

A Stitch in Time

A History of Limerick Clothing Factory

By Sharon Slater

Edited by: Dr Matthew Potter and Jacqui Hayes

Author's Note

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I am indebted to Dr. Matthew Potter for his patience and guidance throughout this project. Last but certainly not least my family Susan, Stephen and Peter who supported this journey.

Sharon Slater

Author

Introduction

The Limerick Clothing Factory closed its doors for the last time in November 1974. On 27th June 2015 over 500 people - including many who previously worked in the factory - attended a once-off open day to get a last glimpse of the by then largely derelict complex prior to its redevelopment. The level of interest, which thrilled the organisers, was apparent from early morning as queues to get in began to form along Lord Edward Street.

Visitors had different reasons for being there - whether it was an interest in the history of the site, its industrial archaeology or the new redevelopment earmarked for the location. Those who'd previously worked there enjoyed recounting their experiences of factory life, many of them recalling how they started there at a young age. While many brought different personal mementos such as old photographs, contracts of employment, and buttons from the uniforms along with them, all brought their rich memories. It was very clear on that day that the Limerick Clothing Factory continues to hold a special place in the hearts of the people of Limerick and that the many strands of its story merited recording and publishing. 'A Stitch in Time – A History of Limerick Clothing Factory' is the fruit of extensive research led by Sharon Slater and is a fitting tribute to the many people who have worked there over the years. It will ensure that the story of the Limerick Clothing Factory will live on for generations to come.

The residential redevelopment of the site is now largely complete. As new residents receive the keys to their new homes, they will also receive a copy of this book to mark a new beginning for the site. The redevelopment builds on sound foundations. It is particularly welcome that both the remaining structures and the affection of the people of Limerick go with the site as it becomes home to a new generation.

Finally, I would like to express our gratitude to the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government for their generous support for this project and the wider rejuvenation of Limerick city.

Seamus Hanrahan

Senior Architect, Limerick City and County Council



Southwark Street.

London. 11 April 1870

S.E.

Dear Bard

I duly received your note
and if you will call on Mr
Abraham at the factory he
will give you the list and my
subscription which I deeply
regret to say I am unable to
make for times as long which
I should much have liked to do
hoping that you may long enjoy
health and happiness in your new
home and wishing it to be
favoured with contributions from
your pen

I am

Dear Bard

Yours Very Truly
The Bard of Thomond
Pete Tait

Prologue

This is the fifth publication in the series produced by Limerick Archives since 2012 exploring key aspects of Limerick's history. The first of these was *Ranks; The Industrial Heart of Limerick City* and its success inspired a series with the same design template and a philosophy around the importance of oral history and engagement between communities and the archive to create publications that are both accessible and definitive.

Publications on Mount Saint Lawrence, Limerick Lace and the Bacon Industry will acquire a new shelf partner in this publication examining the Limerick Clothing Factory on Lord Edward Street. As a set these acting as a homage to Limerick people and to key aspects of Limerick's industrial and intangible heritage.

The Limerick Clothing Factory founded by Peter Tait was once one of the largest clothing factory in the world. Its success provided constant work for generations of men and – mainly, women. Its industrial heritage is fascinating in itself with the building containing the largest single span roof of its time in the British Isles. The factory was run by steam for many years and the surviving boilers represented the cutting edge technology synonymous with the factory.

This project is a collaboration between Limerick Archives and the Social Development Directorate. Sincere thanks to Dr Matthew Potter who supervised the research. Many thanks to Seamus Hanrahan, Sarah Newell and Maria Donoghue who have done so much to ensure the historic fabric of the site is explored and acknowledged. We are grateful to Fred Hamond, whose advice and expertise as an industrial archaeologist greatly informed key aspects of the text. Thanks to Limerick Arts Office for their advice and support, to William O'Neill, Limerick Archives and UL Scholar for proof-reading and last minute checking, and to Avid Graphic Design who have produced the entire series which we are so proud of. Finally thanks to our wonderful author Sharon Slater who has produced a fine piece of work to complete this series.

Jacqui Hayes,
Limerick Archivist



Examining
the Boilers



The gates of the Limerick Clothing Factory through which thousands of Limerick workers passed since they first opened in 1850.

Courtesy Limerick, A Stroll Down Memory Lane

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Typical example of a factory sewing room in the 1870s

Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



The Rise of a Clothing Giant

A painting of Peter
Tait which once hung
in the billiards room of
the clubhouse.

Courtesy Limerick Clothing Factory Anniversary Book



The Early Years

In 1850, Peter Tait arrived in Limerick as part of an influx of businessmen from Scotland, seeking to gain a foothold in the most westerly port of Europe. This was the era of one of the greatest innovations in human history, the transition from craft production by hand in the home, to mass production by machine in the factory. Limerick was still struggling with the impact of the Famine and although poverty was rife, entrepreneurship, especially from foreign investors, was on the increase. This promoted economic growth, ever-rising living standards and a major expansion of the middle class.

The Industrialisation of Limerick

Limerick was never a major industrial city, as a comparison between its workforce and that of Belfast shows. In 1871, 35 per cent of Limerick's workforce was in industrial employment compared to 42 percent in Belfast. Belfast however increased its employment to 74 percent industrial in 1911, while Limerick's declined to 24 percent by 1926.¹

Although Limerick in the early 1800s was not a typical industrial city such as Belfast, Glasgow and Birmingham, its workforce had become familiar with some of the most important elements of industrialisation, particularly the factory system. There were many industries in Limerick using a factory system, including Matterson's bacon factory (1820), Russell's flour mill (1827), Walker's lace factory (1828) and this culture facilitated the establishment of Limerick's largest industry in 1850 - the Limerick Clothing Factory.²

The Limerick merchant and business class in this period was committed to economic regeneration and welcomed enterprising immigrants. The Chamber of Commerce (1815) was established to promote the cooperation between businesses within the city. As a result a number of immigrant entrepreneurs founded what became Limerick's most famous industries: including the Englishmen John Russell, Joseph Matterson and Charles Walker and later the Canadian Sir Thomas Cleeve, who founded the Condensed Milk Company of Ireland (1883).³ Limerick became a multicultural city; these immigrants brought physical changes to the streetscape in the city with the construction of a number of small places of worship as well as entertainment outlets.



