour intensive and slower than mill spinning, factors that would lead to high consumer price tags. If not for efficiency or cost, then why did the Irish Homespun Society demand a textile entirely produced by hand?

The answer lies in an understanding of the craft ideologies of the Homespun Society, which were not unlike those of the slightly earlier British Arts & Crafts movement. Under the aegis of Marxist critiques of the capitalistic exploitation of workers, the IHS and the Arts & Crafts thinkers before them strongly advocated for forms of labour which were seen to be *un*alienated, such as the belief that products should be produced from beginning to end by only one or a few specialised artisans, rather than through the monotonous and deskilling operational work of assembly-line production. A Homespun Society proposal on craft development in the west of Ireland recognised that many in rural areas were "at present…faced with little choice but to emigrate as manual workers."[15] This proposal begins to outline a programme conceived to create employment in rural areas; the type of employment proposed was a decidedly small-scale approach to modern production. The document argues that "the spread of small factories in rural areas is a more suitable form of

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[14] Muriel Gahan, *Irish Homespun Tweed*, January 1948. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[15] "Craft Development in the West of Ireland," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/72. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

development for the West than huge industrial complexes."[16] Based on a structure of many small, dispersed, specialised craft factories, it was proposed that young people at risk for emigration be educated and trained in craft skills and techniques, and they would then be immediately dispatched to nearby manufactories for stable, lucrative employment. A holistic and unalienated approach to manufacture is clearly articulated in this document, and it is worth quoting at length here:

> Each [small factory] unit would be equipped for at least three different crafts. Each craftworker could then vary his or her work from time to time. Apart from avoiding the risk of boredom, this variety in output would cut down the risk of saturating the market with any one kind of work. It would also help to ensure continuity of work even if the market for any one particular craft disappeared altogether.
> …
> Each worker would have to produce an entire article from start to finish without passing it on at different stages to other workers as happens in assembly line operations…It can be argued, of course, that this is not the cheapest method of producing any article that is destined to sell and show a profit, but as it is hoped that the articles produced will have a certain intrinsic artistic merit as well as having an appeal to tourists, I have no doubt that a price level can be obtained that will make the project viable
> …
> The workers from the different units could be invited to come together from time to time to exhibitions, competitions, lectures, etc., and this would help to ward off the feelings of isolation and futility that can be fatal to development in rural areas.[17]

In summary, this single document advocates for a form of craft development which was varied and fulfilling for workers, cognizant of the value of its products, and willing to invest in the wellbeing of the workers in order to preserve the craft. This is precisely the vigor with which the Homespun Society approached the production of homespun, in both discourse and practice. In many ways, the pre-eminent concern in this instance is the

[16] Ibid.
[17] Ibid.

implementation of a standard system to assess quality and skill in the manufacture of homespun.

In 1947-48, the Department of Industry and Commerce inaugurated a Standards Committee, and Muriel Gahan was invited to join as a representative from the IHS. She frequently reported back to the IHS Executive on these committee discussions and actions. As recorded in meeting minutes, the IHS Executive agreed on a set of standards which should be applied to homespun tweeds, and which were put forward to the national Standards Committee. The recommendations were as follows:

1. That the independence of the worker should be preserved, and creative ability encouraged
2. There are four equally important processes in the working of a piece of tweed – selection of wool, carding and blending, spinning, weaving
3. Only when all these are done in the home can the tweed be called 100% homespun
4. There should be separate [trade]marks for 100% homespun, for that made from carded rolls, and for the half homespun (mill spun warp)
5. The mark should be used by approved bodies, not by individuals[18]

First and foremost is stated concern for the wellbeing of the worker; this point is immediately followed by an insistence on the holistic production of homespun, identifying four inseparable processes: wool selection, carding and blending (which would also include dyeing), spinning, and weaving. The IHS even devised contracts with rural producers, for example, fig. 3.1 shows a type-written slip that was required to be completed and submitted to the IHS along with their homespuns being sent in for sale or exhibition.

As indicated above, the IHS required clear statements from producers that they used virgin Irish wool and dyed, handspun, and handwove the tweeds at home. Specifics were

[18] Handwritten meeting minutes, September 18, 1947. Muriel Gahan Papers, II: The Irish Homespun Society, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

required—names, dates, and addresses—as well as a witness signature from a clergyman, doctor, or teacher.[19] It seems that this level of micromanagement was required in order to confirm that the tweeds being sold and exhibited by the IHS did indeed meet their stringent qualifications to be called "genuine homespun." Over time, the Homespun Society expanded upon and provided a detailed breakdown of the comprehensive process of homespun production. From the previous four "inseparable processes," Muriel Gahan later outlined twenty processes required to produce homespun, as shown in fig. 3.2. This detailed list of the stages involved in homespun production breaks the process down into discrete tasks that may be studied on their own; however, these tasks are inextricably linked and must be understood as imbricated parts of a complete, unified whole. What this document provides is an example of how the IHS—focused as it was on contemporary production and immediate socio-economic outcomes—compiled and recorded these tasks for posterity. This sort of forward-thinking documentation is crucial for the perpetuation of traditional homespun techniques and skills.

Craft skills and practices are one component of intangible cultural heritage; while artefacts of crafts persist, the methods and means of producing these crafts are at significant risk of total loss if not recorded and passed on. In "Gifted Places: The Inalienable Nature of Belonging in Place," Julia Bennett borrows anthropologist Marcel Mauss's

[19] The language used on this contract document indicates a quite paternalistic and perhaps even colonizing approach to ascertaining authenticity in homespun. Note that rather than skilled artisan or expert, the witness signature must come from clergy, doctor, or teacher (the majority of whom would have been male, in this period). 'Authenticity'—along with other words used frequently in this dissertation such as 'quality', 'expertise', and 'traditional'—denotes a lineage and a heritage of ideology that is mobilized through language. While this is not the place for it, there is a need for a nuanced analysis of how these words come pre-loaded with histories of meaning. See David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country—Revisited* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015) for an interesting discussion of how memory, discourse, and history intersect with discussions of identity, heritage, and nation.

concept of "the gift," which she "deploy[s] to understand how places are cared for by a community over time."[20] She continues, arguing that place, if seen as an "inalienable gift" has the potential to "create a moral duty to nurture and pass on places to subsequent generations."[21] I argue that one outcome—intentional or otherwise—of Gahan's persistent emphasis on holistic manufacture was to preserve the intangible cultural heritage of Irish homespun; in essence, offering homespun as an inalienable gift to subsequent generations. The individual descriptive tasks and the clear ordering of process provided in the document above gives a clear directive for how to undertake the production of homespun. However, as is the case with all craft, textual sources are not enough. Homespun—as a skilled practice—requires more than just a step-by-step listing; rather, the enactive, embodied skills of craft production require intergenerational transmission which occurs through a hands-on, practical education. Rather than an intellectual education, homespun manufacture depends on experiential and sensuous intimacy with the raw materials, and a complex tangible understanding of the kinaesthetic techniques of manufacture. The following section will use photographs from the Irish Folklore Collection to illustrate the embodied knowledge required for making genuine homespun as decreed by the Homespun Society.

Embodied Knowledge and the Homespun Taskscape

In the introduction to *The Perception of the Environment*, Tim Ingold introduces the idea of "practical enskilment" as "the embodiment of capacities of awareness and response

[20] Julia Bennett, "Gifted Places: The Inalienable Nature of Belonging to Place," *Society & Space* 32 (2014), 658.

[21] Ibid.

by environmentally situated agents."[22] Similarly, he argues that "the study of skill demands a perspective which situates the practitioner, right from the start, in the context of an active engagement with the constituents of his or her surroundings."[23] This is, precisely, Ingold's concept of the dwelling perspective, and it will be mobilised here to detail and analyse the taskscape of homespun (local environment, raw materials, etc.) from the perspective of the labouring artisan's body. As such, I assert that homespun must be understood as an embodied knowledge based on sensuous connections to material and practice. Just as the hand work of homespun manufacture engages the sense of touch and feeling, various other stages of homespun production activate (and rely upon) extra-visual sensory abilities.

In "Twist-hands and Shuttle-Kissing: Understanding Industrial Craft Skills via Embodied and Distributed Cognition," authors Penny and Fisher term the acronym SEEED to encompass the varied verbs that have been applied to describe the concept which I here refer to as embodied knowledge. SEEED is made up of knowledges which can variously be defined as situated, embodied, enactive, extended, and distributed.[24] The authors claim that

> Any attempts to separate the "mental" aspects of this work from the "physical" aspect would be absurd. Because of this, we find embodied, situated, and distributed cognitive approaches to be singularly applicable…Within these approaches it is assumed that intelligence or cognition is not (exclusively) a process of mental operations, but involves the entire body, in sensorimotor integration with environments—prosthetic integration with tools, in distributed synchronization and cooperation with nonhuman agents.[25]

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[22] Tim Ingold, The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill (New York and London: Routledge, 2000), 5.

[23] Ibid.

[24] Simon Penny and Tom Fisher, "Twist-hands and Shuttle-Kissing: Understanding Industrial Craft Skills via Embodied and Distributed Cognition," *Form Akademisk* 14, no. 2 (2021), np.

[25] Penny and Fisher, np. Embodied knowledge and cognition is a broad field of discourse in contemporary theory. As it relates to craft skills, see Alexander Langlands, *Cræft: An Inquiry into the Origins and True Meanings of Traditional Crafts* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2017), Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2008), David Pye, *The Nature and Art*

A sustained interest in the bodily experience of craft skills similarly led Nasseri and Wilson to note that "craftsmanship is a whole person dialogue involving senses, thoughts, feelings, and intuitions of the practitioner. Beyond a process and activity, it embodies and engages modes of being in and knowing the world."[26] Based on this sensuous and engaged understanding of craft skills, potter, poet, and craft writer Mary Caroline Richards expanded the human repertoire of senses from five to twelve: "touch, life, movement, balance, smell, taste, sight, warmth, hearing, word, thought, and ego."[27] Visual evidence—in the form of photographs taken by the Irish Folklore Commission—and textual discourse from the IHS clearly indicates that there was a distinct sense that homespun was an embodied and sensuous engagement with materials and movements; the production of homespun, as practiced by dwelling in the taskscape, deprivileges book learning and the sense of sight for a practice that is multi-sensorial and kinaesthetic.

Returning to Muriel Gahan's comprehensive listing of the tasks involved in the production of homespun (fig. 3.2), we can divide the tasks into sequences of related tasks: Wool selection and preparation (tasks 1-3), dyeing (4-7), breaking, carding, and spinning wool (8-15), weaving (16-18), and scouring and finishing (19-20). These tasks are all interrelated and necessary for a finished piece of homespun tweed; however, not all tasks would be completed by one figure. Multiple skills and crafts are required in the process, drawing on the working practices of farmers, dyers, spinners, and weavers. It was likely

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of Workmanship (London: Cambridge University Press, 1968), or Bruce Metcalf, "Craft and Art, Culture and Biology," in *The Culture of Craft: Status and Future*, ed. Peter Dormer (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997): 67-82.

[26] Mona Nasseri and Sandra Wilson, "A Reflection on Learning Crafts as a Practice for Self-Development," *Reflective Practice* 18, no. 2 (2017), 203.

[27] Mary Caroline Richards, *Centering in Pottery, Poetry, and the Person* (Middleton, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1989), 146.

never the case that all these skills were found in a single figure; rather, I contend that homespun production occurs—to borrow Ingold's term—in a *taskscape*: a localised system of community manufacture that bound artisans together along with their environment through their common work. As Gahan wrote with a flourish in early IHS materials,

> hand spinning should be fostered, as it takes from 10-15 spinners to keep one weaver employed, and the spinners in turn keep their entire household occupied and very often the neighbours as well; the children collecting the flowers and plants for the dyes, the women and girls washing and dyeing and carding the wool, ready for the spinner at her wheel. *The whole industry, bound up as it is with the lives of the people, is of national importance, and should be preserved*.[28]

Figure 3.3 shows just such a community-oriented undertaking in an undated photograph by Thomas Mason on *An Blascaod Mór* (the Great Blasket Island), off the coast of Co. Kerry. It records a large group of men, women, children (and dogs) shown gathered on the shoreline in various stages of the sheep shearing process. Many documents in the Irish Folklore Collection document and record the labour-intensive process of procuring woollen fleece from sheep. For instance, a transcript collected from Donard, Co, Wicklow outlines the calendar of the sheep season, as practiced in that region.

> If the weather is fine about the 1st of June the sheep are all washed in a mountain stream. Only the hardiest and strongest man can stand in the cold water for hours. Only 40 to 50 sheep can be washed in an hour…
> Ten days after the washing the shearing begins [with] 3 or 4 shearers in one house today, in the next tomorrow. [A]fter shearing the pitch pot is heated. The son who has shorn all day catches the sheep while his Daddy puts on the brand…they are driven to the mountain after shearing.[29]

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[28] Untitled type-written and hand-annotated document, 1935. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, MS 49,806/17. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added

[29] *Sheep-farming in West Wicklow*, collected ca. 1930s, Donard, Co. Wicklow, the Schools' Collection of the Irish National Folklore Archive, Volume 0914, page 018, https://www.duchas.ie/en/cbes/5044710/5033454. Another article documenting the process of shearing draws attention to a modern iteration of the dwelling perspective as it applies to Irish sheep. The article quotes Seamus Joyce, a champion Irish hand shearer, who notes that "some wool is left on the animal [with the use of hand shears, as opposed to electric blades] and this is ideal for cold climates like Ireland where

This recollection focuses on a sense of time or duration involved in the prepping of fleeces. The time of the agricultural calendar dictates the time of the year when sheep will be shorn; the practice in west Wicklow allowed for approximately ten days between washing and shearing. Similarly, this account highlights sensuous experience of time as part of the skilled labour of shearing. A modern online source, *The Country Smallholder*, provides an exceptional written description of the kinaesthetic and proprioceptive senses required in shearing a sheep:

> Start by shearing the sheep's brisket, belly and crutch while she is sitting up on her bottom. Next allow her front leg to slip back between your legs and use your knees and feet to turn her onto her right hip. This puts her into position for you to shear the whole of her left hind leg right up to (and preferably a little over) her backbone, and her tail. Having done this you then step forward while lifting the sheep up into a higher sitting position in order to shear the left hand side of her neck.
> This is followed by the left shoulder. On completion of the left shoulder, lower her down onto her right side and keep her position by placing you left foot under her right shoulder. Now you shear the "long blows". Starting from the forward edge of the area that you cleared when shearing her left hind leg, each blow runs the whole length of the sheep parallel with her backbone. At the end of each blow, lift her head slightly and make a short blow around the right side of her neck.
> Once all the wool is cleared from her left side, step over the animal with your right foot and lift her head up and hold it between your legs. In this position, shear the remainder of the right hand side of her neck and her right shoulder. From here you gradually shuffle backwards, which has the effect of pulling the ewe back up into a sitting position. Continue clipping as you move until the whole of her right side is done. Finish of (*sic*) by shearing her right hind leg and then allow the ewe to stand up between your legs and run behind you. Using hand shears the whole job ought to take you about five minutes.[30]

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sheep need some protection from the elements." Care is required from sheep to ensure a continuous annual growth of fleece, thus underlining the mutual benefit offered to both sheep and farmer. [Ciaran Moran, "Traditional skills of hand shearing will be highlight of world championships in Gorey," *Agriland*, May 22, 2014, https://www.agriland.ie/farming-news/traditional-skills-hand-shearing-will-highlight-world-championships-gorey/]

[30] Tim Tyne, "How to Shear Your Sheep Properly," *The Country Smallholder*, accessed May 19, 2023, https://thecountrysmallholder.com/news/how-to-shear-your-sheep-properly-6300688/.

Note the attention paid in this text to the subtle motions and movements that made the shear a smooth and unified process. The ability to recount the action of shearing in such detail clearly indicates an experienced shearer; however, this sort of textual instruction would not primarily be involved in the intergenerational transmission of shearing knowledge. Instead, note how the Blasket photograph shows young boys gathered around the men engaged in various stages of shearing. The carefully choreographed process could only be learned through observation and practice, wherein the bodily movements of the shearer are closely attuned to those of the sheep, both working in concert. These processes can be documented in text, but only engaged and embodied hands-on practice will foster a true understanding of the craft.

After shearing, the fleeces are picked of any large debris, rolled, and prepared for washing, a necessary process required to remove excess natural oils from the fleece.[31] Once washed and dried, the next phase of Gahan's homespun process could begin: dyeing. Dyeing itself is a supplemental decorative process to tint and colour the wool prior to spinning. As previously discussed in Chapter One, dyeing was considered by the IHS to be an important aspect of the manufacture of homespun; in fact, good colouring was foundational to a piece of genuine homespun. Homespun Society discourse on dyes—importantly, natural dyes—draws upon the language of sensual engagement,

[31] As recorded in IHS archival documents, "60lbs greasy wool=40lbs washed wool=36lbs carded wool=48 yds tweed (approx.) =42 yds shrunk and finished saleable tweed." These figures, as annotated by Gahan on the document, came from the Scottish Agricultural Organization, and were linked specifically to the manufacture process used to produce Harris Tweeds. [IHS Memorandum sent to Department of Lands, 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. Irish Homespun Society, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

demonstrating once again centrality of sense-experience in the process.[32] Natural vegetable dyes—as opposed to chemical or aniline dyes—were understood to imbue the homespun with a desirable softness, both to the touch, and in the tone of the colours. Gahan writes of these sensuous engagements in "In Search of Homespun," when she narrates her travels throughout rural Co. Mayo:

> During the Summer, the women gather their dyes. The grey lichen off the rocks—"crottle" in the north, but "the moss" they called it here—for those wonderful shades ranging from tawny orange to deep red brown, with that *never to be forgotten rich homespun smell*… All these vegetable dyes [heather, bracken, elder berry] give soft beautiful colours, like the rocks and the bog, and the mountains where they grow.[33]

The descriptive qualifiers used here highlight the extra-visual qualities of homespun: the movement of gathering, the smell of authentic vegetable dyes, the softness of colour equated with both beauty and the natural colours of the surrounding environment. As a tactile object, clearly homespun cannot but be appreciated for the soft gentleness of its production.

Gahan's narrativization continues: "On the fire a black three-legged pot was boiling. It was wool being dyed with the moss. The house was filled with the smell of it."[34] An example of the dyers' pot is seen in fig. 3.4 alongside a woman seated at the large spinning

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[32] A January 1948 article by Gahan on Homespun Tweed includes an interesting anecdote that links the sense of smell with the historical denigration of dyers and weavers: "Although in the more advanced homespun districts the weaver takes an honourable place, in the more backward parts he is thought of little account. This is very evident in Erris [Co. Mayo] where the weaver's house is the worst in the village, and usually isolated from its neighbours…It is probably that the weaver's lowly position is inherited from days when as well as weaver he was 'dyster'. Irish dyes were almost invariably gixed (*sic)* with urine, and so the trade of dyster came to be looked on as something distasteful. There are parallel instances in other civilizations of this attitude to the weaver's craft." [Irish Homespun Tweed, typewritten document, January 1948. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[33] Muriel Gahan, "In Search of Homespun," 1934, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-1968, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added.

[34] Ibid.

wheel handling the identifiable carded rovings of wool ready to be spun into yarn. Before spinning can begin, however, the toughest and most labour-intensive process must be completed by the spinners: mixing, breaking, and carding the wool. In her list of homespun processes, these steps have the honour of being credited as "the most individual and highly skilled of all," requiring great precision, effort, and care.[35] Figures 3.5 and 3.6 show a woman demonstrating carding in Carna, Co. Galway in the 1930s. She uses the metal-bristled wooden carding brushes to comb and align the fibres of wool to allow for the spinning of a continuous yarn. This is the most intensive and least mechanically assisted aspect of the process, and (as will be explored in the next section) even the anti-mechanisation Homespun Society allowed for the use of machinery to aid. Further, carding is a skill that is entirely tactile in that it relies on the mechanics of body positioning, careful monitoring of tension and angle of movement, and a coordinated effort of many small motor movements. Importantly, the same can also be said of the spinning process, as demonstrated again by fig. 3.4.

In "Tools, Minds, and Machines: An Excursion in the Philosophy of Technology," Ingold idealistically argues that "the image of the artisan, immersed with the whole of his being in a sensuous engagement with the material, was gradually supplanted by that of the operative whose job it is to set in motion an exterior system of productive forces, according to principles of mechanical functioning that are entirely indifferent to particular human

[35] "Observations on the Draft Specification for Irish Homewoven Cloth," May 25, 1949, typewritten document. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/29. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

aptitudes and sensibilities."[36] The author reproduces a 19th century diagram from Reuleaux's *The Kinematics of Machinery* (1876).[37] The diagram shows a trigonometrical representation of a man working at a pedal-powered treadle grindstone. What this diagram of the grindstone—a mechanical aid not unlike a treadle spinning wheel—reveals is the mechanistic linkages between the body of the artisan and the mechanical intercessors that intervene in the production process. The carding and spinning photographs above clearly demonstrate the body mechanics and positioning used to operate the respective tools (cards and wheel), and there is a strong formal linearity that leads from body-hand-tool-material (and in the case of the spinner above, from material back to hand). As Ingold argues, exemplified by his grindstone and these photographs here, "as…demonstrate[d], the machine is not external to the worker, 'receiving' from him its motive force, for in reality, 'the worker makes a portion of his own body into a mechanism, which he brings into combination, that is chains kinematically, with the mechanism to be driven'."[38] Therefore, arising from this analysis it may be concluded that it is not so easy to differentiate between manufacture (handwork) and mechanisation in the processes of homespun production. The boundaries between hand and machine, and between artisan and operative, are difficult to delineate. For this reason, a deeper understanding of the Irish Homespun Society's ideologies is necessary; if machinery functions as a natural extension of the kinaesthetic human body, and certain machines were allowed by the IHS, then just

[36] Ingold, "Tools, Minds, and Machines: An Excursion in the Philosophy of Technology," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 295.