Peter Tait Signature (John Waite Collection)

Limerick became a strong trading city and retail shops including department stores such as Todd's, McBirney's and Cannock's played a major part in the city's economy. They replaced the old fairs and markets providing a 'one stop shop' where goods were bought and sold. This was an example of the Consumer Revolution, which encouraged the acquisition of ever-increasing amounts of goods in excess of basic needs and saw the appearance of 'off the peg' clothing in department stores.

Introduction of a mass clothing industry

The establishment of Peter Tait's Clothing Factory in Limerick hinged on a number of advances taking place in the previous decades. The introduction of the factory system into Ireland was key as this irrevocably changed the way employees carried out their work, becoming reliant on the clock rather than the sun to dictate working hours. The factory system introduced punctuality, fixed working hours, working in large groups, and submission to strict supervision. Limerick also had a pool of semi-skilled female workers as a result of the introduction of the lace making industry to the city by Charles Walker (1829) and the development of this skillbase probably assisted the recruitment of suitable employees.

This was also the age of invention. Innovative time saving devices such as sewing machines were developed, patented and improved upon, making possible the introduction of mass-produced 'off the peg' clothing competing with expensive tailor-made clothing. Under these new conditions, demand for clothing production increased tenfold.

Finally, as advances in steam power technology meant that factories were no longer confined to areas near water or dependant on wind to turn their mill wheels, Tait could select a site close to urban areas and the railroad, taking advantage of the concentrated population, which both provided a cheaper workforce and reduced transportation costs of both workers and materials. The rise of these factories in urban areas facilitated female employment outside of a domestic setting. This was welcome as in 1841, 11,871 women in Limerick city were unemployed compared to only 1,736 men.⁴

It should not be forgotten that while textiles were one of Ireland's largest industries in the early nineteenth century it was an industry in decline. Limerick's overall economic profile changed very little in the 150 years prior to 1970s.⁵ Largely a strong trading city, Limerick retained a significant industrial base with two dominant sectors: food/drink/tobacco (19 per cent in 1871 and 55 percent in 1926) and clothing/footwear (47 per cent in 1871 and 19 per cent in 1926).⁶ This shift away from clothing/footwear to food/drink/tobacco sector into the twentieth century demonstrates the challenging environment in which the Limerick Clothing Factory operated as will become apparent in later chapters. This trend was reflected nationally as in 1841 about 696,000 people in Ireland described themselves as textile workers but forty years later, this had fallen to 130,000 and by 1907, the figure was only 92,000. It is a tribute to Tait's ingenuity and business acumen that he established a business which thrived despite the overall decline in the sector.

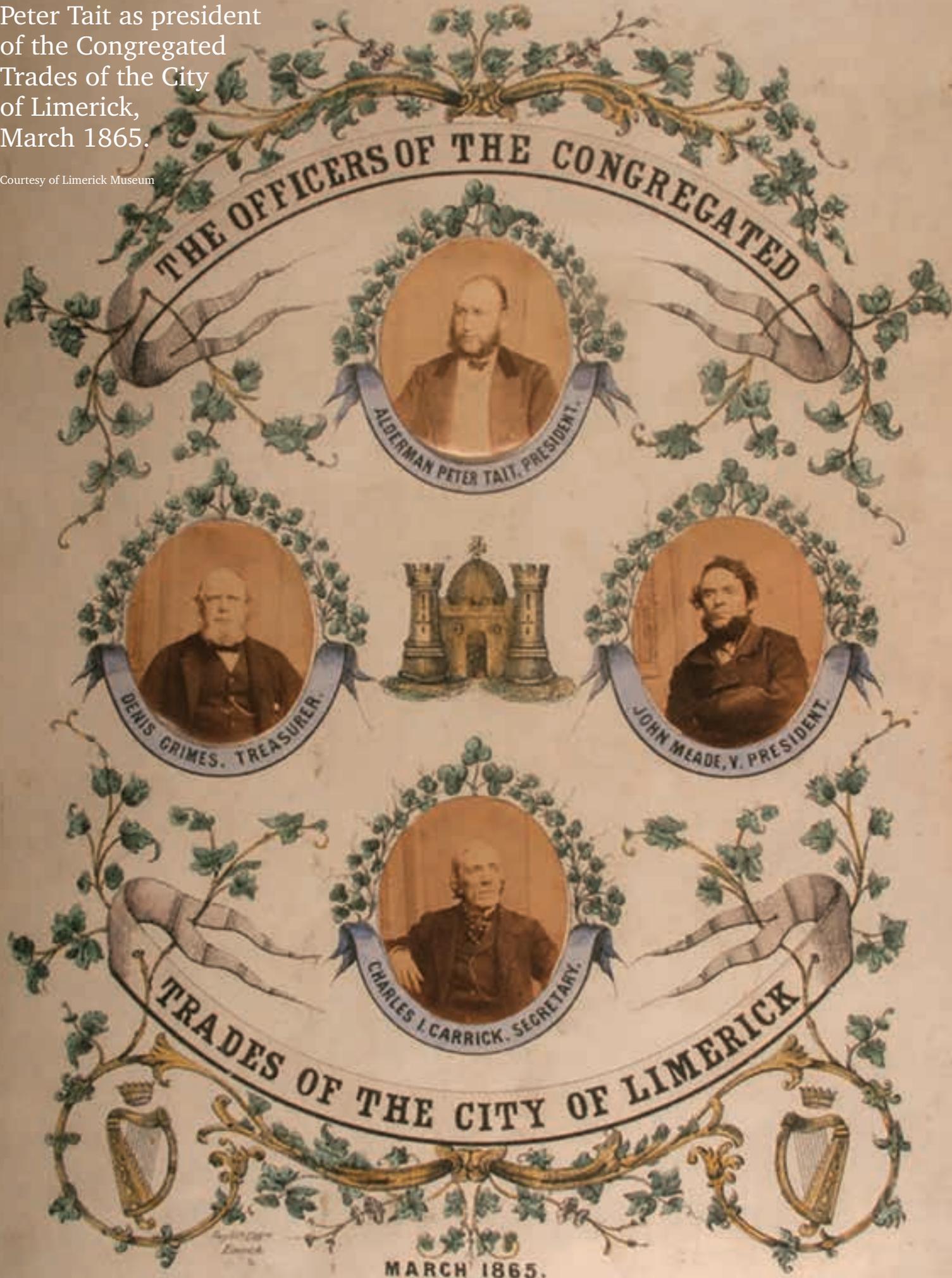
Peter Tait, the man and the myth

The history of Limerick Clothing Factory for the first quarter century of its existence is impossible to separate from the biography of its creator, Peter Tait. Any study of the rise and fall of Tait will show how his private and personal lives intertwined, making it difficult to separate reality and myth. His story is a dramatic one, as he went from 'rags to riches' and back to rags.

Peter Tait was born on 8 August 1828 in Lerwick, the capital of the Shetland Islands in Scotland a son of James Tait, shopkeeper. In 1844, aged sixteen he arrived in Limerick alone and he would later claim with only 3s 6d in his pocket.⁷ While it was once thought that he came to Limerick as he had a sister living in this city this is now known to be incorrect.⁸ It is likely that Tait came to Limerick as part of the small but significant Scottish merchant migration to the city in the nineteenth century.

Peter Tait as president
of the Congregated
Trades of the City
of Limerick,
March 1865.

Courtesy of Limerick Museum



MARCH 1865.

Among these merchant migrants were several highly successful businessmen including William Todd the Dublin-based founder of Todd's department store (now Brown Thomas) and his brother-in-law Archibald Murray, whose family later ran Todd's Department Store. Also significant were William Taylor Cumine and James Mitchell both of Glasgow who in 1840 established a drapery store on 134 George Street (now O'Connell Street).⁹ Here Tait, possibly through the influence of his father, secured his first position in Limerick as a shop assistant.¹⁰

During the summer, Tait worked for Cumine and Mitchell and lived above the premises. However, they refused to employ him during the winter even though he offered to work for bed and board in place of wages, forcing him to sell sundry items from a basket, throughout Limerick for a number of winters showing his determination and self-belief while honing his business skills. After he had made his fortune, Tait hung his basket by white silk ribbons in his porch in 'South Hill' to symbolise his rise from humble beginnings. This was an early example of his love of symbolism and flair for publicity - traits that would recur throughout his career.

Tait progressed from pedlar to entrepreneur in small stages. He began selling shirts to sailors at Limerick Docks but found it necessary to engage the skills of a local shirt maker to meet the demand. From there he progressed to taking measurements from the sailors and getting shirts made to order for them. Word of his business soon began to spread and as orders increased he identified a gap in the market which he could fill. It was this that led him to open his famous clothing factory.

Start of the Clothing Factory

The first recorded notice that Tait intended to create a clothing factory in Limerick came in January 1853, when the following advertisement was placed in the local press:

To shirt makers permanent employment for 500 shirt makers apply to Mr Tait Bedford Row, Limerick.

Eight months later, Tait's clothing factory was based as advertised in Bedford Row where he employed 500 females earning a total of £60 per week. This was a large boost to the local economy where unemployment was still rife with 10,703 emigrating from the city in 1851. Finding that his workforce was not sufficient for his needs, he approached the Limerick Board of Guardians with the bold and ingenious idea of training girls who were idle in the Union Workhouse. In August 1853, he wrote:

Gentlemen – I have for some time been thinking that the female paupers under your care might be instructed in plain needlework and that in the course of a short time they may be able to support themselves. I would propose, if it meets the approbation of the Guardians, to send one or two persons to instruct 200 or more of the females in the workhouse, in consideration of which the Guardians would allow the use of the large sewing room, and the females to work for three months without charge, by my taking all responsibility of spoiling or soiling during that time, and that I allow them some small sum weekly as a stimulant to industry. At the end of that time, I will guarantee to keep them constantly employed, and will allow them the same prices for their work as to any other outdoor worker.¹¹

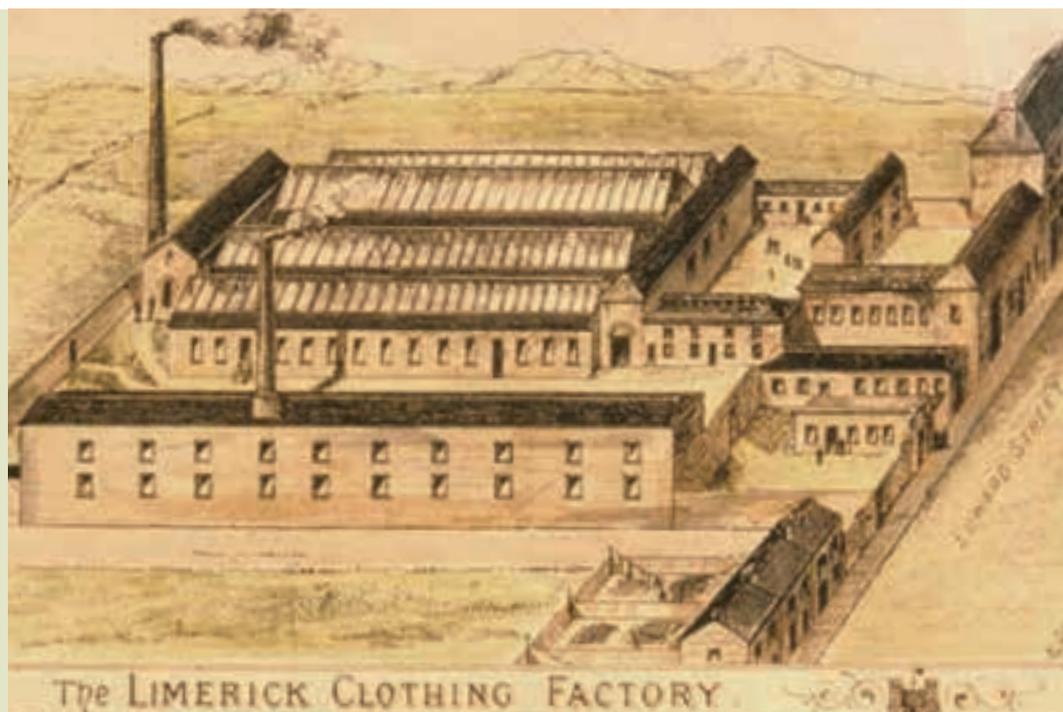
Tait was of the opinion that without giving the girls a stipend for their work they would be less inclined to take up the training. The Board received the request favourably, though it was noted that it was against the regulations of the Poor Law Commissioners to allow paupers to participate in waged work while boarding. Despite this, the Board sent the letter to the committee for the Boherbuoy Auxiliary Workhouse for consideration.¹² Following a lively meeting of the Board, Tait's request was granted with the following amendments; the Board would find a suitable teacher to train the girls and the girls would not be paid.¹³ A sewing teacher to train the girls was to be appointed by the end of the month on £25 per annum with apartment and rations.¹⁴