[37] Ingold, 305.

[38] Ingold, 305. He quotes from Franz Reuleaux, *The Kinematics of Machinery: Outlines of a Theory of Machines* (London: Macmillan, 1876).

why was the Homespun Society so vehemently opposed to other forms of mechanised factory production? To answer this question, it is apt here to return to the symbiotic relationship of worker and machine as forwarded by Lewis Mumford and others. In fact, a prominent disciple of Mumford's ideas, craft theorist and weaver Ethel Mairet, provides a compelling comparison to Muriel Gahan in terms of ideological positioning on factory mechanization and the crafts.

Biotechnics: A Concession to Mechanized Production?

Ethel Mairet (1872-1952) was a British contemporary of Gahan; she was both a craft scholar-theorist and an experienced weaver. Mairet published several books on handweaving and dyeing, including *The Future of Dyeing; or, the conflict between science and art in the making of colour* (1915), *A Book on Vegetable Dyes* (1920), and *Handweaving Today: Traditions and Changes* (1949), among others.[39] In her role as craft theorist, as Antonia Behan notes, Mairet was deeply influenced by the work of Mumford (1895-1990) as well as other prominent contemporary thinkers such as Patrick Geddes (1854-1932) or László Moholy-Nagy (1895-1946).[40] As Behan argues, what these figures shared in common was an interest in the overlapping matrices of biology and design, a field of thought known as "biotechnics," which for Mairet "primarily meant the inherent technical

[39] Ethel Mairet, née Partridge married twice, with her known name coming from her second husband, Philippe August Mairet, a draftsman employed by C.R. Ashbee, celebrated Arts & Crafts designer. Mairet was previously employed as secretary to art historian and philosopher Ananda Kentish Coomaraswamy (1877-1947), Ethel's first husband. Ethel was inspired in much of her craft advocacy and practice by time spent in Ceylon and India, where she attempted to document, study, preserve, and practice indigenous craft techniques, particularly embroidery. See Margot Coatts, "Mairet [*née* Partridge; *other married name* Coomaraswamy], Ethel Mary," in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, September 23, 2004, https://doi-org.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/10.1093/ref:odnb/39639.

[40] Antonia Behan, "Ethel Mairet's Textile Biotechnics and the Aesthetics of Materials," *The Journal of Modern Craft* 14, no. 3 (2021), 212.

characteristic of a material as developed by nature and culture over time and place."[41] As Behan continues, "Mairet understood that textiles and their materials were evidence of history and the creative and technical decisions of past craftworkers. Mairet positioned weaving as an activity with a larger scope than mere technique; rather it was a field of knowledge that included the knowledge of the design of raw materials."[42] This emphasis on understanding weaving in its larger holistic context is very similar to how Muriel Gahan approached her work with Irish homespun.

Mairet, like Gahan, advocated for the use of natural raw materials and was critical of the use of factory produced yarns. Mairet—again, similar to Gahan—valued education and practical training in the crafts; not only did she encourage the acquisition of knowledge for herself and her craft peers, but she also taught using raw materials as object lessons to understand the wider world. For instance,

> To "understand" wool (meaning, for Mairet, to know its technical capabilities in both material and cultural forms, including the ways that craftsmen had responded to it), one needed to understand breeds of sheep. Studying the breeds led to their history, which Mairet showed was a history of human migrations and politics, as when the merino sheep was brought to Europe and Spain from China and Persia, then gifted to England's George III who sent [them] to the colonies of Australia and New Zealand.[43]

The work of the IHS was in many ways very similar to that of their contemporary Mairet in England; however, whereas Mairet "attempted to reformulate, rather than reject, the relationship between handcraft and industrial production," Gahan and the IHS did not appear to go as far.[44] The central dichotomy that seems to have driven the work of the Irish

[41] Behan, 215.
[42] Behan, 216.
[43] Behan, 217.
[44] Behan, 215.

Homespun Society was a distaste for factory-produced tweeds, such as those produced by the Irish government under the Round Tower Tweed trademark. As this researcher has consistently demonstrated, the IHS was vehemently opposed to the use of millspun yarns in the production of homespun; in fact, the Society took a decidedly anti-industrial approach that placed them at odds with other homespun production industries, namely that run under the Irish government's Gaeltarra Éireann cottage industries division.

Rejecting the Factory | Embracing Non-Industrial Time

Muriel Gahan, in her role as homespun advocate with the IHS, expressed in no uncertain terms her distaste for the methods of production used by Gaeltarra Éireann (GÉ) in producing their government subsidised Round Tower Tweeds (RTT).[45] A typewritten document from the Muriel Gahan Papers archive provides a clear statement of these concerns. Titled "Gaeltarra Éireann and Homespun Production," the document begins:

> From the year 1945 until production virtually ceased three years ago, all homespun production in Co. Donegal was taken over by Gaeltarra Éireann. It was their policy during that time to sell machine carded rolls to the spinners and to buy back the unwashed tweed from them. This meant that of the twenty processes undertaken by the home producer, fifteen were now done in the mill, leaving only five…to qualify the cloth for the term 'Homespun'. There is no limit to the amount of cloth that can be produced in this way. Good and bad tweed were accepted by Gaeltarra at this time, and it was this cloth mill finished and tentered that remained unsold after the 'Emergency' causing the later homespun glut whose effects still remain.[46]

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[45] For an introduction to GÉ and RTT, see Introduction. Though it is not within the scope of this project, a future avenue of research may be to explore how issues of "taste" and acculturation are tied up in crafts and craftsmanship. A foundational text on the subject is obviously Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste* (London: Routledge, 2010), but Penny Sparke has also published on aspects of gender, design, and taste which is perhaps closer to the subject at hand. See, for instance, Sparke, *As Long as It's Pink: The Sexual Politics of Taste* (Halifax, Nova Scotia: Press of the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design, 2010) or "The Modern Interior: A Space, a Place or a Matter of Taste?" *Interiors: Design, Architecture, Culture* vol. 1, no. 1 (2010): 7-17.

[46] "Gaeltarra Eireann and Homespun Production," January 14th, 1952, typewritten document, Muriel Gahan Papers II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/29. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Tentering is an industrial practice in the finishing stage of tweed. "A Glossary of Cloth Manufacturers'

In fact, much of the preserved documentation in the Muriel Gahan Papers archive is in the form of correspondence between various organizations, demonstrating that the IHS was involved in a complex negotiation between empowering homespun producers with labour-saving techniques and preserving the traditional, non-industrialized practices of homespun production.

Country Workers Ltd., precursor to the Irish Homespun Society, was exploring ways to improve the quality of life and working conditions for rural producers in the early 1930s.[47] Initially, the organizers sought out the assistance of machine production as a way to limit the arduous physical labour, most notably in the rough breaking and carding of wool prior to spinning. Possible solutions were offered in an August 27, 1931, meeting:

> The question of the better marketing of tweed was discussed and Mr. Stoney stated the difficulties of getting the tweed sufficiently dependable and well woven. Getting

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Terms, Definitions, and Processes defines the tentering machine as “a huge ponderous affair of hooks on sliding chains which stretch and hold the piece out as it is carried under the over layer upon layer of heated steam pipes. These hooks take hold of the cloth selvedge and as they glide forward into the huge machine they open out stretching the piece out in width to a stipulated number of inches, thus at one and the same time is the piece dried as it passes over and under the heated pipes, but also does the stretching process, take out all the creasings effected upon the cloth, but the heavy rollers of the scouring machine.” [J. Archer, “A Glossary of Cloth Manufacturers’ Terms, Definitions, and Processes,” Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/73. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland]. Another document preserved in the same archive indicates that the IHS was reaching out to other organisations for advice on homespun best practices. The letter, received by the IHS from the International Wool Secretariat in 1952 argues that tentering “results in a cloth which, although conforming to the standard width, is dimensionally unstable and one which will shrink excessively during subsequent tailoring operations, e.g., Hoffman pressing. The shrinkage we have just referred to, known as relaxation shrinkage, gives rise to many problems in the wholesale clothing industry and is common to cloths made from all fibres and not merely to wool cloths.” [Letter from International Wool Secretariat, June 30, 1952, Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/29. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland]. Thus, the Homespun Society concluded on the topic of industrial tentering that “not only does good homespun not need [it], but also tentering has a more adverse effect on homespun than on a cloth of mill yarn because the mechanical straining of the hot wet material damages the weft’s cellular composition which is one of its most valuable qualities for reasons of warmth and health.” [“Specification for Irish Homespun Tweed,” Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/29. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

[47] Country Workers Limited was established in May 1930 by P.T. Somerville-Large, Muriel Gahan, and several others also involved with the later IHS. Country Workers Ltd. received their Certificate of Incorporation, No. 8049, dated October 16, 1930. The express intention of the organization, like the IHS and those that followed, was to assist and support craft producers in rural areas of the island. [Archival reference material, Muriel Gahan Papers I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-88, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

> the wool carded was advocated, and Mr. Large suggested that as the company could not afford to set up a carding machine which would cost £200, the company should buy yarn (*sic*) and get it machine carded, and then distribute it to the spinners. This scheme would be impossible to work from Dublin and would require somebody on the spot…It was agreed that the cost of carding at Foxford should be ascertained and if reasonably possible an agency could be started with it and wool could be collected or bought from the weavers and machine carded in large quantities and then redistributed.[48]

It is clear from this discourse that the aversion to machine assistance had not yet cemented itself among the homespun advocates; however, later documents reveal many examples of what I contend is an overall antimodern approach to the application of machine power. For instance, in addition to the aforementioned aversion to tentering practices, the Homespun Society was deeply critical of the ways tweed fabrics were finished at woollen mills. The finishing process involved two linked processes. First was scouring, described by Gahan in a document subsection called "Comparison of Home and Mill Finish," in which she argues that "present methods of mill finish have two main disadvantages over home finish."[49] Scouring is a process of cleaning in which hot water, soap, and pressure are used to clean and shrink the fabrics. The document argues that "in mill scouring, several lengths of tweed are stitched together. With diversity in each of raw material (*sic*) and of every process of manufacture…it is impossible to match each piece so accurately that all will get the right amount of washing and shrinking. Some must get too much, some too little."[50] The other

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[48] Handwritten meeting minutes, August 27, 1931, Muriel Gahan Papers I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-88, MS 49,806/1, National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Foxford Woollen Mill was established in 1892 on the River Moy in Co, Mayo. Founded by Mother Agnes Morrogh-Bernard in 1892, Foxford Mills was based on Sherrard, Smith & Co. woollem mill in Co. Tyrone. As Vawn Corrigan writes, "it had forty power looms, machinery for every phase of textile production and combined hydropower and steam with a 'two hundred horse-engine'. Mother Morrogh-Bernard resolved to follow [this] model. It was an outlandishly ambitious undertaking for a woman in the 1800s." [Vawn Corrigan, *Irish Tweed: History, Tradition, Fashion* (Dublin: The O'Brien Press, 2020), 73].

[49] "Scouring and Finishing Homespun," typewritten document, no date, Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[50] Ibid.

process—finishing and thickening—was required to bond fibres together, resulting in a more water-resistant, warming garment. However, as claimed by the IHS, mass production finishing techniques could not attend to the individual needs of each unique piece of material:

> If the mill gives the usual blown finish, a polished surface is put on the tweed (the softer the tweed the higher the polish), and all life and individuality is ironed out, 'lost in collectivism' almost as much as in milling. On the other hand if the tweed is only scoured and hung to dry, no bonding of the weave takes place at all, and the result is rather a loose, limp material.[51]

While these concerns are not unwarranted for an organization whose primary aim was to improve the quality of tweeds being produced in Ireland, when paired with other writings by the IHS, the deeply ideological beliefs of the advocates may be revealed.

As part of her work with the IHS, Muriel Gahan frequently travelled to various regions of the country to give public lectures on country crafts. At a 1936 seminar in Galway, Gahan very clearly lays down her antimodern perspective on factory production: "Country crafts became a necessity only where the industrial octopus could not reach, it was however, for some time much cheaper even in industrial areas to get things made by the local weaver or blacksmith than to buy factory made goods in the shops…*Men tried to imitate with machines what had been fashioned with men's hands and their hearts. They failed as they were bound to fail,* and it is only now fifty years later that beauty is really beginning to show itself in factory-made things."[52] Similarly, Olivia Hughes—a close friend

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[51] Ibid.

[52] "Country Crafts, Seminar 1936, Galway Muintir na Tíre," 1936, Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49, 806/66. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Gahan here seems to be drawing attention to what Walter Benjamin termed the "aura" of authenticity which surrounds original works but which is absent in reproduction. See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations*, edited by Hannah Arendt and translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968).

and colleague of Gahan—described an exhibition of country crafts held at the Country Shop in 1934 thusly: "As a countrywoman I do not like things called country industries which are made in Dublin factories, but there are none of these things here…There are flowery designs, flamboyant designs, [indecipherable] designs, dainty designs, but no Woolworths designs; nothing heartless, or automatic, or 'stuck on'."[53] A final example should suffice to show the ideological nature of these antimodern beliefs, and it is worth quoting at length here. In "the Crafts in Ireland," a typewritten document by Muriel Gahan used as a transcript for public lectures, she provides very clear linkages between traditional crafts, non-industrial production, and quality:

> Not so long ago the craftsman was the local weaver or boatmaker, basketmaker or blacksmith making the necessities of the region from the materials in the region. The craftsman took pride in what was made and left with the object the indelible "signature" formed by his skill and his handling of the materials. Crafts such as his were gradually replaced by the industrially produced object, so that in Ireland as everywhere else the work of the craftsman, as well as the making of such emblems of old country ways…tended to be forgotten by the emigrant from country to city.[54]

A deep analysis of these kinds of discourse point to an alternative perception of how craft production should be undertaken moving forward; I assert that what Gahan and the other homespun actors seem to be advocating for is a return to a pre-industrialised form of manufacture more in line with the well-known British Arts & Crafts movement. A pre-industrial, or perhaps anti-industrial, perspective undergirds the understanding of homespun production as it takes place in the taskscape.

[53] "An Exhibition of Country Industries," handwritten document, 1934, Muriel Gahan Papers I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-88, MS 49, 806/4. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[54] "The Crafts in Ireland," no date, Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/70. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Rhythmpatterns of the Homespun Taskscape

In providing feedback on the proposed governmental plans for homespun production in Ireland, the Homespun Society's writing demonstrates a decidedly antimodern approach to production. This document provides some of the clearest and most scathing remarks towards governmental intervention in homespun, revealing again the deep divisions between the Homespun Society and Gaeltarra Éireann. By following the government's proposals, the IHS maintained that "the fundamental principle of craftsmanship is entirely discounted. The craftsworkers are to be used as machines turning out so many lbs. of wool, so many yards of tweed: *if this is all that is required, far better to use machines; they will do the work more quickly and more efficiently*."[55] The document continues to argue that "ignoring its unique cultural and national worth, the Department reckons the value of homespun only in £ s. d."[56] Finally, the proverbial nail in the coffin is driven in with the final statement that "from being a primary producer the craftsman becomes a wage earner, thus breaking vital links with agriculture and the home."[57] This final statement is particularly revealing, and alludes to what the IHS considered to be the preferred system of production for authentic homespun: rooted in the geographic and temporal space of rural Irish settlements.

There has long been a recognition that the advent of industrialised factory production fundamentally severed the natural relationship between factory workers and astronomical or agricultural time. From his perspective as an anthropologist, Ingold notes

[55] The Attitude of the Irish Homespun Society to the Proposals of the Department of Lands in Future Homespun Organisation," April 1946, Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added.

[56] Ibid. The reference here is to the old Irish currency system of pounds, shillings, and pence.

[57] Ibid.

that it is "commonly observed, in ethnographic accounts of non-industrial societies, that the people described lack any concept that would correspond exactly to the idea of time current in the West."[58] He argues that societies which are predominantly non-industrialised and agricultural function on a broader understanding of time that is attuned not to the exploitative working schedule of a factory operative but to the cyclical nature of tasks required for subsistence and life. Therefore, as Ingold argues, "we may speak, then, of a *task orientation* in such societies, an orientation in which both work and time are intrinsic to the conduct of life itself and cannot be separated or abstracted from it."[59] The form of time is variably referred to as social time, task-oriented time or, borrowing from Sorokin and Merton, astronomical or sidereal time.[60] The fundamental distinction between industrial time and social time is an embeddedness within the natural cycles and rhythms of nature: diurnal divisions of day and night based on natural sunlight, the annual seasonal and climatic shifts that entail different necessary labours and tasks, and the imbrication of natural world, human and non-human agents. Building on the work of Ingold, Owain Jones draws on the spatially oriented writings of Henri Lefebvre, writing that the latter "contends that spaces (such as cities) have multiple types of temporal patterns and rhythms (linear, sequential, cyclical), and [that] this is key to understanding the pulse of life within them."[61]

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[58] Tim Ingold, "Work, Time, and Industry," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 324.

[59] Ibid.

[60] See P.A. Sorokin and R.K. Merton, "Social Time: A methodological and Functional Analysis," *American Journal of Sociology* 42, no. 5 (March 1937): 615-29.

[61] Owain Jones, "Lunar-solar Rhythmpatterns: Towards the Material Culture of Tides," *Environment and Planning* 43 (2011), 2291. Jones is here citing from Henri Lefebvre, *Rhythmanalysis: Space, Time and Everyday Life* (London: Continuum, 2004).

In understanding the temporal understanding of homespun production advocated by the IHS, we can consider what I will call a *rhythmpattern of the homespun taskscape*.

For Jones, rhythmpattern is a conceptual notion through which "emerges the possibility of people being embedded in ecological senses of time and *rhythmic 'practices of place'* as well as 'senses of place'."[62] "If," as Jones claims and is also the assertion of this dissertation, "we are to take the agencies and the liveliness of nonhumans and nonhuman processes seriously in the construction of the 'social', then surely we must pay heed to such processes as the habits/rhythms of [specific environmental locales]."[63] It becomes possible, through the lens of rhythmpattern, to construct an image of the type of timescape that was being advocated for by the IHS based, not on the shiftwork time of factories, but on the natural ebbs and flows of the environmental homespun taskscape. The example of a woollen *geansaí* (sweater or jumper) produced in the Aran Islands provides an apt case study of the rhythmpatterns of homespun in the rural Irish west.

Figure 3.7 shows a close-up detail of artefact F1937.48C, a red Aran jumper knit in 1937 for the collections of the National Museum of Ireland.[64] This object is exemplary of the intangible cultural heritage of the western Irish islands that the NMI and IHS were so desperately attempting to preserve in the 1930s. Using several distinct stitches such as blackberry, diamond, and sheath styles, the inherent beauty of this cardigan embodies the temporal duration of its agricultural production. The raw materials—sheep's wool and madder dyestuff—require (differing) time and (disparate methods of) care to reach their

[62] Jones, 2292. Emphasis in original.

[63] Jones, 2300.

[64] Red Aran Cardigan, *National Museum of Ireland*, https://www.museum.ie/en-IE/Collections-Research/Collection/Top-things-to-see-in-the-Irish-Folklife-Collection/Artefact/Red-Aran-cardigan/aa03deb0-e9d7-41d2-b7f0-0da13b5c2c8b, accessed May 27, 2023.

individual point of usefulness. Sheep husbandry, as explored in Chapter 1, is a months and years long process of raising sheep to adulthood and then undertaking an annual shearing to procure necessary fleece to spin into yarn. Similarly, the dyes used to colour the sweater in its iconic deep, saturated red come from the madder plant (*rubia tinctorum*), which grows ubiquitously on the Aran Islands, but which also requires extended seasonal time for growth and maturation. Once raw materials have been harvested from the local ecosystem, extended periods of labour are required before knitting can begin. For instance, it could take a spinner several weeks or even months to produce enough yarn to knit a traditional Aran *geansaí*; even more so, the intangible skills and techniques of Aran knitters indicate a generational time in which skills are passed down and practiced to excellence among (predominantly female) knitters. Thus, as this brief description shows, the production of an Aran jumper is far more complex and extended than might initially be thought if one were to only focus on the final stages of production. It is this durational extension of and imbrication with natural environmental processes that make up the rhythmpattern of homespun; an interconnected temporally specific system in which a single garment might take months, years, or generations to come to full fruition.

All this to say, in short, that the Homespun Society appears to have been concerned about more than just the loss of practicable skills in spinning, weaving, and knitting. Instead, there is a clear refusal of the type of work (i.e., factory production) which attempted to compress the rhythmpattern of homespun into a systematic process of industrial labour. The dichotomy established here mirrors that of *artisan* and *operative*, a distinction clarified by Ingold:

> with the adoption of a mechanistic view of nature, the activity of making began to take on a quite different aspect. The image of the artisan, immersed with the whole of his being with a sensuous engagement with the material, was gradually supplanted by that of the operative whose job it is to set in motion an exterior system of productive forces, according to principles of mechanical functioning that are entirely indifferent to particular aptitudes and sensibilities.[65]

In many ways, there seem to be interesting parallels between these distinctions, and the families of dolls on display at the 1937 Model Farm exhibition hosted by the IHS at the RDS Spring Show (see Chapter 2). The artisan is presented by the IHS as an archetypical figure of the taskscape: immersed within and immanent to nature resulting in a well-rounded, healthy type of individual. Conversely, the factory operative is alienated from their work, out of sync with normal diurnal patterns, resulting in an artificial rhythm of life which will have detrimental effects on their health (producing an exploited factory worker husband and father to the "fat, white-faced, flabby-looking woman…presiding over a family of pasty-faced, under-sized children.").[66] The negative implications of this type of production were concretised by Gahan when she wrote that the government scheme to provide materials to the workers was no different than offering temporary welfare assistance, and just as helpful in producing change. She notes condemningly that the government system will "be so simple. No effort on the [craftworker's] part, no thought. Everything put into their hands. Just as surely a dole as if it were money and not rolls of carded wool that were being handed out."[67] The same document ends with the apocalyptic message that

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[65] Tim Ingold, "Tools, Minds, and Machines: An Excursion in the Philosophy of Technology," in *The Perception of the Environment: Essays in Livelihood, Dwelling, and Skill* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), 295.