Military uniforms

Courtesy John Waite Collection

1890s publicity poster
Courtesy Stratten & Stratten,
London 1892



Tait was fortunate as the opening of his company coincided with the Crimean War (1853 – 1856).¹⁵ His first major military contract was to supply the British army in the Crimea with uniforms. Thereafter, Tait's fortunes were tied to his ability to secure government contracts, first in Britain and Ireland, then later throughout the world. One such contract was to supply 21,000 uniforms to the Canadian Militia in 1862. To ensure safe delivery of his uniforms to Canada in 1863 Tait purchased the ship *Evelyn*. This was the ship he would use to transport uniforms during the American Civil War.¹⁶

In 1855, through the intercession of the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland, Tait obtained a contract to provide uniforms for the Royal Limerick County Militia, initially for a year's trial period. After these initial successes, Tait obtained other orders from the British armed forces, which reaped him substantial rewards.¹⁷ Between 1855 and 1858, Tait & Co. generated approximately £250,000 in total sales on Government orders of 120,000 uniforms and employed approximately 1,000 people.

Over the next twenty years, Tait never lost an opportunity to profit from the numerous military conflicts of the time. Peacetime demand for his product was naturally low though he also supplied uniforms and clothing to local institutions and businesses, including railway companies, fire brigades and the Limerick Corporation Night Watch. In 1855 Tait was supplying shirts to the officers and children of the Union Workhouse on Shelbourne Road, Limerick at £36 a week.¹⁸

If Tait was not a 'merchant of death,' as arms manufacturers came to be called in the 1920s, he was nonetheless quite typical of the legion of profiteers for whom war is nothing more, or nothing less, than a unique business opportunity. His pioneering factory was quickly copied and in 1859, the British Government set up its own clothing operation in Pimlico, London which by 1863 employed 1,200 female workers there also using sewing machines.

The Move to Lord Edward Street

Tait's business was so successful that it soon outgrew his site in Bedford Row. In 1857, he purchased a site on the corner of Brunswick Street (now Sarsfield Street) and Henry Street. However, this was never used as a clothing factory and the property was sold in 1866.¹⁹ In November 1858, Tait took possession of the Auxiliary Workhouse at Boherbuoy (now Lord Edward Street) and the following month he signed a 999-year lease at a fixed rent of £160 per annum.²⁰ Limerick Clothing factory was to remain in this location until its closure 116 years later.

In 1860, Tait established another factory at Chapel Street off William Street.²¹ At this time, he also outsourced jobs to the Sisters of Mercy convent and St. Mary's convent. He ceased this

practice by 1867, due in part to the Factory Act of that year and the Government's decision to ban contractors from outsourcing work.²² He became the largest single employer in Limerick in this period with 1,300 workers and 150 sewing machines.²³ He claimed that he could make 250,000 suits of clothing a year and could, in an emergency use steam power to produce 10,000 a week.²⁴

Tait's Innovations

Tait's clothing factory excelled due mainly to two innovations, namely the assembly line and steam powered sewing machines. Assembly line was a process of allocating one section of the production to an individual and training them in the production of that piece instead of training them in the production of the entire garment. His second major innovation was the adoption of sewing machines in the mid-1850s. Although his was not the first company to use sewing machines to create army uniforms, his use of assembly line was revolutionary in the mass production of clothing.²⁵

Tait claimed that he could supply the whole British army with soldiers' tunics, which were made up by machinery, and were finished by hand.

He would undertake to supply the whole British army with clothing made by steam, and could give far better clothing for the same price by making the clothing by machinery. The machinery did not put people out of work. Tait employed 1,000 persons in the clothing factory and he paid none of his men less than £1 1s a week. To show the great advantage derived by the government in the use of machinery, he stated that having received a telegram on Tuesday for 800 suits, which he delivered on Friday morning at eleven o'clock, though he had to telegraph to England for a portion of the materials.²⁶

Where possible Tait used Irish raw materials, such as Belfast linen and thread, but had to import cotton from Leeds. In 1859, in evidence given at the Army Contract Commission:

Mr. Peter Tait, general draper residing in Limerick, and the Government contractor, gave evidence respecting his dealings with the government. He denied the truth of the statement made by Colonel Horne, of the 13th light infantry, to the effect that he declined to make tunics to fit the men, or insisted that the men should fit the tunics. Colonel Horne, when fitting a man, took him by his shoulders and held him back, and wished that the cloth should be taken out of the back and put in the front. Witness [Tait] told him the notion was absurd, and that he should be careful in making his report to the Secretary of War. If the clothing were made according to Colonel Horne's notion, it would burst when the soldier took up his knapsack or put his firearms on his shoulder.²⁷



These tokens bearing the name of Peter Tait were used as a form of advertisement and placed in the pocket of suits of clothing.

Courtesy Jim Noonan

Tait as Self Publicist

In 1862 Tait displayed an almost modern flair for publicising both himself and his company when he secured the contract to supply the Canadian Militia with uniforms. To announce this contract, Tait travelled through Limerick from the Clothing Factory to the Mechanics' Institute in an open carriage drawn by six horses followed by a large crowd and band. That evening he set fireworks off from the roof of Cannock and Tait, in George Street.²⁸ In 1863, after the Canadian contract was completed, he was guest of honour at a banquet held by the Congregated Trades of Limerick in his Boherbuoy factory, at which he was presented with an address expressing their gratitude for his exertions in promoting the city's prosperity.²⁹

Canada Militia buttons

Courtesy Jim Noonan



Life of the Workers under Tait

Tait enjoyed the reputation of being a major local philanthropist due to his workforce consisting mainly of young women largely drawn from the poorer classes in Limerick city. Tait's reputation was increased by such practices as in 1862, when he gave all his employees a 'Christmas Box' of three days wages after receiving a contract for 50,000 uniforms for the British Army.³⁰ Many of these lived in unsanitary conditions and were in poor health, such as Ellen Manning who 'died from a visitation from God' while crossing Mathew Bridge.³¹

In 1864, Tait's factory was inspected as part of the Children in Factories Commission review of factories throughout Ireland. This inspection paints a useful picture of the factory at this time. One of his managers, Balfour Logie, told the commission that 'the business was only brought into the factory in 1859, though it was carried out for a few years before in several separate work-places'. The inspector found that there were three distinct working areas: the cutting area, sewing machine area and 'hand' sewing area. In the sewing machine area, there were long ranges of machines at which females sat on benches while in the hand sewing area they sat on the floor. All staff were trained in house by older employees and taught simple stitching techniques.