[66] Gertrude Gaffney, "A Woman Looks at the Spring Show," *Irish Independent*, May 5, 1937.

[67] "The Attitude of the Irish Homespun Society to the Proposals of the Department of Lands in Future Homespun Organisation," April 1946, Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

> It is the Society's conviction that if government action is carried out as planned, not only will it be the death of craftmanship, but that grievous and irretrievable harm will be done to that spirit of self-reliance and initiative without which life in the barren homespun districts becomes a mere struggle for subsistence.[68]

However, as an earlier section of this chapter demonstrated, there is not a clear distinction between the work of artisan and operative; the human body works in concert with and forms a natural extension of the machine. Therefore, it thus becomes clear that the inflexibility of the Homespun Society's attitudes towards factory production were ideological as much as they were qualitative and procedural. Despite all the advocacy efforts rallied to the Department of Lands by the IHS, little restriction was ultimately placed on what could be sold as authentic homespun. A rather dejected handwritten note appears after the above stated conviction: "These proposals were not agreed to by Dept of Lands 1946. They were put forward again in 1949 and again turned down on grounds that present homespun production was all that is required, only markets were lacking."[69]

Further to the last point on seeing the machine as a natural, labour-saving extension of the human body, the Irish Homespun Society—in hindsight—offers a complex and at times contradictory approach to the use of machinery, as exemplified throughout their archival records and correspondence. Amidst IHS meeting discussions on homespun production, there are many instances where the Society allowed for, encouraged, and at times even purchased machinery for use by rural producers. An early concession to machinery was made by Gahan in 1948 when she wrote in "Irish Homespun Tweed" that "hand breaking [of fleeces prior to carding] is physically exhausting and the advantages of

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[68] Ibid.

[69] "The Attitude of the Irish Homespun Society to the Proposals of the Department of Lands in Future Homespun Organisation," April 1946, Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

it over machine breaking are not sufficient for its retention."[70] In a similar lecture on "Country Crafts and Countrywomen," Gahan claims that an interest in preserving traditional crafts "is not a plea to go back to the old, but to use the old," and that modern amenities could be incorporated into traditional production methods. She provides as examples, "the use of electricity for turned wood crafts, ironwork and pottery, and *for small wool carding machines and other labour saving equipment*."[71] In an attempt to halt the disappearance of genuine homespun production in Co. Galway, the IHS entertained a suggestion that "the solution for the Connemara problem was the installation of a carding machine"[72] which was then purchased by the Homespun Society five days later from Gauntlett's Manufacturing Company for a price of £17.[73] These kinds of issues remain prevalent in IHS discourse, such as in 1954 when advice was sought from the Rural Industries Bureau in London on their accepted definition of a "handloom"; the response received underlines again the slippery nature of the division between body and machine, as recorded in IHS meeting minutes: "they regard a loom fitted with fly shuttle as a hand loom 'provided all operations are governed by the will of the operator transmitted through his brain and fingers'."[74] To reiterate conclusions already drawn above, the Irish Homespun Society's perspectives on machine assistance in homespun production were, at times, confused, conflicting, and indicative of underlying antimodern ideologies at play. The

[70] "Irish Homespun Tweed," typewritten document, January 1948, Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[71] "Country Crafts and Country Women," typewritten document, no date. Muriel Gahan Paper VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[72] Handwritten meeting minutes, March 4, 1936. Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[73] Handwritten meeting minutes, March 18, 1936. Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[74] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 1, 1954. Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

remainder of this chapter will examine other similar ideological practices, particularly as they relate to female labour and its exclusion from the factory production system.

Female Producers and Industrial Enclosures

As should be clear by this point in the study, there was a noted bias towards women in the advocacy work of the Irish Homespun Society; the organization's motto was the somewhat reductive "To Keep Women Spinning in their Homes."[75] Beginning with this very public statement of the gendered politics at play within the IHS, this section will use the lens of gender to examine how female producers were specially targeted by the work of Gahan and others. Almost all forms of home-based and agricultural labour practices shifted in the early decades of the twentieth century; however, female artisans were particularly hard hit by the move from home to factory production. In fact, the fundamental role of women in Ireland was being reformulated in the period under analysis here. The Homespun Society's motto bears striking linguistic and ideological similarities to gendered phrasing that appeared in the 1937 Irish Constitution. Article 41.2 on the family declares that "in particular, the State recognizes that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to

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[75] Similar sentiments are littered throughout IHS archival records. For instance, it was argued that "homespun is over and above all a women's craft, bound up with the home. It is to women we must look for the greatest understanding of its needs and possibilities." ["Letter Outlining the work of the IHS and the wrong use of the term homespun in the 1930s," typewritten document, no date. Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland]. Imbued with ideology to an even greater extent is this highly essentialized recollection in "Country Crafts and Countrywomen" that "when it comes to crafts, men will carry on with them if they are worth while (*sic*), but women delight in them, worth while or not, and will work tirelessly at them, the work itself being its own reward…No, the men can't compete, because women's special feeling for creative craftsmanship is something that goes back to the dawn of human life." ["Country Crafts and Country Women," typewritten document, no date. Muriel Gahan Paper VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home."[76] This should not be surprising considering the particular ideological affinities held by both the Irish Homespun Society and the Fianna Fáil government of Éamon de Valera which wrote the Constitution. Thus, the politics of work at play in 1930s Ireland was especially limiting for women, as was much of life in this period as evidenced by the existence of Mother & Baby Homes, Magdalen Laundries, and the restrictive view of women taken by the dominant Catholic Church.[77] As is frequently the case, however, the matters are not so simple. Despite appearing to be quite regressive in twenty-first century terms, many of the actions and ideas of the Homespun Society were in fact hearkening back to a moment of historical significance in which women had greater agency and control over their lives than they did after Irish independence.

Scholars of nineteenth-century Irish history note that women played an extraordinary economic role in the so-called "Congested Districts."[78] In many cases, the majority of a family's earnings came from work undertaken by women, which included the sale of butter and eggs and, obviously, the products of cottage-based textile crafts including spinning and knitting (but also weaving, sewing, embroidery, and lace-making).[79] The traditional practices of agricultural labour and craft production in Ireland also produced

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[76] *Constitution of Ireland*, enacted July 1, 1937, https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html, accessed May 27, 2023.

[77] I raise many of the same issues in my article on the movement to repeal the 8th amendment. See Brandi S. Goddard, "Our Toil Doth Sweeten Others: Processional Banners and the Artists' Campaign to Repeal the Eighth Amendment," *New Hibernia Review* 25, no. 2 (Summer 2021): 108-28.

[78] See, for example, Sean Beattie, *Donegal in Transition: The Impact of the Congested Districts Board* (Kildare: Merrion, 2013), Joanna Bourke, *From Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Ciara Breathnach, "The Role of Women in the Economy of the West of Ireland, 1891-1923." *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 80-92.

[79] Ciara Breathnach, "The Role of Women in the Economy of the West of Ireland, 1891-1923," *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 8, no. 1 (Spring 2004), 82.

gendered spaces for female friendship and socialisation. Seasonal transhumance, as practiced in Ireland for centuries, involved moving cattle upland during the summer months for pasturage on commonly held lands. Known colloquially as *booleying*, from the Irish *buaile* ("an enclosure, field or building where cattle are kept for milking"), this form of transhumance as practiced in the west of Ireland saw young girls and women undertake the seasonal migration with the cows, living in small semi-permanent structures for several weeks to months at a time.[80] The women (almost always unmarried) and cattle would typically depart for higher pastures shortly after May Day celebrations; on average, these summer settlements were four to five miles away, undertaken on foot, from the village.[81] In addition to necessities to care for themselves and the cattle, the young women would also bring all required tools for milking, separating cream, and churning butter as well as spinning and sewing to complete in the evenings.[82] Storytelling, singing, dancing, and dating rituals were also a common core experience of the booley women, the latter activity taking place on weekends when young men would join the women upland for recreation and to haul back the milk, cream, and butter processed by the women during the week.[83] As a traditional agricultural practice, booleying was already seen as old-fashioned by the colonizing English in the seventeenth-century when they recorded their perceptions of the

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[80] Audrey Horning, "Materiality and Mutable Landscapes: Rethinking Seasonality and Marginality in Rural Ireland," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Historical Archaeology* 11 (2007), 363. The definition of *buaile* provided by Horning comes from J.M. Graham, *Transhumance in Ireland*, doctoral dissertation, Queen's University, Belfast, 1954.

[81] Claire Doohan and Johnny Dillon, hosts, "May Day Folklore," *Blúiríní Béaloideas Folklore* (podcast created by National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin), April 27, 2017, accessed May 27, 2023, https://soundcloud.com/folklore_podcast/bluirini-bealoidis-02-may-day-customs-traditions?utm_source=clipboard&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=social_sharing.

[82] Ibid.

[83] Ibid.

"wild land, uncultivated by its nomadic inhabitants."[84] However, it also provided a valuable escape for young women where the restrictions and mores of stuffy life could be relaxed, for however a short duration.

Another space for female friendship and collaboration was known as the *reamhu*, a necessary component of the tweed finishing process where women would gather collectively to beat and ream the finished woven tweeds to bind together fibres and thicken the fabric. Muriel Gahan herself describes the *reamhu* in terms of its positive contribution towards female labour and socialisation: "It was tiresome work, but a *reamhu* was almost as much a gala occasion as a christening, and people flocked to the house where the work was being done and entertained the kickers. This is what they call a *luadh* in the [Scottish] Highlands."[85] Importantly, it should be underlined that this sort of conviviality and community cooperation was lost if and when the scouring, finishing, and thickening processes of tweed production were moved into mechanised or factory settings. In this sense, I assert that the Homespun Society was correct to be concerned about the loss of these kinds of traditional agricultural and craft practices, insofar as they represented a sort of industrial enclosure that forced women out from lucrative employment opportunities, disrupted women's collaboration, and encouraged a concerted movement back into the domestic sphere of the family home.

As a historical fact that occurred during the early-twentieth century, the loss of women's economic role in dairying and creameries may have been a precipitating cause for the vigor with which Gahan and others fought against the loss of valuable employment for

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[84] Horning, 363.

[85] "Scouring and Finishing Homespun," typewritten document, no date, Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

women. The introduction of agricultural co-operatives in rural Ireland led to the rise of privately-owned creameries; with the arrival of these creameries, women lost an important source of income as the work of milking and churning became part of male labour.[86] This is similarly the case in homespun when production becomes centered on mechanization and factory production. Under the auspices of rural improvement, the Congested Districts Board (headed, in large part, by Muriel Gahan's father) and the Irish Industries Association (of Ishbel Hamilton) introduced technologically advanced fly-shuttle looms to replace antiquated handlooms. Muriel Gahan noted in "Our Homespun Tradition," that "it was at this time that weaving—formerly done by women, as are all other processes in the manufacture of homespun tweed, was taken over by men."[87] This practice of what I have termed industrial enclosures aligns with theories of feminist materialism advocated for by Silvia Federici in her book *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation*. Federici's thesis is that enclosures—in her case study, enclosures of common land that occurred throughout Europe in the early-modern period—were an early tactic of proto-capitalists who sought to privatize lands so that they might profit from them.[88] A consequence of these enclosures was the loss of common land for grazing animals and growing food; another was that fewer people were required in order to maintain and operate these newly privatized holdings. Ideologically speaking, this provided an

[86] Joanna Bourke, *From Husbandry to Housewifery: Women, Economic Change, and Housework in Ireland, 1890-1914* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1993), 87. Under the creamery system, rather than being churned at home, cream was taken to a local depot for processing. The transport and deal-making was considered to be a masculine role, and therefore the work of the husband (except in cases, for example, where a widow or single female farmed, which was not infrequent).

[87] "Our Homespun Tradition," typewritten document, Summer 1944. Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[88] Silvia Federici, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body, and Primitive Accumulation,* 2nd ed. (Brooklyn: Autonomedia, 2014).

opportunity to reformulate the working population, thereby assigning new mechanised or factory work to men, while women were pushed out of lucrative work and encouraged to return to the domestic realm to care for the needs of the home and the family.

In any case, there are many examples of how the Homespun Society successfully advocated for rural women and homespun producers. Women dominated the numbers of demonstrators hired by the IHS to appear at the RDS Spring shows. For instance, it was noted that in 1936 seven out of the eleven total demonstrators were women.[89] Likewise, and as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, Gahan was a tireless supporter of rural women, such as in the case that she offered encouragement and support to a young western Irish woman who expressed great discomfort at being seen in Dublin in her traditional homespun shawl. Gahan recounted the experience in a 1991 *Irish Times* interview in which she expressed her concerns at the time that homespun was "doomed,"

> Not least because of the cultural inferiority complex which has so distorted rural development since independence. Muriel remembers walking down [Dublin's] Grafton Street with a young woman from the west who was wearing a red homespun shawl. Everybody was looking at her, but she misunderstood their looks. "We have coats at home," she cried protestingly to Muriel. "It was just a pathetic sound. She thought she was being looked down on. In fact she was being admired. So sad."[90]

It is difficult or impossible to say with any certainty who was correct in this situation, and it is indeed very possible that Gahan allowed her love of homespun to obscure the realities of life and fashion in a modern city like Dublin of the 1930s. However, regardless of the reality, Gahan's support was almost certainly comforting to the young woman, and reflective of her authentic caring demeanour and desire to uplift rural Irish women.

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[89] Personal correspondence between Muriel Gahan and Mr. Riordan, January 19, 1937, Muriel Gahan Papers II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/20. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[90] Kevin Myers, "Spinning Traditions," *Irish Times*, July 20, 1991.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a nuanced analysis of some inherent contradictions discovered by this researcher during the scope of this project. The work of the Irish Homespun Society was instrumental for providing meaningful employment to many textile craftworkers, and the organization functioned on a bedrock of care for the crafts community that betrays a deep respect for artisans, traditional skills, and craft objects. However, as was also demonstrated, the antimodernist impulse evidenced within IHS discourse reveals contradictions in the underlying ideology that girded the Society's advocacy work. Women were at once empowered to seek meaningful and lucrative labour; however, the IHS attempted to ensure this type of labour remained in rural homes, rather than urban factories. While Gahan and the IHS appear to publicly condemn modern industrialized manufacture, they secured access to labour-saving machines for their workers. Perhaps most poignantly, the Irish Homespun Society's backward gaze went some way in rekindling traditional agricultural spaces for female fellowship and empowerment: the *buaile* and the *reamhu*, at that same time that women were increasingly being affected—socially and economically—by the loss of paid labour brought about by modern industrial enclosures.

Through this analysis of skill and body, the locus of practice in this chapter was envisioned as a pre-industrial cottage workshop. The next and final chapter explores the impacts of vocational education and training on the minds of crafts producers, in particular young Irish rural residents at risk of emigration due to un- and under-employment. Here, the locus of practice shifts from the workshop to the school, and with it the emphasis moves from the artisanal body to the artisanal mind.

Chapter Four – Knowledge: Design, Vocational Education, and the Artisan's Mind

Introduction

The Secretary's Report of the Irish Homespun Society for the years 1950-2 stated with earnest clarity that "it has been apparent for some time that owing to the production of new varieties of materials and changing tastes[,] the demand for homespun material for clothing is diminishing."[1] Already by this time, however, the IHS had both split and expanded its focus. In 1946, Country Markets Limited was established as a rural produce and craft co-operative collaboration between the Irish Homespun Society and the Irish Countrywomen's Association. The new Country Markets venture empowered rural producers to market and sell their goods; after the split, the Irish Homespun Society "remain[ed] only in the background as an educational committee concerned with craftsmanship."[2] While the IHS embraced its educational role, this focus also left the organisation cash-strapped and largely ineffectual for the remaining 10-15 years of its existence, before finally being dissolved in 1965. This final chapter argues that the primary successes of the Irish Homespun Society came through its dedicated support for rural women through craft training and occupational opportunities that halted emigration, enriched the minds of young women, and engaged their skilled bodies. However, this advocacy was practiced in a way concomitant with official gender ideologies as expressed by the nationalist State government of the 1940s and 50s. This argument will first be

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[1] "Irish Homespun Society, Secretary's Report, 1950-2," Muriel Gahan Papers, II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/28. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[2] Muriel Gahan, "This is How They Happened," *ICA Golden Jubilee Magazine*, 1960. Muriel Gahan Papers, IV. Irish Countrywomen's Association, MS 49,806/40. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

contextualized as a microcosm of larger issues in Ireland after WWII: ongoing rationing, youth employment, and rural emigration. Next, I will explore how the IHS executives honoured their dedication to education by continuing to supplement their own knowledge while part of the Society, albeit with a strong flavour of rural conservatism. Two case studies of a female training programme—*Na Figheadoirí Chiarrai* and the An Grianán Residential College—are the foci of the next two sections which use discourse analysis of IHS executive directives to assess the impact of collaborative rural craftsmanship schemes.

Background

Despite maintaining official neutrality during WWII, Ireland experienced severe deprivations during the war years, both in terms of rationing and manufacturing reductions and economic implications from reduced tourism and support for Ireland's fledgling native industries. Irish homespuns and their producers were directly impacted by emergency wartime legislation which placed very strict sanctions on the sale of textiles within Ireland as a means by which to conserve limited resources and protect local manufacturing. A heated Q&A session in the Irish Oireachtas on October 20, 1943 illustrates the fluid conditions as they related to the wartime homespun industry. Michael Óg McFadden, Fine Gael representative from Donegal West confronted Sean Lemass, Minister for Supplies with accusations that, if true, would amount to racketeering on the part of the government. During oral questioning, McFadden outlined his belief that the government had placed homespun producers in an impossible position through their handling of wartime textile acquisitions. Prior to wartime shortages, the Irish government—through Gaeltarra Éireann (GÉ)—competed with other purchasing agents on an open market to acquire bolts of homespun tweed produced by rural cottage producers.

It was noted that in June 1943, a few months prior, that vendors at Donegal markets were receiving between 10/- and 12/- per yard of tweed; by the time of McFadden's comments, producers were restricted to selling to GÉ at the much-reduced rate of 6/- to 8/- per yard.[3] Paired with the claims that GÉ ceased purchasing from producers for the three months prior to the introduction of the monopoly sales act, the serious accusation here is that the government intentionally stopped purchasing to flood markets and tank prices, thereby ensuring a low rate for acquisition once producers were obligated to sell through government GÉ scheme markets.

Government minister for Supplies, Seán Lemass responded strongly to McFadden's accusations during the public debate, firing back that the workers should be thankful to receive from the government a "certain market and a fair price for all the serviceable material they produce,"; however, he also later continued that "the cloths [produced in Donegal] were selling at too high a price [in previous years] and that a proportion of them was not of serviceable quality."[4] Lemass here is alluding to one of the principle concerns also frequently mentioned by the Irish Homespun Society: a belief that the rural homespun industry was in desperate need of a boost through improvements in overall design of homespuns being put out.

The minutes of Irish Homespun Society Executive meetings are littered with complaints of the poor design of weaving patterns and use of colour coming in from the rural producers. For instance, in a memorandum on the Kerry homespun industry in 1936, it was reported that one of the principal tweed producers in Co. Kerry, a Con O'Sullivan

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[3] Ireland. *Dáil Éireann Debates*, Ceisteanna: Donegal Gaeltacht Industries, October 20, 1943 (Michael Óg McFadden, T.D. Donegal County). https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1943-10-20/23/.

[4] Ibid.

outside Kenmare, produced tweeds "well-woven of good texture, but particularly poor in colour and design."[5] Similarly, in October 1945 Muriel Gahan recommended a competition and awards scheme for knitters on the Aran Islands due to complaints that Gaeltarra Éireann was damaging the industry's reputation by sending poor quality raw materials and bad design patterns to the Aran knitters.[6] The previous month, Gahan's judgments on a craft show in Ballaghderreen, Co. Roscommon were that "standards [were] very poor, with no idea of colour or design in rugs."[7]

Complaints of a similar sort were raised by journalists as well. The *Irish Press* reported in March 1937 that Muriel Gahan stated, in a letter to the Cork Industrial Development Association, that "Irish design was so low that the work could not compete with the much-lower-priced machine work."[8] A March 1938 *Irish Independent* article quotes from a press letter written by IHS Secretary R.V. Stoney that maintains that "if the industry was to be assisted at all by public funds the problem should be approached much more from the angle of instruction being given both as regards designs and colour."[9] One of the primary tasks taken on by the Irish Homespun Society throughout its three-decade existence was, as the *Irish Press* wrote, "to act as intermediary between the fashion world and the cottage producers of these superb materials. They give advice as to the colours and designs in demand by the market and then organize sales, at home and abroad."[10] During

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[5] "Memorandum on the Homespun Industry in Kerry," August 1936. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/20. National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[6] Handwritten meeting minutes, October 5, 1945. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/4. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[7] Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Irish Homespun Society, September 18, 1945. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[8] "Irish Home Industry: Mr. E.H. Childers Replies to Criticism of Designs," *Irish Press*, March 9, 1937.

[9] "Homespun Industry, Some Causes of Decline: Society's View," *Irish Independent*, March 29, 1938.

[10] "Homespuns Displayed," *Irish Press*, September 28, 1940.

their entire existence, but particularly during the 1940s and 1950s, the Irish Homespun Society focused its efforts on training young women and girls from rural Irish areas in all aspects of homespun crafts, with special emphasis on design. Craft training and employment schemes executed by the IHS and its collaborators sought to address mid-century poverty, un- and under-employment, and mass emigration amongst young rural Irish women.

It has been generally accepted by historians—then, as now—that the middle decades of the twentieth century were a period of exceptional deprivation in Ireland. Lack of job opportunities following WWII contributed to extremely high emigration rates, by international standards. During the 1940s and 50s, an estimated 6.3 to 8.2/1,000 people were emigrating annually, typically in search of employment abroad.[11] This exodus was particularly noted in rural areas, and especially amongst young women who were dissatisfied with agricultural work and living conditions. In 1951, the urban ratio of women to men was 1,120:1,000, whereas the same metric for rural areas was 868:1,000.[12] As argued by Mary Daly—and evidenced by the healthy and sickly doll families discussed in previous chapters— "the privileging of rural lifestyles drew heavily on a pessimistic version of the early industrial revolution that contrasted the stunted growth and wasted limbs of the industrial workers and their children with the sturdy offspring of peasants."[13] However, these forms of antimodernist discourse did not seem to stem the flow of young people from rural regions, especially young women. The Irish government viewed the

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[11] Jennifer Redmond, Moving Histories: Irish Women's Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018), 23.

[12] Mary E. Daly, *The Slow Failure: Population Decline and Independent Ireland, 1922-1973* (Madison, Wisc.: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 43.

[13] Daly, 26.

decrease in women remaining in rural areas as a significant threat to their agenda to keep Ireland rural and agricultural, and drastic measures were considered including bans on women working in urban factories or an outright ban on female emigration.[14]

As part of a national collective focus on retaining young women in rural areas, the Irish Homespun Society and many partner organizations introduced initiatives to provide vocational and technical training for women in the hopes of stemming the flow of emigrants. Vocational education committees were established in all regions of the country under the *Vocational Education Act* of 1930 which defined "technical education" as,

> Education pertaining to trades, manufactures, commerce, and other industrial pursuits (including the occupations of girls and women connected with the household) and in subjects bearing thereon or relating thereto and includes education in science and art (including in the county boroughs of Dublin and Cork, music) and also includes physical training.[15]

As Marie Clarke argues, "for those women who chose to remain in rural Ireland, their lives were shaped by a gendered ideology that was structurally enacted through legislation and

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[14] Daly, 44. During WWII, women's travel outside of Ireland was restricted by wartime measures. Following the war, the government considered—but ultimately abandoned—implementing restrictions on Irish women's travel in three ways: "a ban on women under twenty-two years of age; the introduction of a quota system based on pre-war averages adjusted to suit current conditions; or to issue each woman with a travel permit card and leaflet warning them of the dangers and difficulties they were likely to encounter in Britain." [Redmond, 62). Redmond further notes that the restrictive treatment of women within Ireland resulted in the Free state being blacklisted by the League of Nations for their use of "legislation against women's interests." (166).

[15] "Vocational Education Act, 1930," *Irish Statute Book*, Government of Ireland, accessed February 1, 2020, http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1930/act/29/section/4/enacted/en/html - sec4. Note how the early language of this Act mirrors the more definitive statement of women's role which appeared in the 1937 Irish Constitution. Article 41.2 notes that "the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved." [*Constitution of Ireland*, enacted July 1, 1937, https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/cons/en/html, accessed May 27, 2023]. In March 2023, Irish Taoiseach Leo Varadkar announced that a referendum would take place in November to determine the future of this wording in the Constitution, touted as a way to "enshrine [in the Constitution] gender equality and to remove the outmoded reference to 'women in the home,' in line with the recommendations of the Citizens Assembly on Gender Equality." ["Taoiseach and Minister O'Gorman announce holding of referendum on gender equality," *Press Release*, Government of Ireland, March 8, 2023, https://www.gov.ie/en/press-release/534bb-taoiseach-and-minister-ogorman-announce-holding-of-referendum-on-gender-equality/#:~:text=%22I%20am%20pleased%20to%20announce,Citizens%20Assembly%20on%20Gender%20Equality.%22].

policy."[16] Similarly, she continues to note that "the [Irish]State, churches, and the press employed a gendered ideology that ascribed very particular roles to Irish women."[17] The Irish Homespun Society was also sensitive to the plight of young people in rural areas. For example, it was noted that incidents of gender discrimination were occurring in South Donegal: "Brigid McBride would like to learn weaving, but Kilcar man instructing in Dunlewey will not take girls. She and any other likely to be interested to be told of Miss Mitchell."[18] As part of their advocacy on behalf of female homespun producers in rural regions, much of the work of the IHS focused around the execution of two craft schemes: the Kerry Weavers training programme for girls aged 10-14 and An Grianán, a residential college offering the first courses in Ireland for adult continuing education, with special emphasis directed to women's domestic and hand skill training. Before these case studies are analyzed however, the next section will examine how the Irish Homespun Society kept themselves abreast and up to date on issues related to homespun production.

Educating the Executive & Engaging with Experts

> *The Committee thinks that its function as an educational medium is a very important one, and that we should continue to seek knowledge for ourselves to enable us to co-operate fully with those most intimately concerned in the preservation of our traditions, crafts and customs.*[19]

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[16] Marie Clarke, "Education for the Country Girls: Vocational Education in Rural Ireland, 1930-1960," *History of Education* 51, no. 3 (2022), 434.

[17] Clarke, 423-4. See also Louise Ryan, "Negotiating Modernity and Tradition: Newspaper Debates on the 'Modern Girl' in the Irish Free State," *Journal of Gender Studies* 7, no. 2 (1998): 181-97

[18] Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Irish Homespun Society, March 15, 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[19] "Irish Homespun Society, Secretary's Report, 1947-8," Muriel Gahan Papers, II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/28. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

The Secretary's Report of 1947-48 clearly documents a transitional moment in the Irish Homespun Society's work. The report noted the continuing difficult situation of the homespun industry:

> Trading by the Irish Homespun Society had become unsatisfactory since the control of homespun came into force, as purchases from the makers could be made only through Gaeltarra Éireann, the government marketing board…Once inquiry about licenses to buy and sell direct it became clear that this could be obtained only by producers themselves becoming the sellers.[20]

A decision had been made a few years earlier to diversify the work of the Irish Homespun Society and to concentrate advocacy efforts in rural regions by basing craft organizers in those areas. This was part of a larger shift towards co-operative marketing, which culminated in the establishment of Country Markets Ltd. in 1945, a joint marketing venture of the IHS and the Irish Countrywomen's Association (ICA). By 1948 Country Markets Ltd. had been fully licensed and registered as a trading interest, allowing them to market and sell crafts on behalf of producers; however, it also left the IHS financially untethered, the only income from membership subscriptions which at this point offered little incentive for members.[21] Based on this extreme decision to alter the strategies of the IHS so drastically, it is clear that the position of the homespun industry was indeed quite dire. Having surrendered control of craft marketing and sales to Country Markets Ltd., the Irish Homespun Society from 1945 on was engaged strictly and rigidly with the "educational" side of the industry, a position from which they struggled to both adequately define their mandates and implement effective programs.

[20] Ibid.

[21] "Irish Homespun Society, Secretary's Report, 1947-8," Muriel Gahan Papers, II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/28. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

As the quotation at the opening of this chapter intimates, the Irish Homespun Society took their educational role very seriously. One consistency dominates the discourse in the Muriel Gahan Papers archive: that education was central to the preservation of the homespun industry. In many ways, the IHS faithfully followed this credo, and it began with the Society executives themselves. A central part of IHS meetings was in the organizing, attending, and recording of lectures given to IHS members by various intellectuals and public figures.[22] Referred to occasionally in meeting minutes as "First Tuesday Discussions," the IHS hosted a semi-regular series of guest speakers who were invited to general meetings to introduce and lead discussion on a topic of interest to the IHS community at large. Recordings of these events as printed in executive meeting minutes and by the Irish press indicate that these events were, at times, quite provocative, but were always tinged with the same ideological antimodernist conservatism that led many Society decisions.

An illustrative example of the above noted tendency was recorded in detail by several syndicated Irish newspapers under headlines such as "Priest's Criticism of Government's Policy towards the Farmers," "Economist's Views on Rural Economic Problems," or "Education and the People, a Farmer's Position."[23] A Catholic Priest, Father P. Conefrey pontificated on emigration, "the greatest evil under British rule, [which] existed in its worst form still."[24] Conefrey is recorded as passionately declaring that "the farmers in

[22] The Irish newspapers frequently reported on the "Who's Who" of IHS meeting attendees, many of whom were leading figures in Dublin's socio-cultural elite circles.

[23] The headlines come from, respectively, the *Irish Examiner, Irish Press*, and *Irish Independent,* respectively. All articles appeared in publication on February 25, 1937.

[24] "Priest's Criticism of Government's Policy towards the Farmers," *Irish Examiner*, February 25, 1937.

Ireland were—as a body—uneducated, the British government had seen to that…The Free State government has done nothing to raise them out of that state."[25] Conefrey went on to opine that

> what was required was a properly constructed system of vocational education that would concentrate on agriculture, and educate the growing peasantry and give them the ways and means to work. The farmer should be made the manufacturer as well as the producer of the raw materials of agriculture. The agricultural industry should be left entirely to the farmer.[26]

These views, which mesh nicely with the overarching ideology that guided the Irish Homespun Society's actions, foreground a continuing emphasis on Ireland's agricultural economy as being of paramount importance, to the neglect of industrial or other forms of economic development. At the same event, Lecturer in Economics at University College, Galway, Liam Ó Buachalla declared that "girls are suffering most from the complex that life on the land is inferior to life in the town."[27] And, while he made clear to note that "there is nothing demeaning in woman's work in or near the farmhouse," he was also quick to argue that teachers' training for rural areas need not emphasise "urban" skills such as shorthand or typing, as these were "a considerable waste of time for pupils and teachers involved" and will only serve to increase the generalized and widespread dissatisfaction with country living.[28] The aggressive rural-centric focus of the IHS lectures had not diminished even more than a decade later, when Dr. Eoin MacNeill proposed a vote of thanks to E.E. Evans for his lecture on Irish Heritage with a toast: "He who has contempt for rural life arts and

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[25] "Education and the People, a Farmer's Position," *Irish Independent*, February 25, 1937.

[26] "Priest's Criticism of Government's Policy towards the Farmers," *Irish Examiner*, February 25, 1937.

[27] "Education and the People, a Farmer's Position," *Irish Independent*, February 25, 1937.

[28] Ibid

crafts is an enemy of Ireland"[29] Overall, the events organized and ideas circulated through IHS circles were clearly oriented towards the continuing celebration of a rural lifestyle which was quickly vanishing from existence; like the Fianna Fáil government of Éamon de Valera above them, the IHS proffered traditionalist ideals for country living that sought to uplift and support rural Irish women, while at the same time ensuring they were well-appointed to remain within their preferred domestic realm.

Despite the regressive gender dynamics at play—overtly and sub-textually—through the actions of the Irish Homespun Society, it is clear that Muriel Gahan and her other female organizers valued a grassroots approach which created and grew spaces for vast inter-agency networking. The IHS collaborated with many experts throughout their three-decade existence. Ongoing partnerships with the Irish Folklore Commission have been discussed in earlier chapters, as have explorations into natural vegetable dyes with Violetta Thurstan. In 1939, as part of the ongoing experimentation with natural dyes, the IHS executive had considered asking Professor T. Nolan of University College Dublin if, in September, he might "include in his research work experiments in vegetable dyes."[30] That same year, using surplus funds that remained after IHS debts were paid, it was decided to hire and train an Instructor of Designing, Dyeing, Spinning, and Weaving. Gahan recommended an English painter, Stella Frost (1890-1962), for the position.[31] The particulars of the work were discussed and outlined in IHS executive meeting minutes:

[29] "Irish Arts and Crafts," *Irish Independent*, March 28, 1942.

[30] Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Irish Homespun Society, June 21, 1939. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[31] As Art Historian Riann Coulter notes, "Stella Frost is one of a number of women artists who worked in Ireland during the 1940s and 1950s about whom little is known." (Riann Coulter, "Stella Frost, *Red*

> Miss Frost wrote asking for particulars of work proposed [via letter a week earlier]. It was decided that
> (a) The course of training could be taken next year (June and July),
> (b) That period of employment would be about 3 months each year
> (c) That Miss Frost should give two months' teaching time in return for two month's training paid for by the Society, the Society paying her board and lodging during that time and travelling expense to and from place of residence
> (d) That salary afterwards while working would be 4 guineas a week and fare to and from residence, this to be subject to revision according to progress[32]

Not only was it important to Muriel Gahan that craftworkers were supported in all aspects of their design and craft training, but she also sought to provide meaningful and rewarding professional positions for amateur female artists such as Stella Frost. Other notable artistic figures associated with the work of the Irish Homespun Society include many artists such as modernist painters and sisters Evie Hone (1894-1955) and Mainie Jellett (1897-1944), and English printmaker and illustrator, Elizabeth Rivers (1903-1964).[33]

Earth, no date," *Niland Collection*, https://www.themodel.ie/artwork-title/red-earth-by-stella-frost-1890-1962/, accessed August 25, 2023.

[32] Handwritten meeting minutes, May 31, 1939. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Not much else is recorded of Miss Frost's position as instructress with the IHS; however, it is noted that she was once again to be offered a position as expert in vegetable dyeing in 1942. Meeting minutes recommend "to ask Miss Frost, offering £50 + expenses for season's work or ask her for suggestions." [Handwritten meeting minutes, May 26, 1942. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

[33] Mainie Jellett's contributions to the world of European modern art have been reassessed in recent years, and today she is celebrated as one of the most influential and pioneering figures—of either gender—in the Irish modernist arts movement. Muriel Gahan was introduced to Jellett through the latter's aunt Livie, who oversaw Muriel's work with the Irish Countrywomen's Association. Jellett would collaborate frequently with the IHS, oftentimes designing and painting stands and fabrics for IHS displays and exhibitions. [Geraldine Mitchell, *Deeds Not Words: The Life and Work of Muriel Gahan, Champion of Rural Women and Craftworkers* (Dublin: Townhouse, 1997), 61]. In May 1944, the IHS elected to send £103 to Jellett as a token of appreciation for her help that year. It was also decided that "the two pictures, *Achill Horses* and *Birch and Bracken* should be bought by the Company at a price not exceeding £65." [Handwritten meeting minutes, May 9, 1944. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland]. Unfortunately, Mainie Jellett had already passed away earlier that year (February 16, 1944) from pancreatic cancer. In October, meeting minutes record that "Miss Gahan reported the purchase of Mainie Jellett's 'Horses' at 30 guineas. It was agreed that £10.10 should be sent to Miss "Bay" Jellett [her given name was Dorothea, and she was an orchestra conductor at Dublin's Gaiety Theatre] for the Mainie Jellett Memorial Fund. This was the price of 'Birds in Bracken' which the Jelletts had given the [Country] Shop." [Handwritten meeting minutes, October 11, 1944. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

Perhaps the most consequential collaboration the Irish Homespun Society nurtured was that with Avoca Weavers. Continuing the tradition of a co-operative mill founded on the bank of the Avoca River in Co. Wicklow in 1723, Avoca Weavers was taken over by the Wynne sisters in 1927. Emily (1872-1958), Winnifred (1873-1969) and Veronica (1890-1969) Wynne were highly skilled textile artists and designers who established one of the most important weaving interests in Ireland.[34] Within the first year of operations, Muriel Gahan and the IHS had arranged a short course for training women as spinning instructors at Avoca Weavers in Co, Wicklow. This and other training schemes are discussed in greater detail below.

According to meeting minutes from the IHS's precursor, Country Workers Ltd., "everything possible should be done to improve existing designs and workmanship in Country Crafts *by studying methods in other countries through both periodicals and by visiting exhibitions*."[35] On a number of occasions, the IHS worked with the governmental departments and the Irish Folklore Commission to exploit personal and professional relationships with the Swedes, seen as being at the cutting-edge in terms of preserving, documenting, and celebrating folk culture and crafts. In January 1947, it was recorded by the IHS Secretary that arrangements were underway to send a suitable candidate to

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[34] As noted on the Avoca website, "under the management of the Wynne sisters, the mill was given a new lease of life. By 1937, the Wynne sisters went on to buy the business and further develop their designs. They introduced the use of vibrant colours and new weaving patterns. The surrounding countryside provided both inspiration and dye sources. In the walled garden of their family home, they grew plants to be used for dyes. With these dyes, they created new colour combinations by twisting strands of wool fibre together with differing colour tones. The sisters' creation of signature colour lines is still the brand's signature today." ["Timeline: Our History," *Avoca*, https://www.avoca.com/en/our-history, accessed August 25, 2023.

[35] Handwritten meeting minutes, December 29, 1933. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/1. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added.

Sweden to study crafts.[36] Two years later, another entry read that "Miss Gahan suggested asking Department of Education again to train two [weavers] abroad, Sweden for example. This was agreed and Mr. O'Doherty, CEO to be consulted about it first."[37] The multidimensional examples mentioned above should suffice to show that the Irish Homespun Society placed significant emphasis on creating collaborations and co-operative schemes with other craft agencies, all in the support of providing better training aimed at producing better textile designs. The next section of this chapter will explore these craftsmanship schemes in greater detail, with particular emphasis on competitions, teacher training, and a case study of a weaving programme for young girls in Co. Kerry.

Executing a Multi-Agency Craftsmanship Scheme

In the summer of 1944, Muriel Gahan penned an article titled "Our Homespun Tradition," within which she argued strongly for the value of education in saving Irish handicrafts:

> There is no foretelling how our homespun and other traditional country crafts will fare in the years to come, but it is certain that their only hope of surviving post-war competition is the country wide employment of trained handcraft teachers and a comprehensive programme of craft instruction ranging from the primary school to the National College of Art.[38]

Gahan outlined three important points here. First is the recognition that homespun was at risk, and that the Society had deemed education as the primary tool to fight extinction of the craft. Next, Gahan provided two avenues by which to mobilize educational resources and educators: inaugurate or improve teacher's training programs, and encourage training

[36] Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Irish Homespun Society, January 17, 1947. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[37] Minute Book of the Executive Committee of the Irish Homespun Society, January 7, 1949. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[38] "Our Homespun Tradition," typewritten document, Summer 1944. Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

in the handicrafts at all ages, skills, and stations in life.[39] This section will explore how the advocacy efforts of the Irish Homespun Society fared in practice, especially as related to education. After detailing how the IHS helped support workers from their base at the Country Shop restaurant in Dublin, a discourse analysis and case study approach is applied to evaluate how successful the efforts of the IHS and its partner organizations truly were in meeting their mandate to "keep women spinning in their homes." The Kerry Weavers, a vocational training programme for young rural girls in Co. Kerry, will be the focus of the case study which is based on several official documents produced by the IHS, rural Vocational Education Committees, and the Department of Education. As has been discussed previously, the Executive Committee of the IHS foregrounded education throughout the tenure of their work; however, once the IHS was effectively splintered by the establishment of Country Markets Ltd. in 1946, the former's primary occupation became education; Gahan stated this explicitly by outlining in a typed lecture how the IHS's craft advocacy was attuned directly to education in the 1950s, which was noted as being "the Essential Requirement."[40]

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[39] Though there is no room in this dissertation to discuss at length, it should be noted here that Muriel Gahan's advocacy work spanned far beyond the Irish Homespun Society and its immediate partners. In the realm of craft education and training, for example, the Muriel Gahan Papers archive reveals several documents showing that Gahan was engaged in work to start a scheme for occupational therapy at St. Brigid's Sanitorium in Portlaoise, Co. Laois. The archive contains correspondence between Gahan and the other players in the project, as well as a typed document that outlines "Handcrafts Suitable for a Scheme of Occupational Therapy," which lists the following crafts as appropriate: hand knitting, rug making, soft toys, felt work, patch work, block printing, hand weaving, basket work, and wood toys." [Various correspondence and documents relating to scheme to start Occupational Therapy at St. Brigid's Sanitorium, Shaen, ca. November 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, IX. Additional Papers of Muriel Gahan, MS 49,806/80. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

[40] "Synopsis of Talk on the Development of Craft in Ireland," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, ca. 1930-1988, MS 49,806/70. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Designing better Homespun: Supporting & Celebrating Rural Artisans

Examination of internal Irish Homespun Society documents (i.e., correspondence, meeting minutes, etc.) shows that the organization was both emergent and reactive. I contend that the true depth and scope of the homespun industry's dire situation became evident to IHS organizers only once they were already invested and engaged in their supporting work; thus, policy decisions were made quickly and pivots in practice and delivery were frequent. Initially, it was believed that homespun producers were only in need of assistance with marketing and sales. At the first meeting of the IHS in 1935, as recounted in meeting minutes, an observation was made that "in the last few years successful efforts have been made in Donegal, in particular, to improve the quality, *but the marketing problem is one of the greatest difficulty*."[41] The need for markets in which to sell the produce of rural artisans was at the heart of much of Muriel Gahan's work, and it was the reason behind her founding of the Country Shop restaurant in Dublin in the early 1930s.[42] Later, however, and only after the Country Shop had been established as a central marketing depot for rural crafts producers did it become obvious to Gahan that the industry suffered from more than just a lack of markets for crafts; in fact, the glut of mediocre and poor homespun that was sent to the IHS to be put on sale opened the eyes of homespun advocates to another vast fault in the industry: the lack of design, pattern, and colour.

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[41] Typewritten and hand-annotated meeting report, 1935. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/17. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added.

[42] Located at #23 St. Stephen's Green in central Dublin, The Country Shop was established by Gahan and others as a co-operative marketing outlet for the sales of rurally produced crafts in urban Dublin. It became exceedingly popular as a gathering place for local artists and intellectuals. The Shop also played host a number of craft and art exhibitions throughout the years. For a full account of the founding and running of the County Shop, see Geraldine Mitchell, *Deeds not Words*: *The Life and Work of Muriel Gahan* (Dublin: Town House and Country House, 1997).