The inspector reported that working hours in the summer were between 6am and 6pm, with two one-hour breaks, while in the winter the hours were 8am to 7pm with a single one-hour break. By contrast, the same inspector reported that Mrs Seymour's Dress-makers, Cecil Street the working hours were between 7am to 8pm with no fixed meal times and overtime up to 10pm was common. More than 90 percent of the workforce in Tait's factory were female and all were over thirteen years of age as 'they are of no use younger'. If employees were late, they lost a quarter day pay. The weekly wages ranged from between four shillings and four shillings and six pence for unskilled workers winding thread to ten shillings for skilled machine operators. The majority of the staff could read but not write, 'seven of the youngest girls in succession all said that they could read. One however could not read, but the rest did'.³²

Though steam-powered sewing machines were a great advantage to the company, they often caused distress to the staff. The inspector noted that 'a girl working a Thomas's No.3 machine

ENTERPRISE IN IRELAND.—Peter Tait, mayor of Limerick, employer of some 1,000 hands, partner, too, in the largest drapery house in the city, has been little more than a dozen years in making his fortune out of the three halfcrowns which were all his wealth when, a poor Scotch lad, he took service under the firm of Arscott and Cannon. He began to make money by Australian shirts. Then he got a contract for militia boots, and he was rejoicing in his luck when all his goods were returned on his hands. Instantly he went over to London, sought out a friendly M.P., and said, "There must be some favoritism here, for I know my things are good, and quite up to sample." His friend got the boots re-examined, and the contract was confirmed. Tait was a made man. He ran the blockade, too, and supplied the South with something very different from the New York shoddy. He now makes a great deal for our own army, besides clothing the Irish constabulary, and doing odd jobs for foreign Powers, like that which the Prussians gave him the other day. Thus, if he is not altogether a manufacturer—for, though he makes Limerick lace, and uses a good deal of Irish frieze, the bulk of his cloth is woven in Leeds—he has at any rate shown that Irish industry may be, with common care and perseverance, remuneratively diverted into non-agricultural channels. Care and perseverance, those are rare qualities everywhere; rarer, people say, and the state of things seems to prove the assertion, in Ireland than elsewhere. The cry for Irish manufactures has frequently been heard. It was often in O'Connell's mouth, it was loudly raised by the Young Ireland party. At one meeting, for instance, a good deal was said about Irish pottery; some good clay had been discovered, and henceforth no true patriot would use any cups, or plates, or basins that were not home-made. A Staffordshire man was among the company. Out he walked, and wrote off home, "Make a lot of cheap things of all sorts, and put a border of shamrocks round every one, and an Irish harp in the centre of each." This was done, and before the Irish had thought of getting out their clay, the markets were stocked with "patriotic" crockery, the sale of which had made the cunning Englishman's fortune. Well, care and perseverance have made Peter Tait the largest employer of labour in Limerick. His place is well worth a visit. The long work-room contains 150 sewing-machines, which employ 500 work girls. All goes by steam; so that the doctors, who cry out about the evil effects of the machines in the London slop-shops, can now point out a remedy. The ventilation is perfect; and the neatness and modest look of the girls contrast strongly with what one sees in Yorkshire or Lancashire mills. Of course in other rooms there are cutting-machines which go through 24 thicknesses of cloth as easily as you would cut a piece of cheese, and pressing-irons heated inside with gas, and all the most modern adjuncts of a great clothing establishment. But the main point is, that these girls, who would else have been picking up a wretched livelihood by making a little lace and hawking it about the streets, get here from 8s. to 10s. a week, and are all so good that when a young woman of loose ways of talk gets among them they at once send up a deputation and respectfully insist on her being removed. People can't all be Tait's; and, if they were, there is not room in the world for an unlimited number of army clothiers. But there are other businesses in which cheap, "satty" labour, such as Irish women (and men too) can give when they are properly set to work, is the main requisite. Why should not cheap bookbinding be done in Ireland? Messrs. Wood, of Belfast, who show so many fine things in the Paris Exhibition, prove that good bookbinding is as possible now as it was in the days of the old saints. Not surely at Cork, or some other southern town, an enterprising man might bind cheaply and well for public offices and private companies, and might make ledgers and such like at rates with which English houses could not compete. The trade would be a small one; but Ireland is not in a condition to despise the day of small things. Before Irishmen, however, can hope to do anything in this way they must leave off that abominable habit of detraction which has always been their besetting sin. It is sickening to hear two priests—worthy, useful men in their way, but who certainly look as if whatever amount of self-denial is imposed on them by their creed agreed most admirably with their health—discussing, for instance, the new boat which their Mayor has brought over from Glasgow for the good of the Limerick citizens. He has halved the fares, doubled the speed, and quadrupled the accommodation, and every thinking man believes him when he says he does not wish to make a penny by the venture, but only to give the people readier access to their Brighton at Killee, and to attract strangers by offering them a steamer of which any city might be proud. Yet one clerical person grumbles out, in his lazy Western speech, "Tasait's no fool!" and his companion, grinning, replies, "Tasait's wide awake. His 5,000*l.* at 5 per cent. would not be bringing in so much as that boat does." "Aye, and see his notice stuck up, 'Dinner on board at half-a-crown, and the best liquors at moderate prices.' Tasait knows what he's about. Who'd eat half-a-crown's worth when the boat's rolling with a fresh wind?" And then a lay friend chimes in, and finds some fault because the steamer was not re-christened with an Irish name. That's the way Irishmen treat those who do for them what they won't do for themselves; and that's all the reward "Tasait" gets for his well-doing. No, it is not; for, besides winning a fortune, he has won the respect and goodwill even of those among whom he lives; though they can't for the life of them get quite rid of the fault-finding, they do admire him in spite of it.—*Globe*.