The Irish Homespun Society had extremely high standards for the tweeds and other materials they accepted for exhibition and sale at their many venues and displays. The *Irish Press* commented on the stringency of the selection process at a 1940 IHS exhibition, pointing out that "[m]aterials handled by the Homespun Society have to pass a strict examination for quality, and no defective length is ever offered for sale."[43] During the early years of hosting these exhibitions in the 1930s, the IHS quickly discovered that in order to achieve the highest possible sale price for the rural producers, there needed to be a great improvement in the overall design and execution of homespuns. To meet this lofty goal, the IHS initiated a system of collaboration with producers. Initially, the aid offered to rural producers was quite modest—providing suggestions, dyestuffs, and patterns to producers via mail—and grew to also include a network of All-Ireland competitions, awards, and certifications in the traditional crafts. The most extensive project undertaken by the Irish Homespun Society was that done to meet the need for qualified craft teachers in rural areas by devising and executing a multi-agency crafts employment scheme across western Gaeltacht counties.

As a somewhat genteel organization, the archival documents of Muriel Gahan and the Irish Homespun Society steer away from complex and nuanced discussions of finances; money is always mentioned in executive meeting minutes as being scarce, but it appears that—at least on paper—the IHS was somewhat disengaged from the true economic specificities of the craft market. In one interestingly-worded newspaper article, however, the journalist notes that the "business of the Society [is] to act as intermediary between the

[43] "Homespuns Displayed," *Irish Press*, September 28, 1940.

fashion world and the cottage producers."[44] What this implies is that the IHS functioned as a middleman to the fashion industry; this was a world far removed from the lives of rural producers, but one which offered exceptional financial rewards in a period of widespread economic deprivation. It was reported in the *Irish Independent* that, though quality and output had been decent, "hand-spinners had become so discouraged at the lack of demand for their products that they have not found it worth their while to recommence working."[45] Conversely, it was reported in the *Irish Press* following an early IHS exhibition at the Country Shop in Dublin that "high praise was given to the beautiful Irish tweeds displayed, but the general opinion was that the range was not wide enough to meet the ever increasing demands of the public."[46] The article continued to note that a tweed purchasing agent from Ireland's pre-eminent department store, Brown Thomas, "who made big purchases at the present exhibition, told THE IRISH PRESS that had there been a bigger variety on view that he would have placed a larger order."[47] The consistent refrain from purchasers—frequently reported on in Irish newspapers—was that there was a ready market for high-quality, beautifully designed homespuns, and that there was not currently enough of said quality homespun to meet international demand.[48] Therefore, the Irish Homespun Society tasked themselves with improving the standards of design in rural

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[44] "Homespuns displayed," *Irish Press*, September 28, 1940

[45] Recall that during the latter years of WWII, purchasing of homespun tweeds and other textiles was done exclusively by Gaeltarra Éireann as part of emergency wartime rationing measures. The industry never recovered.

[46] "Demand for Brighter Irish Tweeds," *Irish Press*, October 3, 1935.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Concessions were offered by journalists and purchasers alike, such as in the above noted article's insistence that "the makers of these tweeds live, many of them, in mountain districts completely out of touch with their public. It is not to be wondered at that their ranges are limited." ["Demand for Brighter Irish Tweeds," *Irish Press*, September 28, 1940]. The article continues with an optimistic word from commercial interests: "In fact, buyers for the trade have expressed surprise at some of the more unusual designs and are confident that, given fresh ideas, wonders can be achieved."

districts by brokering dialogue and deals between tweed purchasers and rural spinners, dyers, and weavers.

The meeting minutes for the Irish Homespun Society frequently and consistently report on ways that the organization was working with producers to improve the quality of design in cottage-industry textiles. For example, in 1938 the *Irish Times* enthused that "during the year the Committee has sent designs, samples of unusual weaves and suggestions on dyeing to the spinners and weavers with these very encouraging results," and in 1942 the IHS supplied a spinning wheel to a "poor spinner in [Connemara] district who will pay for it in yarn."[49] The IHS also produced and mailed out tip sheets, such as that reproduced in fig. 4.1 which calls on the producers to "always keep good quality in mind," and "let the beginner learn to get good true colours first of all—'Art' shades will never be good unless there is a foundation of clarity and definiteness."[50] This friendly mailer also provides a concise and clear definition for how the IHS understood the at-times nebulous element of "design": the combination of texture, weaving pattern, and colour "to produce a cloth planned beforehand."[51] However, encouraging words and simple tips and tricks were not enough alone to elevate the design of Irish homespuns, producers were also invited to participate in sponsored county fair craft competitions, many offering cash prizes for the best homespun submissions.

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[49] Handwritten meeting minutes, March 31, 1942. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. In the first 10-15 years of operation, the IHS expended a lot of time discussing the merits and drawbacks of seeking a registered trademark for Irish homespun along the lines of the mark used by Harris Tweeds of the Scottish Hebrides Islands. The subject of a trademark for Irish homespuns will be explored in a future research article by this author.

[50] "Some Hints for Simple Textile Designing," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/73. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[51] Ibid.

The relationship between the Royal Dublin Society and the IHS extended beyond the Spring show exhibitions at Ballsbridge discussed in previous chapters. In addition, the two organizations collaborated on a nationwide handcraft competition that worked to assess the overall quality of diffuse rural homespun production, bring producers together in friendly competition, and create a space for awards, certifications, and proficiency testing. According to IHS documents, a handcraft competition was "offered to one Agricultural Show Society in each county each year and certificates and County Championships are awarded."[52] The competitions were not exclusive to homespun, and there were classes for a wide range of traditional crafts.[53] Judging, as far as possible, was to be encouraging and fair, with regulations specifying that no competition with entries be cancelled, even if it meant a single entry was awarded winner in that category. The reason for this underlines the deep-seated adoration for the crafts: "even if only one craftsman competes in a class, something has been accomplished, and he may win the County Championship Award."[54] The cash prizes typically awarded to class winners ranged from £1-£5 depending on the venue; however, there were larger prizes established at times when a need was identified. For

[52] Untitled typed and hand-annotated document, no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49, 806/73. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[53] A 1953 report listed the over 30 classes in which submissions could be entered. They included rod basketry, wrought ironwork, woodwork, hand carving, pottery, saddlery, stonework, local traditional craft*, rushwork, hedgerow basketry, straw work, folk dolls, hand weaving, lumra rug, handwoven floor rug, fair isle knitting, plain knitting, socks, wool embroidery, coloured embroidery, white embroidery, lace, Irish crochet, smocking, bedspread, patchwork, skin curing, gloving, soft leatherwork, sheepskin slippers, toys, and souvenirs." Farriery was listed but had been scratched out in pencil. *Category #9: Local Tradition crafts was the category in which homespun fell ("any local traditional craft not included elsewhere such as: handspun knitting yarn, homespun tweed, traditional quilting, work in bog fir, hay or straw sugan, etc"). It is interesting to see that, under the umbrella organization of Country Markets Ltd., homespun did not even receive its own category in the competition classes. This, when paired with the previous insight that Country Markets also did not maintain a presence of homespun displays at RDS Shows, gives some idea of the distressed state of the industry. ["Country Markets: Country Crafts Competition Schedule," 1953. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. The Royal Dublin Society, 1946-1985, MS 49,806/32. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland]

[54] "Country Craftsmanship Exhibition Scheme Plans," 1953. Muriel Gahan Papers,

instance, in 1945 Muriel Gahan set out to tackle the bad designs and materials being sent by Gaeltarra Éireann for knitting on the Aran Islands. To improve design and encourage quality and workmanship over and above that required by GÉ, the IHS inaugurated a competition cup with a 1st place prize of £10, and a special class for girls under age 16.[55] The competition and awards scheme operated by the Irish Homespun Society warrants a deeper examination than can be done here; an especial significance of the archival documentation is the survival of the names of rural producers—many women—awarded prizes whom might otherwise have been lost to history. At the 1945 Spring Show, top prize for spinning was awarded to a Miss C. Malone of Co. Longford, with Miss Scanlon of Leckaun, Co. Leitrim given special commendation.[56] In 1948, the IHS sent prized Galway fleeces to competitors, who then sent in their completed submissions. "Mr. and Mrs. Andrew Dever, Newport, Co. Mayo, took the honours in the competition for Irish homespun tweed…Mrs. Dever winning the Robert Stoney Perpetual Challenge Cup, and Mr. Dever the weaver's prize."[57] Regardless of any final determination on the efficacy of their efforts, the Irish Homespun Society must be recognized for being instrumental in recognising and documenting the efforts of marginalized and largely forgotten rural homespun artisans.

Policy into Practice: The IHS and Schemes for Training Craft Teachers

Even prior to WWII, the IHS was discussing how improvements in education and training were central to the betterment of homespun design. In 1937, the Irish Homespun

[55] Handwritten meeting minutes, October 5, 1945. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. It was also advised in the same minutes that "Miss Gahan was asked to see Gaeltarra about their designs."

[56] "A Leitrim Winner," *Leitrim Observer*, May 19, 1945.

[57] "Mayo Winners of Homespun Contest," *Irish Press*, September 15, 1948.

Society executive penned a letter to a Mr. Riordan of the Royal Dublin Society in which it was argued that the

> Immediate necessities of the [homespun] industry are as follows:-
> (1) A weaving instructor to improve technical faults.
> (2) An expert in colour and design and marketing of a higher standard than those available through the Department of Technical Education.[58]

The letter continued to note that "a man at present [is] available in Donegal with a thorough knowledge of weaving technicalities, who had been very highly recommended to us. If required, we believe that he could start immediately.[59] As for the expert in colour and design, the letter noted that "we have no candidate in mind for the second post, but we think it should not be difficult to find a suitable person. Her work would of course be with the spinners."[60] While it has been exceedingly difficult to piece together the execution and success of these schemes based solely on documentation available from the Muriel Gahan Papers archives, it does seem clear that these suggested roles were filled by at least two figures at various times: Mr. Gallagher as a weaving instructor, and Miss Stella Frost as an expert on colour and dyes.

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[58] Typed correspondence between IHS and Mr. Riordan," January 19, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[59] Ibid. The man in question was a Mr. Gallagher of Co. Donegal. He was described in meeting minutes as "having been with Miss Wynne [of Avoca Handweavers] for 8 years, [he] was considered to be sufficiently expert to send round to his own district of Donegal, also to North Mayo and Galway, for the purpose of instructing weavers, *both in the actual technique of weaving, and in designing.*" [Handwritten meeting minutes, January 27, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added].

[60] Ibid. Note the gendered language inherent within this language. It was self-evident to the author of this letter that the weaving instructor be male, and the spinning/dyeing expert be female. This division will be explored at length in the next section on the Kerry Weavers. It is important to note too the early date of this letter—1937. Most of the archival materials on education schemes operated by the IHS date to the late 1940s and 1950s, and many of the early schemes such as this one were never, or not fully, implemented. It is interesting to note here, however, the envisioned functioning of this scheme, as described in the letter to Riordan: "If your committee considers these schemes for the betterment of the homespun industry worthy of support, might we put it to you that for one year the fund should be available to pay for the instructor in weaving…At the end of the year, if you are satisfied with the progress we have made, that the fund should then be put to training an expert in colour and design, and later to pay her salary for say two years, she having to give a guarantee that she will remain this length of time."]

Included with the aforementioned letter were two key IHS documents: “Scheme for the employment of an instructor in weaving,” and “Scheme for the Training of Expert in Colour & Design.”[61] The scheme for weavers was the more straightforward of the two: the instructor would travel around their designated region and lodge with trainee weavers for a period of one week where one-one-one instruction in technique and design could be given.[62] The scheme seems to have fallen into place remarkably quickly. The first inklings of the idea appear in IHS meeting minutes on January 13, 1937 (“the secretary was instructed to suggest to Mr O’Riordan that Miss Wynne’s weaver who was being sent back to Donegal should be sent round [*sic*] the country to instruct the weavers in other districts”[63]), and the suggestion was made via mailed letter already by January 19, with the above noted reference to the man (Gallagher) who was prepared to fill the post. A favourable response was reported at the next IHS meeting (“it was with great satisfaction that the Society heard that [Riordan] had seen fit to locate £166…to be expended in the payment of a weaver, Mr.

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[61] Both documents are located in Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/20. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Note the slightly different angle of each position: the weaving post is for an experienced instructor, whereas the expert in colour and design is for a scheme to training an expert, who will then be dispatched. The assumption here is that experienced weaving instructors were not difficult to find; conversely, it is clear from IHS documentation that spinning and design instructors were exceedingly rare. A memorandum sent to the Department of Education in 1946 gives an impassioned plea on the importance of qualified teachers: “Just as there no longer exists in the educational world any doubt at all as to the cultural value of handicrafts, so there also no longer exists any doubt that instruction in handcrafts must be at the highest possible level—or not at all. *We have at present no teachers in the country capable of giving craft instructions of the essential quality required.”* [“Memorandum sent to the Department of Education,” 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/27. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Emphasis added.

[62] “Scheme for the employment of an instructor in weaving,” 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/20. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. The annual salary given for this position was £156, a not-inconsiderable sum which roughly calculates to nearly £6,000 today based on inflation.

[63] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 13, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Gallagher"[64]), and by February 3 circulars were being sent to all weavers in the northwest counties to gauge interest and begin planning an itinerary for the new weaving instructor.[65] While Gallagher does not re-appear in the IHS archives, the speed at which the scheme was devised and executed indicates the importance placed on proper weaving instruction; importantly, it was stressed that Gallagher was competent to train in both weaving technique <u>and</u> design, the latter of which was considered the more urgent.

The importance of the various IHS schemes is indicated, as above, by the speed of implementation; similarly, we can also use the dispersal of limited IHS funds to point towards areas of greater need. On July 13, 1938, it was reported in meeting minutes that "following the payment of all debts, the Society would have money left over, and it was suggested that a dyeing expert might be engaged to travel around the country."[66] English dye expert Violetta Thurstan was engaged to travel to Donegal and provide classes in dyeing and colour (as already discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation), but design and colour seem to have remained an ongoing issue such that it was reported that "after discussion with Miss Baker, Inspector under the Technical Board it was decided to write letter to the Department suggesting that spinning instructresses should be sent for a course with Miss Thurstan."[67] It is unclear if anything was done in the immediate, but the IHS sought to engage Thurstan's expertise once again through a course of training with Stella

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[64] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 27, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[65] Handwritten meeting minutes, February 3, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[66] Handwritten meeting minutes, July 13, 1938. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. The outcome of this proposal was the extended visit to Ireland by Violetta Thurstan, English dye expert, as discussed in Chapter 1 of this dissertation.

[67] Handwritten meeting minutes, June 16, 1939. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Frost, an artist and volunteer who worked closely with Muriel Gahan on other projects.[68] Frost was consulted and expressed her interest by mail in the position which was officially given the title Instructress in Designing, Dyeing, Spinning, and Weaving. The job particulars were given as:

> (a) The course of training could be taken next year (June and July)
> (b) That period of employment would be about 3 months each year
> (c) That miss frost should give 2 months' teaching in return for 2 months' training paid for by the Society, the Society paying her board and lodging during that time and travelling expenses to and from place of residence
> (e)[*sic*]that salary afterwards while working would be 4 guineas a week and fare to and from residence, this to be subject to revision according to progress[69]

Unfortunately, there is not enough extant documentation on these schemes within the Gahan Papers to produce a complete assessment of efficacy; however, suffice it to say here that—presumably for Mr. Gallagher and Miss Frost, at least—the effort was appreciated in terms of craft employment and individual improvement. Luckily, the Gahan Papers archive is replete with documentation on another educational scheme undertaken by the Irish Homespun Society, and it is to this scheme—the Kerry Weavers—that we turn to next.

Rural Jobs for Rural Women: A Case Study of Na Figheadoirí Chiarrai (The Kerry Weavers)

By the 1950s, tracing Irish Homespun Society education and training schemes becomes much easier as the IHS had formed an official partnership with the Royal Dublin Society in 1951, known as the Country Craftsmanship Scheme for the Encouragement of

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[68] Handwritten meeting minutes, May 24, 1939. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[69] Handwritten meeting minutes, May 31, 1939. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. There is scant evidence of the execution of this scheme in archival documents from this point; however, Frost remained engaged with the IHS as evidenced through a brief mention again in 1942: "Plans for future. Discussion on (a) collecting crottle in the country, (b) engaging expert to experiment in vegetable dyeing. Decided to ask Miss Frost, offering £50 + expenses for season's work or ask her for suggestion." [Handwritten meeting minutes, January 13, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland].

Craftsmanship in Hand Work and the Further Development of Ireland's Country Crafts. "Organised annually on behalf of the RDS by Country Markets," the RDS-funded scheme saw qualified craft teachers offering workshops and competition classes to local artisans.[70] Craft demonstrations and a loan exhibition were also on display. Interestingly, a discussion of the scope of the scheme written by RDS representative Felix Hackett cites the low standard of workmanship exhibited at local exhibitions, a point immediately followed by the claim that "it might be feasible to arrange a collection of articles of high grade workmanship which could be arranged as a permanent exhibit to go to from Show to Show during the year."[71] The practice of exposing rural artisans to high quality examples of workmanship aligns with the previously discussed emphasis on embodied skill. While the IHS clearly valued education, it was not a strictly intellectual form; rather, the craft training advocated for by the IHS was training in a holistic sense. An examination of a training scheme for teenage girls in Co. Kerry will demonstrate a preference for education which engaged both the body and mind of the producers, and in so doing will also provide a summation of the Irish Homespun Society's principles on employment and education for young, rural Irish women at mid-century.

To here, this dissertation has largely been an analytical historical assessment of the elements that I argue compose the Irish Homespun Society's *holistic* approach to craft advocacy. These include raw materials and the natural environment (Chapter 1), community and national identity (Chapter Two), embodied skill in artisan's bodies

[70] "The RDS Craftsmanship Scheme," 1951. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. Royal Dublin Society, 1946-1985, MS 49,806/37. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[71] Felix Hackett, "Craftsmanship and the Royal Dublin Society," 1951. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. Royal Dublin Society, 1946-1985, MS 49,806/37. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

(Chapter Three) and, finally, design education and practical training (see above). The following case study of the Kerry Weavers Employment Scheme will provide an opportunity for a full assessment of the Irish Homespun Society's holistic approach based on extensive archival research.

It was argued in a previous chapter that the industrialisation of spinning and increased use of millspun yarns represented a form of industrial enclosure that resulted in the loss of valuable employment for rural Irish women. I believe that the Irish Homespun Society—Muriel Gahan, in particular—fought passionately against the loss of cottage spinning at that time due to a similar process at the end of the nineteenth century that resulted in the loss of weaving jobs for rural Irish women. In "Our Homespun Tradition," Gahan wrote of the aid given to rural industries by the Congested Districts Board:[72]

> It was the Congested Districts Board, backing up the voluntary pioneer work of the Irish Industries Association, that at the end of the last century pu[t] Irish frieze again on the map and made the name of Donegal homespun famous. Following a conference between these two bodies in 1893 a development scheme was established under the management of the Association assisted by the Board. New fly-shuttle looms were brought to replace the old hand looms, a teaching centre was set up, and a system of inspection of finished webs inaugurated, carrying with it a registered mark for good quality cloth. *It was at this time that weaving—formerly done by women, as are all other processes in the manufacture of homespun tweed, was taken over by men*.[73]

Note in the above quotation how Gahan underlines that the CDB—which was, in fact, managed by her own father—did great work in introducing mechanized looms and systems of inspection into Donegal; however, this represented yet another form of industrial

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[72] For an introduction to the Congested Districts Board and Irish Industries Association, see the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

[73] Muriel Gahan, "Our Homespun Tradition," typewritten document, Summer 1944. Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/65. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. For an introduction to the Congested Districts Board and Irish Industries Association, see the introductory chapter of this dissertation.

enclosure. Once again, an industry that was previously a source of income for rural women disappeared behind the walls of the masculinized factory.

Muriel Gahan championed educational ventures that provided opportunities for young, rural Irish women. For instance, when Brigid McBride, a young girl in Dunlewey, Co. Donegal, was refused weaving lessons because the "Kilcar man instructing in Dunlewey will not take girls," the IHS responded with encouragement and the suggestion that young Brigid contact Miss Mitchell.[74] Miss Mitchell, Helen Lillias Mitchell (1915-2000), was an expert weaver and the owner of the Golden Fleece weaving workshop at #84 Lower Mount Street, Dublin. Mitchell would go on to establish the first workshop for weaving at the National College of Art in Dublin in 1951, a task Gahan had been advocating for since at least the early 1940s.[75] In July 1943, the executive of Country Workers, Ltd. discussed Gahan's meeting with the Director of the National College of Art in Dublin, Michael Bourke (1912-85) during which she had requested that a school of weaving be established. Bourke expressed hopeful optimism for the future, but Gahan was informed that stained class and

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[74] Handwritten meeting minutes, March 15, 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. The "Miss Mitchell" mentioned here is presumably Helen Lillias Mitchell (1915-2000), a fascinating figure in her own right who deserves greater scholarly attention. According to the National Gallery of Ireland, Lillias Mitchell mastered weaving in Wales during WWII, and returned to her native Dublin in 1946 to establish a weaving workshop at #84 Lower Mount Street with fellow weaver Morfudd Roberts. When Roberts accepted a teaching position in the UK, Mitchell struggled to manage the workshop on her own and struck a deal with the Department of Education to open a small weaving workshop as part of the newly renamed National College of Art [formerly that Dublin Metropolitan School of Art]. After spending several months in Sweden brushing up on her weaving techniques and acquiring looms for the school, Mitchell returned to Dublin to take up her post at the Weaving School in which she would teach spinning, dyeing, and weaving until her retirement in 1979 ["Lillias Mitchell collection (1923-1987)," no date. Yeats Archive, IE/NGI/Y29. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[75] Mitchell became closely associated with the IHS upon her return to Ireland from Wales in 1946. She volunteered on the IHS exhibition committee and having "recently returned from teaching spinning and weaving in Wales, was put in charge of everything to do with wool." [Geraldine Mitchell, 117]. The monograph cited here, *Deeds not Words* is a biography of Muriel Gahan written by Lillias's niece, Geraldine.

pottery workshops had priority.[76] It was then decided by those in attendance at the meeting that "Country Workers should do their best to help in the founding of a weaving school or that they should encourage weaving in the guilds."[77] By November, the IHS was considering plans on forming a lobbying body of interested players in the establishment of "spinning and weaving classes in [the] College of Art."[78] While the School of Weaving at the National College of Art was opened in 1951—by Lillias Mitchell, not Gahan—the Irish Homespun Society undertook its own project to encourage weaving amongst young, rural Irish girls.