had to use both feet [to operate the pedals], and after about six hours became fatigued'. However, Logie proudly told the inspector that despite their fatigue the machine operators did not stop their work.³³

In 1867, a reporter from the *The Times* newspaper reiterated how important Tait's factory was to the local poor:

His place is well worth a visit. The long work-room contains 150 sewing-machines, which employ 500 work girls. All goes by steam; so that the doctors, who cry out about the evil effects of the machines in the London slop-shops, can now point out a remedy. The ventilation is perfect; and the neatness and modest look of the girls contrast strongly with what one sees in Yorkshire or Lancashire mills. Of course in other rooms there are cutting-machines which go through 24 thicknesses of cloth as easily as you would cut a piece of cheese, and pressing-irons heated inside with gas, and all the most modern adjuncts of a great clothing establishment. But the main point is, that these girls, who would have been picking up a wretched livelihood by making a little lace and hawking it about the streets, get here from 8s. to 10s. a week, and are all so good that when a young woman of loose ways of talk gets among them they at once send up a deputation and respectfully insist on her being removed.³⁴

As with most business Tait's factory was not immune to theft and in 1860, a significant conspiracy was uncovered there. Four of his staff stole large quantities of clothing from the factory and pawned them at James Lyttleton, a local pawnbroker. Of these, Daniel Robinson was found guilty and was sentenced to six months imprisonment; sisters Jane and Catherine Carroll both received six months hard labour while an aged woman called Catherine Frawley was remanded in custody until her daughter, also involved in the robbery, was located. Their accomplice Hanorah Normoyle, who did not work for Tait, was charged with receiving stolen goods.³⁵

American Civil War

One of Tait's most famous contracts was with the Confederacy (the Southern United States) during the American Civil War. It is interesting to note that the Peter Tait Company did not necessarily manufacture all of the 'Tait' uniforms. In fact, three separate companies provided uniforms to the specifications of the Tait jacket, namely Peter Tait and Company Limerick; Hebbert and Company London; and Alexander Collie and Company Manchester & London.³⁶

Peter Tait and Limerick's connection with the Confederacy began in earnest in December 1863, when the Confederate Government ordered 50,000 caps, greatcoats, jackets, trousers, shirts, blankets, boots, stockings and haversacks. In December 1863, Tait & Co. initiated contact with James A. Seddon, the Confederate Secretary of War. Tait arranged to supply £158,457 worth of clothing, from stockings to great coats by 1 April 1864.³⁷ In October 1864, Peter Tait and Co. agreed to supply 40,000 uniforms. Due to this contract, the numbers employed in the factory swelled to 1,200 in 1864 and 1,800 in 1865.³⁸

The American Civil War: Battle of Wilson's Creek - Fall of General Lyon, an 1863 engraving

Courtesy Thinkstock







This jacket was worn by Private Benjamin S. Pendleton who was a courier for Confederate General Stonewall Jackson. Pendleton wore this jacket at the surrender of the Confederate forces with General Robert E. Lee at Appomattox on 9 April 1865.

Courtesy Texas Civil War Museum, Fort Worth, Texas

The Confederate purchasing agent was Major J.B. Ferguson, Manchester, England. To secure the contract, Tait met with Alexander Collie one of the South's principal financial links in England, and owner or part owner of several infamous blockade-runners. In July 1862, North Carolina appointed Alexander Collie and Company as an agent in London to handle the state's commercial affairs.³⁹

In June 1864, Tait entered into a separate contract with the State of Alabama.⁴⁰ In order to fulfil his contract and deliver his cargo he had to navigate the Federal (Northern United States) blockade of Southern ports and to do so used the ships *Condor*, *Kelpie*, *Elwy* and *Evelyn*. Of these the *Evelyn* was the only one in which Tait owned a share.⁴¹ The *Evelyn* would go on to run the blockade five times, with her last departure from Foynes, Co. Limerick in October 1864; she would not return until September 1865.⁴²

Blockade runners delivered Tait's cargo to Wilmington, North Carolina and Galveston Texas. Confederate troops in Alabama received their uniforms in autumn 1864 while Texas, North Carolina and Virginia waited until 1865. In total approximately 53,600 'ready-made' Tait uniforms were imported into the Confederacy.⁴³ Supplies purchased by Virginia were paid in cash but the Alabama purchases were to be paid in 680,000 pounds of cotton. Disastrously, for Tait this consignment of cotton was seized by Union forces, leaving the Alabama debt forever unpaid which was to be a major factor in the collapse of his business.⁴⁴

At the end of war, Collie presented Tait with a bill for approximately £30,000 - Tait's share of the alleged losses in this joint venture. Tait honoured the bill and absorbed the loss but this was the first sign that dark clouds were on the horizon for the company. Surprisingly despite these losses, his relationship with Collie was not broken and they continued a business relationship for several years.⁴⁵

Only eleven Confederate jackets and one set of trousers made by Tait are known to survive today. This was due to them being issued to the men towards the end of the war.⁴⁶ The surviving examples are of cadet grey kersey with linen lining. The body of the jacket is made of five separate pieces, with each sleeve consisting of two further pieces. They are further identifiable through their eight-button front, and wool broadcloth collars.⁴⁷ Some of Tait's Confederate jackets are on display in the United States, in a number of museums including the American Civil War Museum, Richmond, Virginia.⁴⁸ Relic hunters on former Civil War sites regularly recover Tait of Limerick buttons inscribed on the back with 'P Tait & Co. Limerick'.⁴⁹



American Civil War button.

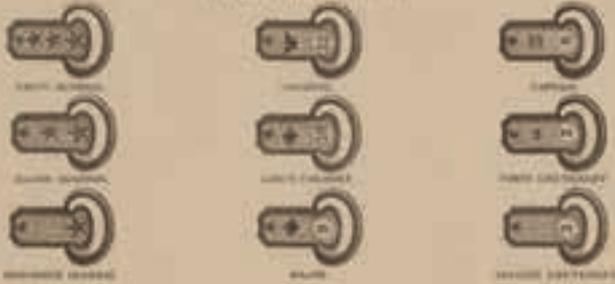
Courtesy Cooper Hewitt

ATLAS TO ACCOMPANY THE OFFICIAL RECORDS OF THE UNION AND CONFEDERATE ARMIES, 1864-1865.



BADGES TO DISTINGUISH RANK, U.S. ARMY.

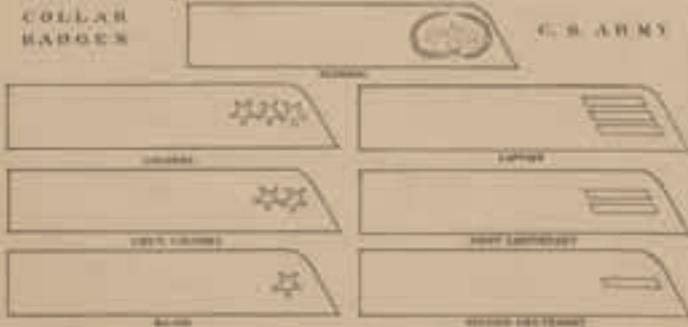
EPAULETTES



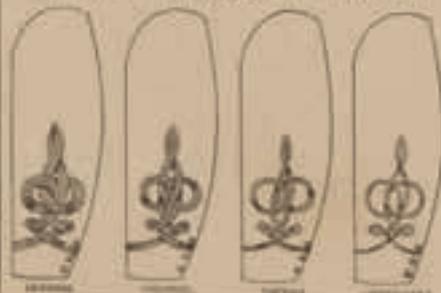
SHOULDER STRAPS



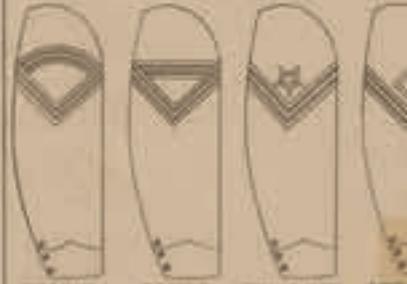
COLLAR BADGES



SLEEVE BADGES, C.S. ARMY



CHEVRONS, C.S.





UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS

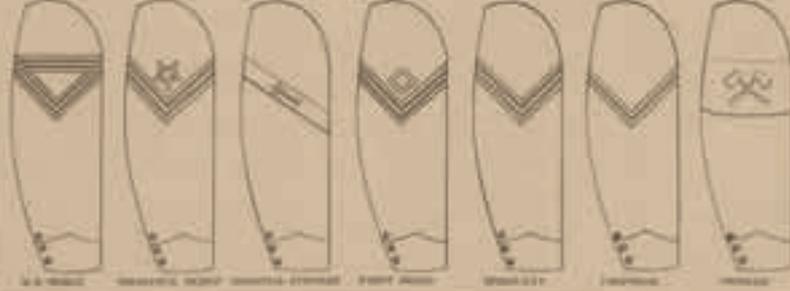


UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS

CHEVRONS



BUTTONS, U. S. ARMY.



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



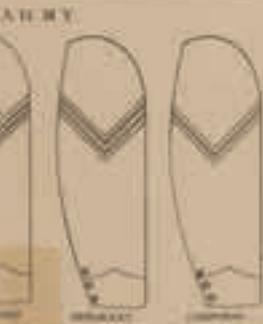
UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



UNION ARMY PRIVATE IN FULL DRESS



The illustrations are intended to show the general appearance of the uniform, and are not to be taken as a guide to the exact dimensions of the same.

Post-American Civil War to First Closure

The American Civil War contract brought fortune, fame, notoriety and disaster to Tait's Clothing Factory. The loss of the Alabama cotton consignment was to be the principal cause of his company's collapse. Also during the course of the conflict, the Union government had carried out an investigation into allegations that the *Evelyn* had smuggled arms concealed in bales of clothes to the Confederacy. Although no evidence was produced and Tait was cleared of all wrongdoing, the affair caused him great strain and worry.⁵⁰

Signatures of George Cannock, Peter Tait and Peter Thom.

Courtesy Limerick Archive



After the Civil War, Tait appears to have tried to diversify the company, first by purchasing a colliery in South Wales and then by making substantial investments in the flotation of a shipping company in 1866. In this latter adventure, Tait ill-advisedly went into business again with Collie, whose fraudulent practices brought about the collapse of the company.⁵¹ This disaster also contributed to the eventual bankruptcy of Tait and Co. in 1869, which was reported in the *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer* as follows:

Closing of Sir Peter Tait's factory at Limerick. This is a great calamity for the city, amounting to a loss in wages alone for £40,000 to £50,000 annually. From 800 to 1000 female workers are thrown out of employment.⁵²

Similarly, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported:

At a meeting of the creditors of Messrs. Peter Tait and Co., of London, Limerick, and elsewhere, held yesterday, the liabilities to unsecured creditors were stated at £111,000, and the assets £116,000. The private estates, it was also reported, show a surplus. A committee of inspection was appointed.⁵³

By 1865, Tait had expanded his operations to Southwark Street, London and the Alexander Street, Leeds branch that was managed by F Goodall.⁵⁴ In 1866, the Limerick Clothing Factory had 2000 females employed as well as between 80-100 journeymen tailors.⁵⁵ Both of these closed along with the main factory in 1869. The total loss of employment between the three factories was over 5,200.⁵⁶

Though Tait had to sell the majority of his stock in 1869, his bankruptcy continued for a number of years. Messrs. James, Edwards, Cash and Stone accountants prepared the affairs of the firm, which showed total liabilities of £183,000, with the company possessing £202,000 in assets, including buildings.⁵⁷ In 1871, Tait bought back the lease of the premise though still remaining in bankruptcy.