Apart from the very public exhibitions hosted by the IHS at the Royal Dublin Society, the most well documented component of Society work was Muriel Gahan's project for craft development in the west of Ireland, which resulted in the creation of *Na Figheadoirí Chiarraí*, a vocational training programme in weaving for teenage girls that was instituted in 1952 on the Dingle Peninsula, Co. Kerry. An undated document entitled "Craft Development in the West of Ireland," presumably written by Muriel Gahan, outlines the plan for a complex system of training, production, and marketing that would assist the rural crafts by offering high-quality training in targeted rural areas, establish "production units" for the immediate activation of labour upon completion of training, and an experienced marketing board to find outlets to sell goods. The scheme as it was

[76] Handwritten meeting minutes, July 27, 1943. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/4. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[77] Ibid.

[78] Handwritten meeting minutes, November 30, 1943. Muriel Gahan Papers, I. The Country Shop and Country Workers Ltd., 1930-1988, MS 49,806/4. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. A letter read at the July 31, 1945 IHS executive meeting notes that the Secretary of the Irish Technical Congress "replied saying that School of Weaving would be outside the scope of their work : he gave names of Federation of Irish Manufactures and Gaeltarra. *It was decided to do nothing further now*" [Handwritten meeting minutes, July 31, 1945. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland]. Emphasis added.

implemented was imperfect, and ultimately an acknowledged failure; however, it is clear that the organizations involved had kind intentions behind their work, as exemplified by the personal reflection with which Muriel Gahan began:

> Before putting forward my proposals on craft development, I would like to make the point that having lived and worked in different parts of the west for a number of years, I feel that I am aware of the facts of life regarding the population decline, the lack of job opportunity, the problems of age structure and some of the other problems that hinder development in this part of Ireland. However, from experience gained as a teacher of arts and crafts in these areas I am convinced that there is sufficient talent and interest amongst the young population to make the following programme of development a viable proposition.[79]

The proposal document continues: "[the development scheme] is designed specifically to create employment opportunities in rural areas for boys and girls of ordinary artistic talent who do not make the grade academically and who at present are faced with little choice but to emigrate as manual workers."[80] The language used in this document pinpoints a very specific demographic: young students from rural areas with little possibility of lucrative employment at home who frequently end up emigrating to England or Scotland to work unskilled manual labour or domestic service positions.[81] The scheme, as designed, was first proposed by Muriel Gahan to the CEO of the Vocational Educational Committee (VEC) of County Galway.

In 1951, the Irish Homespun Society received a cash grant from the Conor Magee Trust in the amount of £200 with which it was determined to "buy looms for Galway…and pay for instruction. A scheme is to be drawn up for submission to Mr O'Doherty CEO with

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[79] Muriel Gahan, "Craft Development in the West of Ireland," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-68, MS 49,806/70. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[80] Ibid.

[81] For more on the experience of young Irish female emigrants in this period, see Jennifer Redmond, *Moving Histories: Irish Women's Emigration to Britain from Independence to Republic* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2018).

the approval of the Dept. of Education."[82] In a clear example of the desperate situation of rural Irish regions in this period, O'Doherty's response was rather pessimistic. As written in the meeting minutes, "a letter from Mr. O'Doherty CEO Galway [Vocational Education Committee] said that it would not be possible to carry out the scheme suggested in the memorandum as there were too few young people left in any of the districts, not enough to form classes in any centre."[83] At this point, the IHS shifted their focus to the hopes that "with the £200 a year from Conor Magee Trust it was suggested that a training centre in weaving for Gaeltacht students might be set up."[84] Clearly, the work of the Irish Homespun Society had in fact come too late to rescue homespun production in many areas of County Galway; while surely discouraging for craft advocates at the time, this does in fact reveal that there was most certainly a need for the type of work being undertaken by the IHS. Gahan persisted in her efforts and continued sending out her proposal to various Vocational Educational Committees throughout the western counties.[85] An area of

[82] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 18, 1951. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. The Conor Magee Trust was established by an eccentric Irishman who left a bequest of funds for the purposes of the "improvement and development of manufacturing industries in Ireland, especially in those parts of Ireland where the Irish language is generally spoken as a home language, such improvement and development to be carried out by the provision of instructors, organisers, lecturers, teachers, the payment of premiums, the payment of money to Societies existing at the date of my death directed in whole or in part to the promotion of like objects…" [Mitchell, 110]. As Mitchell notes in her biography of Gahan, one of the Trust's primary trustees, Agnes O'Farrelly, was deeply involved in the IHS since it's foundation, and much of the work of Gahan was directed towards projects to exploit the use of the funds as set aside by Magee before his death.

[83] Handwritten meeting minutes, August 1, 1951. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23.

[84] Ibid.

[85] Gahan, as noted in the introduction to her craft development scheme, was intimately aware of the conditions in the rural western regions through her work and extensive travel in those areas; therefore, she was uniquely situated to determine the most appropriate locations for intervention, which required a careful balance of economic need and financial possibility. In a letter dated January 14, 1952, she sent the next offer to Co. Kerry in recognition that "the County still has a living handweaving tradition." This was after disclosing in the letter that "Galway did not take up the scheme on the ground that there were not sufficient girls left in Connemara to make its trial worthwhile." [Typewritten correspondence between Muriel Gahan and J.P. McDwyer, CEO Kerry Vocational Education Committee," January 14, 1952. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31].

particular need to Gahan were the four remaining homespun districts on peninsular Co. Kerry (Kenmare, Sneem, Cahirciveen, and Dingle), as noted in a 1936 report for the IHS on the condition of the homespun industry in that county. In the conclusions to this document, Gahan provided a clear and succinct definition of the problems faced in rural homespun areas, and also pointed to a remedy that would not only improve Kerry homespuns, but also provide necessary work for women who had previously been excluded from the industry. She wrote:

> It appears that the industry in Kerry is in the same position as in Ardara in Donegal, that is, it is in the hands of a few men who for the last twenty years have been regulating the handspun supply and demand to suit their own purposes. The system in use, that of giving out wool for the women to spin and paying so much per lb. (10d. a pound is paid in Kerry) has the effect of killing all initiative on the part of the spinner, making hand spinning unprofitable, and eventually doing away with it all together.
>
> The remedy seems to be to instruct women in spinning and dyeing, colour and design, and encourage them to get their local weavers to weave their yarns, and then sell their own tweeds direct as in Mayo and N. Donegal. It seems imperative also to make it impossible to sell mill spun as homespun, as nowhere is this done more flagrantly than in Kerry, the weavers themselves taking it for granted that anything they made came under the heading of homespun.[86]

Gahan received an enthusiastic response from J.P. McDwyer, CEO of Kerry's VEC, and the two engaged in a lively discourse via mail throughout most of the first 6 months of 1952. An analysis of the planning undertaken by Gahan and McDwyer and the reports on the scheme once up-and-running provide a clear instance of Gahan's craft development in practice. In the detailed proposal documents for her earlier craft development scheme, she

[86] Muriel Gahan, "Memorandum on the Homespun Industry in Kerry," August 1936. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/20. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

outlined four inseparable elements that would work in concert with one another: the Director, a School of Crafts, production units, and a board of marketing and standards.

The Irish Homespun Society had a female director in mind for the weaving scheme prior to even settling on a location in which to execute the programme. Miranda Scally, a fluent Irish speaker and experienced artist and craftsworker, was the beneficiary of Conor Magee Trust grant funds (along with Chrissie O'Gorman, who completed the Craft Survey for the IHS discussed in Chapter 3) that allowed for her to study weaving in Sweden as a supplement to her education at the National College of Art (in which she was noted to have already studied in "materials, dyeing, spinning, [and] weaving on the hand loom").[87] The role of the director was multi-faceted, and required an individual with great compassion for the plight of the students in rural areas, optimism and belief in what the scheme could achieve, and a strong foundation in arts and crafts training. In her capacity as the organizer and teacher appointed to the Kerry Weavers' first location in Murreigh, Dingle, Scally's "tackling in and making the best of things" attitude allowed her to make great progress despite the rather terrible socio-economic conditions of the area.

The final decision to renovate an abandoned girls' school from the 1920s was made to ensure that the resources of the scheme were being best utilized to support Irish speakers in rural areas.[88] The space was thus described as consisting of "two rooms, each

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[87] Mairin McDonald, sec., "Na Fígheadoirí Ciarraidhe – The Kerry Weavers," 1954. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Though not discussed here, another crucial document for the development of this craft scheme was Gahan's 1947 "Scheme Submitted to the Department of Education" which, though never fully implemented, outlines an official training scheme for crafts organizers, very similar to that undertaken by Miranda Scally, in practice. The two-page document is reproduced in Appendix II.

[88] McDwyer clarifies in a letter to Gahan that "Murreigh is *Fior-Ghaeltacht* [true Irish-speaking], and Miss Scally would have to teach entirely through Irish – will she be able to do that?" [Typewritten correspondence between Muriel Gahan and J.P. McDwyer, CEO Kerry Vocational Education Committee," March 18, 1952. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31].

about 30’ x 20’, divided by a glass partition.”[89] During the inaugural year of the weaving scheme, this space was occupied full-time by “twelve local girls between the ages of 14 and 18, none of whom had any previous training in weaving, nor in design or colour.”[90] It was never the intention of this program to produce expert craftspeople; instead the focus was on providing young students sufficient training in crafts so that they could find employment at home that was preferable to emigration. Note, for instance, that the 1954 report on the Kerry Weavers scheme produced by IHS Secretary, Mairin McDonald, made sure to underline the real-world issues being addressed by these programs: “I may mention here that most of the Murreigh girls had intended to go to England, where they have sisters or other relatives.”[91] This full-time training programme saw female students begin daytime courses in September, continuing through to at least Easter of the following year, and the activities of the pupils were well-recorded in reports from their instructor, Miss Scally:

> Eleven students had taken the course at Murreigh disused national school (near Ballyferriter). Nine were girls aged 14-17 and two nuns. They started in September with design, then weaving and dyeing and spinning. Vegetable dyes were used first, then aniline which they found easier. They loved painting especially. Wool and linen were both used for weaving, and a mixture. Cushion covers, aprons, table mats were all made very well for first attempts.[92]

On most accounts, organizers and participants appear to have been satisfied with the early outcomes of the weaving programme. When IHS Secretary Gahan and McDonald visited Kerry to speak to students and parents, they heard many reports of “the good work which

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[89] Ibid. Despite being “fairly recent—about the 1920s, I’d say,” the school was in need of “fairly considerable repairs.”

[90] Mairin McDonald, sec., “Na Fígheadoirí Ciarraidhe – The Kerry Weavers,” 1954. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[91] Ibid.

[92] Handwritten meeting minutes, April 22, 1953. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Miss Scally had done and the excellent spirit which pervaded the whole scheme, due both to her and to the CEO Mr. McDwyer."[93]

Following the completion of their programme of training at the weaving school under Scally, the young weavers were expected to immediately begin working in local workshops—known as production units—which had been established in their localities, and from which they could begin producing saleable goods which would be marketed and sold through a collective marketing board, the fourth and final element in Gahan's scheme. Based entirely on the system of production already well-established within the cottage industries, I contend that it was no accident that Gahan modelled her project for small rural workshops on the traditional manufacturing methods used by Irish women textile artisans in the west of Ireland for centuries. She outlined clearly in her craft development plans that, in her opinion, "the spread of small factories in rural areas is a more suitable form of development for the West than huge industrial complexes."[94] For Gahan, the insistence on these "production unit" workshops for individuals or small groups of artisans in small villages seems to have been linked to her strong antimodernist ideological beliefs—fostered in the echo chamber of IHS discourse—that, for better or for worse, is neatly summed up by the IHS motto: "To Keep Women Spinning in their Homes."

The previous chapter explored ways in which the Irish Homespun Society had an ideological aversion to the industrialisation of homespun, as being practiced by businesses like Gaeltarra Éireann. What the IHS had objected to were the conditions of labour in textile mills that encouraged the mechanization of homespun tasks previously completed by hand,

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[93] Ibid.

[94] Muriel Gahan, "Craft Development in the West of Ireland," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-68, MS 49,806/70. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

as well as the attendant loss of control over objects being produced by the factory worker. This concern is discoverable sub-textually within Gahan's craftsmanship scheme for the west, in which she takes great pains to enunciate the importance of *unalienated* forms of labour for the scheme's craftworkers. In the subsection on "Development of Production Units," Gahan outlines the importance of diversity in skill and trade. She stipulates that both the school of craft and production units be equipped so that the workers are each capable and prepared to produce at least three different crafts. Gahan argued that varied tasks would keep workers engaged and interested in a form of labour that was, by design, meaningful and worker focused. Also, diversification ensured that were markets for one craft to be lost, the craftworker had others to fall back on. Finally, it was argued that diversity was important so as to avoid oversaturating the market and reducing market value for produced crafts. [95] In perhaps the clearest statement of the rural fundamentalist attitude peppered through the scheme, Gahan specified that "each worker would have to produce an object from start to finish without passing it on at different stages to other workers as happens in assembly line operations."[96] She noted that this was "in keeping with the normal traditions of handcraft work," for which the preferred outcome was a craft object with a nebulously-defined "certain intrinsic artistic merit," that is left largely undefined.[97] Despite many outmoded notions on gender and the historical failure of the IHS to rescue the homespun industry in western Ireland, it is the contention of this author that Gahan and the others should be celebrated for the work they did. However, a conclusion must also be drawn that the IHS depended heavily on nostalgia and idealism. For example,

[95] Ibid.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Ibid.

in the document cited above, Gahan defended the lack of design education offered to students in the Kerry Weavers Scheme; in defense, she wrote "I also believe…that the native and inherent love of craftsmanship of the people would come to the fore as time went on and that a new tradition would eventually emerge which would do away with the necessity for "imported" designs." The desired renaissance of Irish design principles obviously did not materialize, based as it was on idealism and desire, rather than concrete, actionable plans. Without over-stating the point, I believe that the downfall of the IHS was their unwillingness to abandon archaic practices and beliefs, rather than the "doubling-down" in the name of the preservation of national traditions that is documented throughout IHS practice.

These critical conclusions have been drawn based on assessments of the Kerry Weavers Scheme offered by Gahan and McDwyer themselves. In a letter from March 24, 1953, McDwyer provided a lengthy report on the status of the students at the end of their first year at the weaving school workshop. He began, "generally, I think the progress made in the training has been fairly satisfactory, but I understand from Miss Scally that the girls do not want to work on their own at home. They appear to want us to establish a work-centre for them, run it as an industry, and pay them a weekly wage."[98] In essence, the outcome of the first class of weaving students was a desire for increased movement towards factory work, rather than away from it. Clearly disappointed, McDwyer mirrors Gahan's previous statements when he continued, "apart from the fact that we have no power to do such a thing, I do not think the work would lend itself to organisation on a

[98] Typewritten correspondence between Muriel Gahan and J.P. McDwyer, CEO Kerry Vocational Education Committee," March 24, 1953. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31.

factory basis—it is more properly suited to organisation as a home industry."[99] Despite this assessment, it appears that, based on scant archival evidence, Kerry Weavers was not attempted again, at least on such a large multi-agency scale.[100]

Enrichment for the Rural Masses: Extension Lectures, Exhibitions & Courses

It was Muriel Gahan's intention that the craft schools devised under her comprehensive craft development scheme in the west of Ireland would also serve the larger interests of the community, in addition to educating full-time young adults during the daytime. A major concern at this time was the lack of stimulating activity for residents in rural areas which led to a mass exodus of young people towards villages, towns, and cities that offered a seemingly more exciting and glamourous lifestyle. These concerns are twice noted by Gahan in her craft scheme. First, she notes that the school should also offer classes in craftwork for adults, as "it could also provide a much-needed social outlet in rural areas by providing night classes for the general public."[101] She continued to note that once the individual workers were sectioned into their respective production units, "the workers from the different units could be invited to come together from time to time for exhibitions, competitions, lectures, etc. and this would help to ward off the feelings of isolation and

[99] Ibid.

[100] By way of closure to this narrative, it is worth quoting a 1954 Secretary's Report on the Kerry Weavers: "Miss Scally was retained by the Vocational Committee as a part-time teacher of other crafts, such as rush basket making to adult classes in nearby districts in the evenings; this enabled her to supervise and advise the girls at their work [7 took looms on loan from the IHS and continued to weave in their homes], and also to give them much needed encouragement. Samples of all this work were exhibited and sold well at the RDS horse Show by Country Markets Limited… The display aroused so much interest that the Irish Homespun Society encouraged the holding of a special Exhibition in Dublin in the Autumn, and this will take place by kind permission of Messrs. Brown Thomas in their Little Theatre, from November 15th to 26th. The Society are very satisfied with the results of the Kerry experiment, and hope for similar developments in other Gaeltacht Counties." [Mairin McDonald, sec., "Na Fígheadoirí Ciarraidhe – The Kerry Weavers," 1954. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31].

[101] Muriel Gahan, "Craft Development in the West of Ireland," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, 1930-68, MS 49,806/70. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

futility that can be fatal to development in rural areas."[102] Gahan appears to be speaking from personal experience, as she witnessed this phenomenon firsthand during an extension lecture tour in Tipperary Town undertaken on behalf of the Royal Dublin Society. As she recalled later in her annual report,

> About 60 were at the lecture – all women, and again it was very noticeable what an interest the audience took in the crafts, an [*sic*] little they knew about them. The almost unnatural earnestness with which everyone listened to the lecture brought home how much Ireland's small towns are in need of something more than the usual round of bridge, the pictures, and the greyhounds. This was their only lecture in the year, they told me afterwards.[103]

Gahan regularly participated in the annual Extension Lecture series organized and funded by the Royal Dublin Society in conjunction with the individual Vocational Education Committees.[104] Between 1946 and 1951 she offered free public lectures across the country on topics such as Irish Country Crafts, Crafts Training, In Search of Homespun, Sweden's Handcrafts, and Denmark's Folk High Schools.[105] An interesting conflation occurs in the delivery of these lectures. Gahan's choice of topic betrays her emphasis on the traditional and, perhaps, old-fashioned even; however, within IHS committee documents, she is consistently discovered to be advocating for the use of modern visual technologies such as lanterns, colour photography, and documentary filmmaking.

The Irish Homespun Society public exhibitions at the RDS and elsewhere always foregrounded educational aspects of the traditional crafts, none more so than the Spring

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[102] Ibid.

[103] Muriel Gahan, "Royal Dublin Society Extension Lectures, Irish Country Crafts," ca. January 1947. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. Royal Dublin Society, 1946-85, MS 49,806/32. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[104] Royal Dublin Society, Listing of Available Lectures and Subjects, 1946/7," May 1946. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. The Royal Dublin Society, 1946-85, MS 49,806/32. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[105] Various RDS Lecture Scheme materials, various dates. Muriel Gahan Papers, III. The Royal Dublin Society, 1946-85, MS 49,806/32. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

Show of 1937 (see Chapter 2), and the organizing committees were constantly discussing ways to engage the public with craft history, material, and culture. The possibility of viewing, acquiring, showing, and producing films on Irish crafts appears repeatedly in IHS meeting papers, such as in 1950 when it was ordered that "films of Mexican Handicrafts and Pottery to be borrowed from Film Institute and shown at the AGM," or in that same year when meeting minutes record "the possibility of getting a film on Irish Country Crafts made in the future."[106] These same conversations were being had a decade earlier, such as in June 1940 when IHS executives considered commissioning a film on crafts:

> Film of Spinning and Weaving. Miss Gahan read a letter from Mr. Toner of the Irish Film Society saying that a film would cost about £150. Miss Gahan to find out from RDS Tech Ed Branch, Irish Folklore Society, National Museum if they would co-operate in the work and share the cost.[107]

Though many craft films were produced during the mid-twentieth century, it is unclear from IHS archival materials if that organization played any role in their production. In fact, there are some cases where the Irish Homespun Society presented a very subtle anti-technology perspective on films.

While perhaps not entirely convincing on their own, the following two examples supplement the argument of this dissertation that the IHS operated as a platform for antimodernist and pro-ruralist beliefs. In January, 1937, IHS minutes record that there was "considerable gratitude" amongst the committee when they learned that no films would be shown at the RDS Spring Show crafts display, allowing for their own tweeds on display to

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[106] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 6 and February 8, 1950. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[107] Handwritten meeting minutes, June 14, 1940. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/18. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

be viewed "in ordinary daylight."[108] It appears here that the material and visual experience with real fabrics was perceived in the minds of IHS organizers as superior to that of the mediated experience offered by film.[109] At another time, it was noted that John O'Kennedy, an "entertaining magician", was asked to perform in lieu of a film at the IHS AGM, as the assigned room was too small to accommodate film viewing.[110] I find it quite striking that a magician was considered to be an appropriate substitute; perhaps, to the IHS, the entertainment value of films was greater than their educational value. Regardless, the lectures and exhibit displays arranged by Muriel Gahan and the IHS show—at the very least—that they were cognizant of the ways in which modern visual technologies might be used to enrich the educational value of the Irish traditional craft objects themselves.

As was documented in Chapter 2, the Irish Homespun Society favoured the use of craft object displays and skill demonstrations at their exhibitions and competitions (recall, as well, the Loan Exhibition which was to circulate as part of the RDS rural craftsmanship improvement scheme). Having an experiential engagement with the materials, movements, and history that combined to produce a craft object was intrinsic to the holistic understanding of crafts as forwarded by Gahan and the IHS. History, manufacturing technique, and the formal qualities of raw materials and finished products could all be

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[108] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 27, 1937. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/17. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[109] The author intends to conduct further research into historical education and pedagogy as represented through object lessons by women on Domestic Science at agricultural fairs and colleges. This will form part of a larger research project on craft organizations and agricultural societies in western Canada and Ireland. For an excellent application of material culture research and object lessons, see Sarah Anne Carter, *Object Lessons: How Nineteenth-Century Americans Learned to Make Sense of the Material World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018). See also Andrea Korda, "Object Lessons in Victorian Education: Text, Object, Image," *Journal of Victorian Culture* 25, no. 2 (April 2020): 200-222.

[110] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 18, 1956. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

grasped at once by an audience who is confronted with multi-sensory displays (hearing the knock of the spinning wheel, feeling the tension on the warp threads of a loom, smelling the bitter natural dyes, etc.). As decades passed and the IHS faded into the background as a cash-strapped educational volunteer organization, its members always managed to maintain the central focus of bringing the minds and bodies of rural women together through the provision of meaningful educational opportunities for young and old alike. Nowhere is this exhibited more clearly than through An Grianán, a permanent college offering courses for rural women. Gahan's short obituary in the July 13, 1995 edition of the *Irish Times* recorded this achievement—which Muriel celebrated in 1952—as "one of her greatest dreams."[111] An Grianán—an Irish phrase which translates as 'the Sunny Place'—was (and continues to be) a rural residential centre offering adult education in crafts, cooking, leisure, and personal development; in its early years it was, by design, aimed specifically at the same class of young rural women targeted by other schemes such as the Kerry Weavers.[112]

At An Grianán, there occurred a fascinating collision of rural tradition and modernizing impulses that reflected larger socio-economic and political changes which

[111] Tom McEnaney, "Muriel Gahan of ICA dies, aged 98," *Irish Times*, July 13, 1995.

[112] Through the persistent efforts and extensive networking done by Muriel Gahan, the Irish Countrywomen's Association was the beneficiary of a grant from the US-based Kellogg Foundation which allowed them to purchase an old manor house and surrounding lands in Termonfeckin, Co. Louth for the establishment of a permanent residential college benefitting rural residents. This had been a desire of the ICA for many decades, as they hosted incredibly successful summer camps which were, however, always temporary and impermanent. For more on the collaboration between Gahan, the ICA, and the Kellogg Foundation, see Mitchell, *Deeds not Words*. The An Grianán under discussion here should not be confused with the institution by the same name in Dublin which, according to late singer Sinead O'Connor and other Irish women, operated as a Magdalen Laundry. For more on the horrific treatment of Irish women at these institutions see James M. Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

were underway in Ireland in the 1950s and early 1960s.[113] For women, one of the most publicized aspects of rural modernity—if such a term can be used here—in Ireland was the electric refrigerator, a synecdoche for the modern kitchen and, by extension, farmstead. Miss Scally, organizer for the Kerry Weavers scheme, was reported in IHS meeting minutes of 1954 to be "furnishing her kitchen by degrees as model country kitchen."[114] If that were not enough to impress the latest domestic innovations onto the young girls under Miss Scally's tutelage, it was also recommended that the girls be provided with some good quality magazines such as *Home & Garden* to inform their design aesthetic (in terms of their crafts, their homes, and their bodies, the latter provided through ubiquitous beauty tips and diet secrets).[115] Ideas on domestic idealism and the transition of craft from necessity to hobby activity were conflated at An Grianán and other similar women's educational colleges of the mid-twentieth century; the courses offered to women at An Grianán (as documented by the ICA website's listings of current course offerings) include cooking, bobbin lace, ribbon weaving, comportment and professionalism, style and image, fabric sculpture, paper craft, and several different and specific forms of embroidery.[116] In keeping with Rozsika Parker's critical analysis of embroidery's history, there were strong threads in the fabric of Irish social identity that linked ideal notions of femininity with genteel domestic pursuits; radical feminist critiques of domesticity and housewifery were

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[113] See Michael Breen and James Dorgan, "The Death of Irish Trade Protectionism: A Political Economy Analysis," Irish Studies in International Affairs 24 (Jan 2013): 275-289.

[114] Handwritten meeting minutes, January 1, 1954. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[115] Ibid. For more on women's home periodicals in Ireland, see Caitríona Clear, *Women's Voices in Ireland: Women's Magazines in the 1950s and 60s* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2016).

[116] "Courses Available at An Grianán," *An Grianán, Irish Countrywomen's Association*, https://www.an-grianan.ie/courses-events, accessed August 30, 2023.

becoming part of the zeitgeist at the same time—even in Ireland—but these are absent in both IHS discourse and practice.[117]

Conclusion

The preceding examination of the numerous educational schemes planned and executed by the Irish Homespun Society and its partner organizations is necessarily brief due to limitations in accessing archival materials and the incompleteness of existing archives. However, some general conclusions can be made from the previous discussion. From its very beginnings in the 1930s to the continuing legacy of its sister organizations, the Irish Homespun Society was an organization that was fundamentally in step with the social structure and gender divisions as concretized in the ruralist and conservative national Constitution of 1937. While this in no way discounts the exceptional work undertaken by the IHS on behalf of rural Irish women, it should be noted that the IHS viewed the native homespun industry as an essential element of rural Ireland's intangible cultural heritage, and not just an economic problem. The underlying ideologies of the IHS made their practices fundamentally incompatible with the work of other organizations such as Gaeltarra Éireann, which was also unable to achieve a viable native tweed industry in anything other than small, inconsequential pockets throughout the depleting Gaeltacht areas. Following on the analysis of the Muriel Gahan papers in their near entirety, I believe that the efforts of the Irish Homespun Society were doomed to failure since their inception. In dedicating much of their own lives to the service of the Irish crafts—something to be

[117] Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010). On early Irish Feminism, see Louise Ryan and Margaret Ward, eds. *Irish Women and the Vote: Becoming Citizens* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007) and Laura Sydora, "Red Biddies, Wailing Banshees, and Rebel Sisters: Reading Feminist Discourses, Women's Movements, and Alternative Periodicals in the Republic of Ireland, 1950-1980," unpublished PhD diss., University of Alberta, 2019.

recognised as incredibly admirable—Muriel Gahan and her fellow homespun enthusiasts were arguably successful in their work; however, rather than saving homespun permanently, the IHS seemingly only delayed the eventual demise of the cottage industry.

Afterword: Reflections on the Death and Afterlives of Irish Homespun

Closing the Narrative: The Dissolution and Legacy of the Irish Homespun Society

By 1958, it was clear that that Irish Homespun Society had become somewhat un-ruddered; without a consistent funding partner or ongoing sense of purpose, much of the time at executive meetings was spent pondering the future of the organization. On March 5, 1958, the future of the society was discussed, and it was noted that the recommendations were to "continue [as] is encouraging crafts or develop on wider educational lines into Traditional Ireland Society. There was discussion then on how [the Society] could engage or help in collection of folklore material."[1] In fact, the only productive discussion occurring in the later years of the 1950s and early 1960s was around compiling the nucleus of an artefacts collection that could in the future form a national museum of country life. These discussions envisioned the planning and hosting of one massive national exhibition, the *Traditional Ireland* show, which was oft spoken and written of, yet never actualized. Several ineffectual years resulted in the final dissolution of the Irish Homespun Society in March 1965, when the following was recorded, by hand, in the minutes book of the Executive Committee:

> The following motion was proposed by Miss Drury, seconded by Dr. Hackett and unanimously agreed: That the Irish Homespun Society be wound up and its liquid assets transferred to Country Markets Limited after August 14th 1965 to be used for the development of Country Crafts in Ireland and that the trusteeship of the Irish Homespun Society together with its £5 share in Country Markets Limited be transferred 'in love and affection' to Country Workers Limited, 23 St. Stephen's Green, Dublin.[2]

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[1] Handwritten meeting minutes, March 5, 1958. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[2] While I stress the overall failures and inertia of the IHS in later years, it must be noted that Muriel Gahan and many others of the IHS kept very busy and engaged with other community groups such as Country

The perseverance of those involved in homespun advocacy should be recognised, as the cessation of activity occurred a full eight years after Chrissie O'Gorman's disheartening report on the condition of the homespun industry in Kerry, Mayo, and Donegal:

> [Miss O'Gorman] found that there is no handspinning being done anywhere except a little by one or two old women now and again for family use. There are no weavers except those working for Gaeltarra Éireann in South-west Donegal using mill thread. Knitting is doing well, also under direction of Gaeltarra in S. Donegal. Sprigging in the same area is declining, it is mainly in private hands and the work is badly paid. In all areas, except S. Donegal, the young people are all emigrating.[3]

Similar sentiments had been shared even earlier, as in the May 19, 1952, meeting record that "Dunlewey [a principal weaving district in Co. Donegal] is at a stand still at present. Miss Scally said there is no likelihood of its ever developing on the old lines, it could be adapted to rugs and furnishings, but the old people will not change."[4] The IHS's entire *raison d'être* was in slowing the eventual extinction of cottage industry textile production in rural Ireland; in later years, however, they attempted (far too late) to redirect skilled labour into similar industries that might provide better employment outcomes.

An undated (though likely ca. 1950-51) "Memorandum to the Conor Magee Trust on the Development of Rug Weaving and Furnishing Textiles in the Donegal and Galway Gaeltachts" outlined a plan that "some young spinners in the Donegal and Galway Gaeltacht should be taught weaving on suitable lightweight looms, using the local Scottish Black Face

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Workers, Ltd., Country Markets, Ltd., the Irish Countrywomen's Association, and others. In fact, Muriel Gahan's legacy is extensive, as evidenced by this list of select accomplishments: *Buan Chara* (Lifetime) Member of the ICA, of which she served as vice-president; Horace Plunkett Award recipient for Co-operative Endeavour; honorary doctorate from Trinity College Dublin; Vice President of Royal Dublin Society (first such election of a woman in over 200 years); one of 5 members elected to the Irish Arts Council during its inaugural year, and many others.

[3] Handwritten meeting minutes, February 20, 1957. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

[4] Handwritten meeting minutes, May 19, 1952. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/23. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

wool which is very suited to this purpose."[5] This suggestion was in response to a perceived market demand for "distinctive furnishing textiles and handwoven floor rugs," that could achieve better outcomes than the tweeds that had been marketed for clothing and the fashion market.[6] However, a review of design in Ireland undertaken by a team of Scandinavians in the early 1960s had fairly damning opinions on the quality of Ireland's rug and carpet manufacturing industry. Machine-made carpets took the worst of the criticism, with it being noted that:

> [The Scandinavian delegation of designers] found all the faults we have mentioned when referring to textile printing—imitations of foreign carpets, attempts to anticipate next years' fashions, resulting in shallow and worthless designs, and a general lack of understanding of the medium by all concerned with production… The patterns we saw were not good. Those based on oriental or antique models were violent, as the pattern detail had been torn out of the composition of a complete carpet and then this detail had been endlessly repeated… The 'modern' patterns, whether they had been cubist or informalist paintings, were extremely irritating to look at… So far…, in these young industries, we do not find that genuine feeling for textiles which distinguishes so many Irish wool products.[7]

The handmade carpets fared slightly better, as it was noted that though they were "of a very high quality," the standards of design needed to be raised.[8] It was revealed quite bluntly that "a collection of carpet drawings showed that the work of the designer's office was skilful but dull," and that the Irish would be wise to "experiment with natural earth

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[5] "Memorandum to the Conor Magee Trust on the Development of Rug Weaving and Furnishing Textiles in the Donegal and Galway Gaeltachts," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/30. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. Note how in this proposal Gahan continues to envision the scheme holistically: the skills of local spinners are to be redirected in the local area to similar crafts, relying on raw materials drawn from the local environment.

[6] Ibid. This is a much more complex issue than can be discussed here, but it is a fascinating avenue for further research. By the mid-1950s, Ireland had become a massive tourist draw, especially from the United States, which only increased once John F. Kennedy rose to prominence in US politics on his simple Irish-American identity. A film produced by the Irish Tourism Board in 1958, *Irish Gossamer*, is the subject of a future research article to be written by this author as an extension of this doctoral research project.

[7] Kaj Franck, Erik Herløw, Åke Huldt, Gunnar Biilmann Petersen, and Erik Chr. Sørensen, *Design in Ireland* Report, April, 1961 (Dublin: Córas Tráchtála, 1964), 16-17.

[8] Franck *et al.,* 15.

colours in conjunction with natural wools which we think would be suitable for the techniques."[9] If this sounds similar to methods advocated for by Muriel Gahan, and the IHS, then it should not be surprising to discover that a rare glowing review in the report was given to the Donegal tweeds industry which was so near to Muriel Gahan's heart, and it is worth quoting at length here:

> Donegal tweeds: Probably the most valuable and brilliant facet of Ireland's textile history. We can have nothing but praise for the production and one of the firms we visited could stand as a model to all others. It occurs to us that the traditional patterns and colours seem immediately more valuable than where the design are more or less dependent on changing fashion claims. Therefore we propose the establishment of a tweed museum which would illustrate the history of the craft/industry and show the various stages of growth and development and the techniques used in production. All the old colour recipes, directions on colouring methods, samples of the original ways of spinning and weaving, etc., could be collected and preserved so that fading and other changes are avoided.[10]

Note, however, how there is no distinction included between the types of tweed being praised here: the partially mill-spun fabrics produced under Gaeltarra, or the more labour intensive and irregular tweeds produced in the country cottages. The report—commissioned from a delegation of Scandinavian industrial designers and design educators by *Córas Tráchtálá*, the Irish Export Board—concluded that

> In general, the best designed products we found in Ireland were those based on traditional craft industries successfully integrating the Irish tradition. Outstanding examples were the Donegal tweeds and the handknitted sweaters of the traditional design. At the other end of the scale, we found many products which were badly designed and executed, and which, in our view, would not have the slightest chance of competing successfully on the world market.[11]

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[9] Franck *et al.,* 16. In language in line with the holistic practices of the IHS, the Design Report also noted that "the original tweeds and a great many other Irish products derive their effect from a similar connection with nature and, bearing in mind the above examples, we must advise you to take care of this line of production and pay attention to good materials, careful craftsmanship and practical form, as attractive design in our case has developed from an acquaintance with materials, methods of production and the main human requirements." [Franck *et al*, 8].

[10] Franck *et al.,* 14.

[11] Franck *et al*., 8.

In the view of the design experts, Ireland's most immediate concern to be addressed was the provision of a proper system of design education and praxis through the establishment of a brand-new school of design that would provide students with a strong foundation in the arts, crafts, and principles of good design. The Scandinavians saw great opportunity in the unevolved state of design in Ireland, arguing that "by virtue of her lack of sophistication in matters of design [Ireland] had a unique opportunity of making a great contribution, not alone to her prosperity and culture, but to the culture of Western Europe."[12] However, the final determination was that a strong foundation must be laid were Ireland to hope to achieve any improvements in design and manufacturing for the export market:

> We would finally note that we have considered the possibility of adapting existing bodies to this purpose, but it is our opinion that no existing organization or association in Ireland could cope with the problems involved in the developments of design in Ireland, and consequently a new body must be brought into existence.[13]

The final outcome of the *Design in Ireland* report was that the government took this last recommendation very seriously and established a successful "multi-disciplinary, state-sponsored design consultancy," known as the Kilkenny Design Workshops which specialized in the design and manufacturing of "weaving, textile printing, ceramics, glass, silver, wood working and furniture" until its eventual dissolution in 1988.[14] Though its existence was relatively short, the Kilkenny Design Workshops were the foundation for the Design & Crafts Council of Ireland, now in its sixth decade of work.

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[12] Franck *et al*., 4.

[13] Franck *et al*., 55.

[14] Una Walker, "The Scandinavian Report: Its Origins and Impact on the Kilkenny Design Workshops," *Journal of Art Historiography* 9 (Dec 2013), 13.

Towards a Theory of Craft Ecologies, by way of a brief conclusion

Judged by its own goals, the Irish Homespun Society must be declared a failure. By the time of its shuttering in 1965, Irish women, by and large, were no longer spinning in their homes; however, based on the research completed for this dissertation, my final determination is that, in small pockets of the country, the Irish Homespun Society slowed the decline and eventual demise of cottage-industry homespun tweed production. The work of the IHS—though valuable and commendable—came far too late. Due to what I have referred throughout this dissertation as antimodernist perspectives and rural fundamentalist beliefs, the actions of the IHS were guided by a backwards-looking, regressive ideology. In essence, the failure of the IHS to preserve textile craft traditions in the rural regions of Ireland occurred for precisely the same reasons that the Irish nation more generally suffered stagnation and population decline at mid-century: in attempting to cling to a quickly-vanishing ideal of healthy, rural living, Ireland missed many opportunities which would have allowed it to build a strong basis for rural Irish textile crafts in the future, rather than the past. This said, however, without the interventions of Muriel Gahan and the Irish Homespun Society, the tradition and history of Irish traditional crafts would almost certainly be in a worse state today. At present, Ireland has a thriving artisanal crafts industry popular with natives and tourists alike; this industry remains an important economic driver that can trace its lineage directly back to the advocacy work of energetic and selfless advocates like Gahan. This dissertation, as it set out to, has provided a first-of-its kind analysis of the Irish Homespun Society in the larger context of women's labour history, postcolonial studies, craft and material culture studies, and ecocriticism, the latter of which I turn to now.

A fundamental finding of this research that emerged from the archival materials on the Irish Homespun Society was the emphasis placed by advocates on fostering a native textile industry that functioned holistically. The structural organization of this dissertation mirrors the interconnected themes of this holistic approach: materials and materialities; exhibition histories; concerns of identity and community; and embodied skills and sites for craft education. Efforts were undertaken to improve the working conditions and lives of rural artisans, but unlike government-run Gaeltarra Éireann, the Irish Homespun Society did not elevate or de-contextualize the craftworkers from their socio-ecological situation. Chapters Two to Four trace this holistic praxis of the IHS's advocacy efforts through all stages of homespun production. Tim Ingold's dwelling perspective is used as a theoretical lens in Chapter One to explain the emphasis on labour-intensive and time-consuming raw materials drawn from the local environment. The IHS's bottom-line was never financial or strictly economic, and the form of homespun manufacturing called for was local, environmentally friendly, and encouraged to reject non-native materials and influences. Chapter Two traces how the IHS functioned within a larger "imagined community"—to borrow Anglo-Irish scholar Benedict Anderson's term—of rurally-minded individuals resistant to urbanization, modernization, and industrialization.[15] Homespun was celebrated in this community as a persistence of fast-disappearing rural values, traditions, and industries; one of the most visible aspects of IHS work was the planning and executing of public demonstrations and exhibitions of traditional crafts, thereby attempting to keep them alive in the minds of the Irish public more generally. Finally, Chapters Three and Four

[15] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2016).

provide a bisected analysis of the bodies and minds of artisans, before finally re-uniting them under the IHS's holistic system of small-scale manufacturing. Skill and knowledge were perceived as equally important aspects of the craft production, and the IHS expended energies on both celebrating and transmitting the embodied skills of crafts producers and on programmes to elevate them further through by advancing sound design principles and forming a national collection of rural artefacts. Overall, the Irish Homespun Society's efforts reached all aspects of the traditional Irish crafts in what I have termed a *Craft Ecology*.

This holistic theoretical framework of craft ecologies was not imposed onto the research materials, but instead emerged organically; therefore, I contend that this framework—largely unspoken in IHS documents—underlined the entirety of the IHS's advocacy work. True Irish homespun was placed at the centre of a nexus between equally important actors in the network of homespun production, as visualized in fig. 5.1.
The theory of craft ecologies is a framework that has application outside this specific research project; for instance, it could easily be applied to comparative analyses of transnational craft organizations, such as the next stage of this research project which will apply the same theoretical and methodological structure applied to the Edmonton, Alberta branch of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild.[16] More importantly, the theory of craft ecologies can be used to assess and perhaps even drive and improve manufacturing by considering the nexus above: environment, community, body, and mind.

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[16] See my public interest article commissioned by the Edmonton Heritage Council in 2021, Brandi S. Goddard, "History of the Edmonton Branch of the Canadian Handicrafts Guild, 1911-1966," April 20, 2021, *Edmonton City as Museum Project*, Edmonton Heritage Council, https://citymuseumedmonton.ca/2021/04/20/history-of-the-edmonton-branch-of-the-canadian-handicrafts-guild-1911-1966/. Accessed August 31, 2023.

We could all use a little of the optimism, passion, and drive exhibited by Muriel Gahan and the Irish Homespun Society during the middle decades of the twentieth century. Despite the eventual loss of traditional homespun production in rural Ireland, the legacy of this dedicated work persists in contemporary Irish crafts and design, in the collections of the National Museum of Ireland, Country Life, and in a generalized Irish affection for beautiful traditional crafts alongside the complex and fascinating history of shifting Irish national identities and self-identities. It is worth quoting James McDwyer from a letter sent to Muriel Gahan in 1956. This letter betrays McDwyer's great admiration for Gahan, and belief in the meaningful nature of their work together:

> Only the material fruits have been denied us [through the Kerry Weavers Scheme]. The other and more important ones remain—the residuum of skill and knowledge of this craft, which is the starting point from which to build a tradition of handcraft; the stimulation in some measure of an appetite for good handwork; the little accession of courage and confidence in the district; the association of beauty and high quality with the labour of humble hands in humble homes.[17]

The doyenne of Irish crafts, Muriel Gahan, was as eloquent a writer as she was a driven advocate. In honour of her unceasing work with Irish crafts up until her death at age 97 in 1995, I share her words on the crafts in Ireland:

> It has been stated that handcrafts belong to the world which existed before the separation of the useful and the beautiful; in which the object was something made for everyday use and not to be venerated from afar. Its very usefulness was its beauty. It was made from local materials by hands for hands to touch and use, and through its usefulness and beauty, to give pleasure.[18]

With the value of hindsight, it is evident that the Irish Homespun Society existed as an organisation of many paradoxes, at a time in Irish history with many of its own. Tensions

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[17] Typewritten correspondence between Gahan and McDwyer," 1953. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-1965, MS 49,806/31.

[18] Muriel Gahan, "The Country Crafts Rooted in the Life and Soil of the Country," no date. Muriel Gahan Papers VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49, 806/69. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland.

between tradition and modernity, feminine freedom and domesticity, and hand-production and efficiency all contributed to the many successes—and ultimate failure— of the homespun industry so treasured by Gahan and Ireland's other mid-century craft advocates.

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Appendix I: Figures

Figure 0.1. *View of Croagh Patrick, Co. Mayo*. Photograph by Richard Tilbrook, June 1963. National Library of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. TIL 744

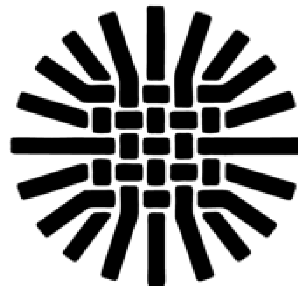


Figure 0.2. *Logo for the Slieve Bawn Craft Co-operative*, designed by Peter Dabinett, ca. 1974, http://www.logobook.com/logo/slieve-bawn-co-operative/

Figure 0.3. *Map of Ireland divided by county and showing six homespun -producing districts in the west of Ireland.*

Figure 1.1 *Parmelia saxatilis, commonly known in Ireland as crottle, a lichen used to dye homespuns*. Wikimedia Commons, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Parmelia_saxatilis_(4).jpg

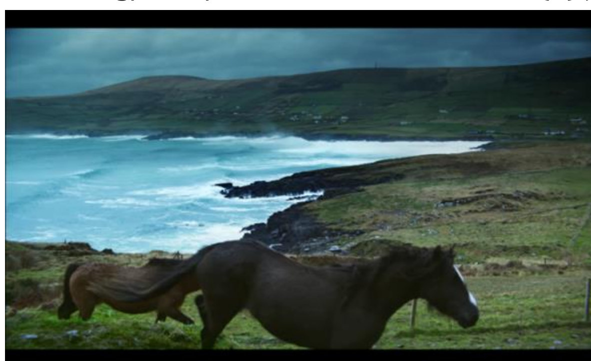


Figure 1.2. *Screenshot from Fáilte Ireland's promotional video for the Wild Atlantic Way*. Aidan Sheeran, Fáilte Ireland Wild Atlantic Way, Youtube. Directed by Ken Byrne. Dublin. Reel good Films, 2013. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlzU6Vhpzyw.

Figure 1.3. *A Pair of Scottish Blackface ewes in North Ayrshire*. Photograph by John McMillan, April 27, 2006. Wikimedia Commons.

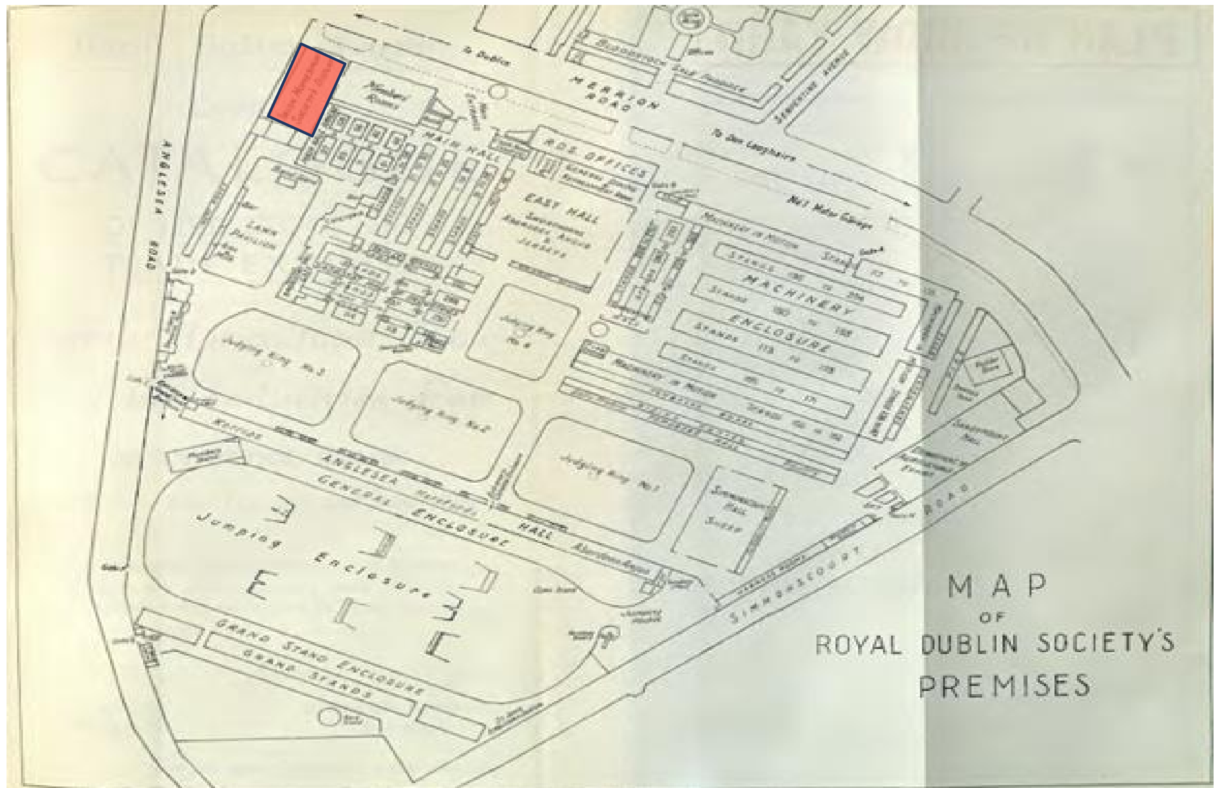


Figure 2.1. *Map of the Royal Dublin Society's Ballsbridge complex with location of the Irish Homespun Society's display space highlighted. Royal Dublin Society, Spring Show, 1936* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, Ltd., on behalf of the RDS, 1936). Exhibition catalogue accessed May 17, 2021, https://digitalarchive.rds.ie/items/show/3382, xix.

Figure 2.2. *Detail of Gaelic typeface used to introduce the Irish-language name of the Irish Homespun Society at the organization's first exhibition*. *Royal Dublin Society, Spring Show 1936* (Dublin: Browne and Nolan, Ltd., on behalf of the RDS, 1936).

Figure 2.3. *Cáit Ní Fhárthartha weaving a críos belt on Inis Meáin*. Photograph by Frank Stephens, 1928. Trinity College Dublin, Ireland. TCD MS 10842 1 9, https://www.tcd.ie/library/manuscripts/blog/2016/07/frank-stephens-a-photographic-archive/.

Figure 2.4. *Film still from* Man of Aran *(1934) showing three fishermen in a currach reeling in a basking shark, https://ifi.ie/film/man-of-aran-4/*

THE IRISH PRESS, TUESDAY, MAY 7, 1935.

THE NEW HALL OF SAORSTAT INDUSTRIES AT THE SPRING SHOW

The WORLD'S PERFECT REFRIGERATOR IS MADE IN IRELAND

SEE THE IRISH BUILT FRIGIDAIRE IN THE NEW HALL OF SAORSTAT INDUSTRIES AT STAND NO. 57

INDUSTRY AGRICULTURE

1935 SAORSTAT HALL OF INDUSTRIES

We cordially invite the public to visit our stand in the Saorstat Hall of Industries at the R.D.S. Spring Show, where a comprehensive range of the famous Fruitfield Products—the finest goods of their kind—will be on view

Fruitfield

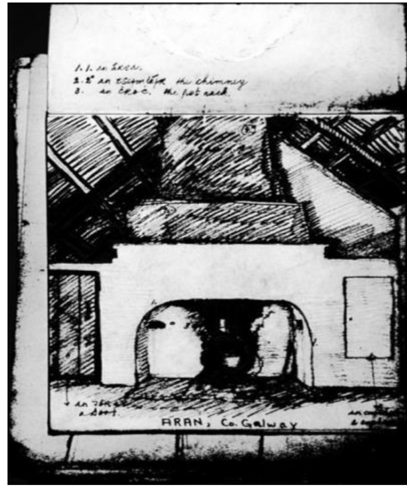
STAND

(Continued from Page 4.)

(Above Left) Figure 2.5. Irish Press *illustration depicting industry and agriculture alongside one another for the Saorstát Hall of Industries at the 1935 RDS Spring Show*, May 7, 1935

(Above Right) Figure 2.6. *Advertising poster for the Irish Industrial and Agricultural Fair*, 1932. Boole Library, University College Cork, Ireland

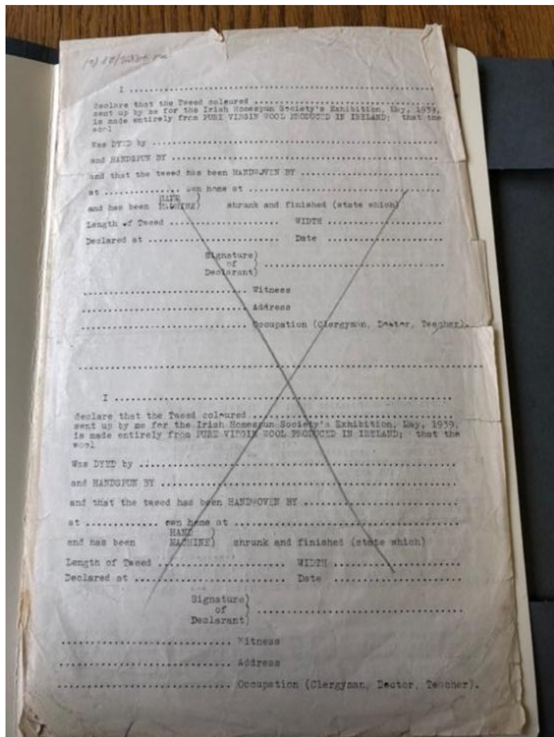
Figure 2.7. *Suit of Clothes from a bog in Co. Sligo and a Jacket found in Co. Tipperary*. Reproduced from H.F. McClintock, *Old Irish Dress and That of the Isle of Man: With a chapter on pre-Norman dress as described in early Irish literature* (Dundalk, Ireland: Dundalgan Press, 1950), xx.



(Above Left) Figure 2.8. *Illustration of a vernacular home in Co. Mayo*. Illustrated by Åke Campbell, 1935. Woven paper, ink and coloured pencil, 50.9cm x 37.5cm, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin.

(Above Centre) Figure 2.9. *Illustration of a hearth and chimney of an Aran Island cottage*. Illustrated by Åke Campbell, 1934. Photographic Collection, National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Ireland. A021.01.00064

(Above Right) Figure 2.10. *Illustration of the front elevation of a house*. Illustrated by Åke Campbell, 1934-5. Woven paper, black ink, and coloured pencil, 37.4cm x 50.2cm, National Museum of Ireland, Dublin. F:2006.36



I ...

declare that the Tweed coloured ... sent up by me for the Irish Homespun Society's Exhibition, May, 1939, is made entirely from PURE VIRGIN WOOL PRODUCED IN IRELAND; that the wool

Was DYED by ...

and HANDSPUN BY ...

and that the tweed has been HANDWOVEN BY ...

at ... own home at ...

and has been HAND / MACHINE shrunk and finished (state which)

Length of Tweed ... WIDTH ...

Declared at ... Date ...

Signature of Declarant ...

... Witness

... Address

... Occupation (Clergyman, Doctor, Teacher).

...

I ...

declare that the Tweed coloured ... sent up by me for the Irish Homespun Society's Exhibition, May, 1939, is made entirely from PURE VIRGIN WOOL PRODUCED IN IRELAND; that the wool

Was DYED by ...

and HANDSPUN BY ...

and that the tweed has been HANDWOVEN BY ...

at ... own home at ...

and has been HAND / MACHINE shrunk and finished (state which)

Length of Tweed ... WIDTH ...

Declared at ... Date ...

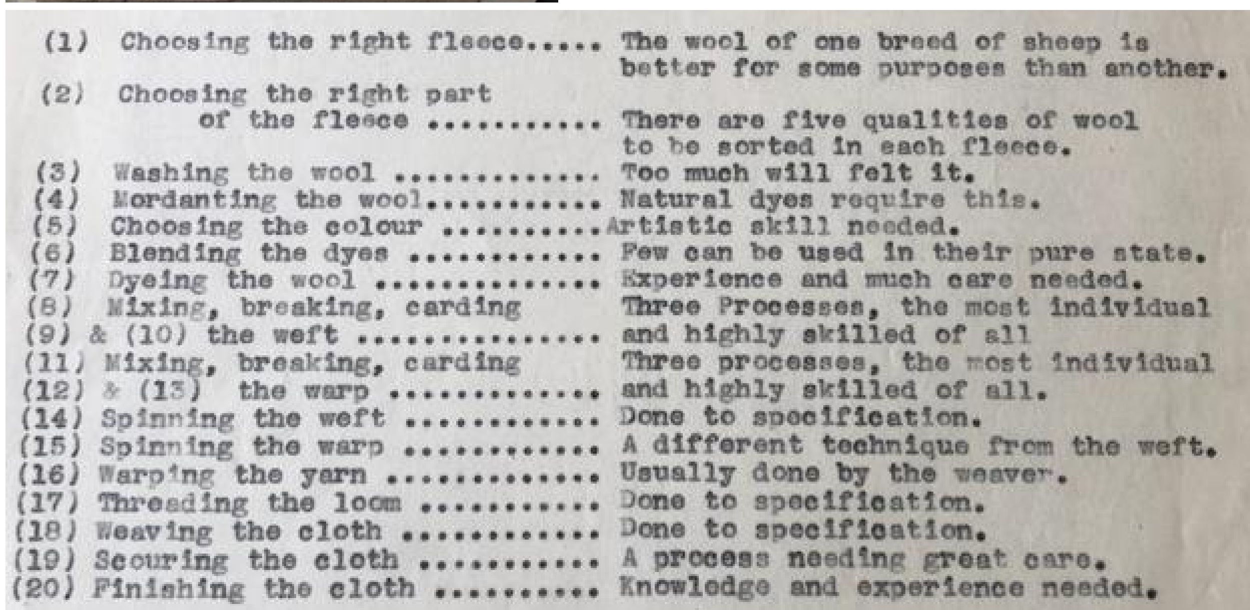
Signature of Declarant ...

... Witness

... Address

... Occupation (Clergyman, Doctor, Teacher).

Figure 3.1. *Template for tweed guarantee*, date unknown. Photograph by Samantha Haywood, 2021. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, MS 49,806/28, National Library of Ireland, Dublin.



(1) Choosing the right fleece.....	The wool of one breed of sheep is better for some purposes than another.
(2) Choosing the right part of the fleece	There are five qualities of wool to be sorted in each fleece.
(3) Washing the wool	Too much will felt it.
(4) Mordanting the wool...........	Natural dyes require this.
(5) Choosing the colour	Artistic skill needed.
(6) Blending the dyes	Few can be used in their pure state.
(7) Dyeing the wool	Experience and much care needed.
(8) Mixing, breaking, carding (9) & (10) the weft	Three Processes, the most individual and highly skilled of all
(11) Mixing, breaking, carding (12) & (13) the warp	Three processes, the most individual and highly skilled of all.
(14) Spinning the weft	Done to specification.
(15) Spinning the warp	A different technique from the weft.
(16) Warping the yarn	Usually done by the weaver.
(17) Threading the loom	Done to specification.
(18) Weaving the cloth	Done to specification.
(19) Scouring the cloth	A process needing great care.
(20) Finishing the cloth	Knowledge and experience needed.

Figure 3.2. *Detail of a document showing 20 steps involved in homespun production, according to Muriel Gahan.* From "Observations on the Draft Specification for Irish Homewoven Cloth," May 25, 1949. Muriel Gahan Papers, II. The Irish Homespun Society, 1935-65, MS 49,806/29, National Library of Ireland, Dublin. Photography by Samantha Haywood, 2021.

Figure 3.3. *Shearing on a Beach, An Blascaod Mór*. Photograph by Thomas Mason, no date. Black and white 35mm, Photographic Collection, National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Ireland. B014.18.00007

Figure 3.4. *Nóra Bean Uí Chíobháin feeding wool into a spinning wheel by the fireplace, over which a three-legged pot hangs, Com Dhíneol, Co. Kerry.* Photograph by Tomás Ó Muircheartaigh, no date. Photographic Collection, National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Ireland. B063.18.00006

(Above Left) Figure 3.5. *Spinner carding wool, An Cheathru Rua or Carna, Co. Galway*. Photograph by Caoimhín Ó Danachair, no date. Photographic Collection, National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Ireland. B063.01.0020

(Above Right) Figure 3.6. *Spinner carding wool, An Cheathru Rua or Carna, Co. Galway*. Photograph by Caoimhín Ó Danachair, no date. Photographic Collection, National Folklore Collection, University College Dublin, Ireland. B063.01.0019.

Figure 3.7. *Red Aran Jumper (cardigan)*. Maker unknown, 1937. Collection of the National Museum of Ireland, Dublin, Ireland. F1937.48C

SOME HINTS FOR SIMPLE

TEXTILE DESIGNING.

Always keep good quality in mind.

TEXTURE.

May be rough or smooth or a mixture of both so arranged as to have a decorative effect - but always keeping sound quality of cloth as the first essential - for instance: charming textures can be obtained by using heavy uneven wefts on very fine warps - but this is generally unsatisfactory the weft wearing out the warp - unless managed with great caution.

WEAVING PATTERNS.

Plain weave, Hopsack, Herringbones etc.. Roughly speaking "twill" weaves, either "plain twill" or one of the many varieties of herringbone - may be said to be safest to produce sound cloth for the beginner.

COLOUR.

Success in colouring involves not only the capacity to recognize good true colours and intelligence in combining them, but an understanding and constant attention to Value, Gradation, Contrast and Harmony.
1. Value is the relative lightness or darkness of a shade to other shades - thus the same colour may be a light value when placed near a deeper tone and a dark value when its neighbour is paler than itself.
2. Gradation right succession of values or colours or both.
3. Contrast effects produced by sharp difference of value - Black and White is the greatest we know - or of tint. It can also be obtained by putting definitely warm and cold colours side by side - a bright red and a bright blue though they may be almost the same value will give this kind of contrast. (Note. There is also a certain amount of contrast of form to be had by wide and narrow stripes, large and small checks etc..)
4. Harmony - Colours and values pleasing by their combination and gradation.

DESIGN.

Is the combination of all the foregoing to produce a cloth planned beforehand.

Let the beginner learn to get good true colours first of all -'Art' shades will never be good unless there is a foundation of clarity and definiteness.

Figure 4.1. *Mailer sent by IHS staff to rural producers*. No date. Muriel Gahan Papers, VII. Writings on Irish Crafts, MS 49,806/73. National Library of Ireland, Dublin.

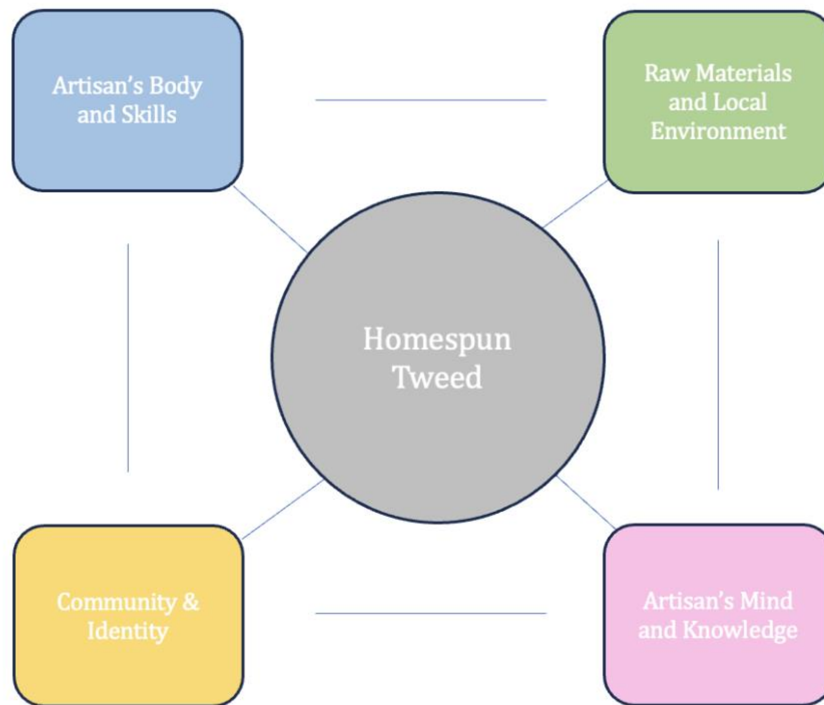


Figure 5.1. *The Homespun Ecology Nexus*. Note that the centre circle may be populated by any traditional craft (or indeed, any complex issue), which could then be traced backwards or developed moving forwards along the holistic lines outlined above.