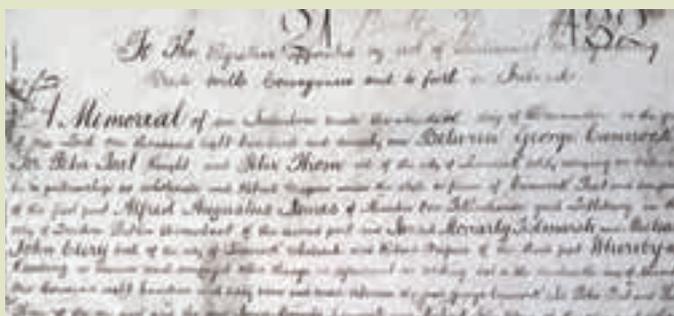
However the Limerick factory reopened in 1869 in order to fulfil a number of outstanding contracts including one to supply 150,000 uniforms for a Continental Government (which cannot be identified due to the loss of the stock books).⁵⁸ When this contract was completed, the factory

closed its doors on 16 November 1875 with the loss of over six hundred jobs.⁵⁹ This caused great distress in Limerick and in the following weeks one hundred unemployed women left the city to work in Gardiner's clothing factory in London.⁶⁰

In 1876, a reporter from New Zealand paid a visit to Limerick and he described the situation in the city that year:

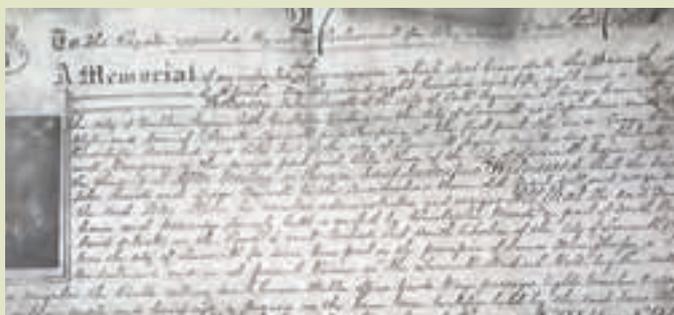
Mr Adam stopped at Limerick for half a day on his return north, and expresses himself very strongly regarding the misery he saw there. 'I ventured to predict,' he says, ... 'that it will take a hundred years and the introduction of twelve millions of emigrants, before New Zealand will be able to reproduce the misery I saw in the single town of Limerick.' Doubtless, as he goes on to remark, this misery was temporarily increased by the failure of Sir Peter Tait and Co., a firm that took large contracts for the supply of army and navy clothing. Through the stoppage of this concern, 500 girls were thrown out of work, and added to the general distress and depression.⁶¹

Tait's Other Business Ventures in Limerick



Transfer of deeds from Cannock, Tait and Thom to Cleary and Tidmarsh.

Courtesy Limerick Archives



Transfer of deeds from Arnott to Tait.

Courtesy Limerick Archives

Peter Tait was also involved in a number of other business ventures including one with fellow Scotsman George Cannock. In 1850, Cumine and Mitchell department store was sold to Cannock and another Dublin based Scottish businessman John Arnott and they traded together under the name Arnott Cannock & Co. Eight years later Peter Tait bought Arnott's shares in the company and in the following year contributed £9,000 to the rebuilding of the department store.⁶² The company, now under the leadership of George Cannock, Peter Tait and Peter Thom, was renamed Cannock Tait & Co. Cannock himself took little part in the day to day running of the company as he lived in Dublin until his retirement to London in 1865. Tait's nephew, Thomas Nicol, assisted Thom in the day-to-day operations.⁶³ Unfortunately, for George Cannock, Tait's bankruptcy in 1869 also brought about the collapse of Cannock Tait and Co.'s department store. The store was sold to M.J. Clery (founder of the famous department store in Dublin) and J.M. Tidmarsh. As a result Cannock also went bankrupt and was forced to return from retirement in London to Limerick to work as a manager in his former store. His woes continued as his daughters fiancé refused to marry her without a dowry and on her return to Limerick with her father, she became pregnant by Patrick Lynch, the married owner of the George Hotel.⁶⁴



Investing in Linen and Shipping Industries

Tait and other Limerick businessmen also attempted to revive the linen industry in Limerick. Tait's involvement was motivated by his desire to create a local supply of linen for his clothing factory. In 1864, he purchased £100 worth of shares in the Russell flax mill at Farranshone (later known as Cleeve's Condensed Milk Factory) where linen was manufactured. The linen factory had a modest success before closing in 1869.⁶⁵

In 1867, Tait also established a shipping company with Collie, which ran three steamers between England, Belgium, Brazil, and the River Plate in South America but soon collapsed. He also ventured into the local shipping market and in 1867, his Limerick to Kilkee line was humorously recorded in *The Times* newspaper:

He has halved the fares, doubled the speed, and quadrupled the accommodation... to give the people access to their Brighton at Kilkee... Yet one clerical person grumbles out in his lazy Western speech 'Taaait's no fool' and his companion grinning, replies 'Taaait's wide awake...', 'Aye, and see his notice stuck up, Dinner on board at half-a-crown... Taaait knows what he's about. Who'd eat half-a-crown's worth when the boat's rolling with a fresh wind?'⁶⁶

Unfortunately, these enterprises could not resurrect Tait's fortunes. In 1872, Patrick Lynch, owner of the George Hotel and shipping agent for Tait, attempted to sue Tait for loss of wages incurred due to Tait's bankruptcy. He filed another case against Tait for £1548 for hotel and private expenses while Tait was acting as Mayor. Both cases were dismissed.⁶⁷

Tait's post-Limerick career

In 1869, Tait left Limerick permanently and by 1870 along with his wife, nine children and brother Robert were living in Wandsworth, London.⁶⁸

He spent many of the last fifteen years of his life attempting to revive his fortune in a variety of business ventures in the Ottoman Empire and Russia.⁶⁹ However he could not extricate himself from his financial difficulties and in 1880 his house in the Shetland Islands was confiscated by the local council due to arrears he had incurred.⁷⁰ In 1886, he embarked on his final major entrepreneurial enterprise when he purchased a piece of land in the then Russian province of Georgia and attempted to form a syndicate to search for oil there.⁷¹ Ever the entrepreneur he returned to Georgia for one final time in 1890 to further this business deal but fell ill with a lung infection at the Hotel De France, Batoum and passed away on 15 December 1890 aged 62 years old.⁷²

Fortunately for Limerick, Tait's factory survived its creator's financial demise and continued for another century producing clothing for both the military and civilian market. Despite having no involvement in the running of the factory for the next hundred years Tait's name remains intrinsically connected to the factory to this day.

Tait's Clock, Baker
Place, c.1949

Courtesy Limerick Clothing Factory Anniversary Book



Endnotes

¹ *Census of Population, 1821-1911* (Dublin: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1871 and 1911) and *Census of Population, 1926-2011* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1926, 1971 and 2006). The proportion of Limerick's workforce in industrial employment remained at that level for much of the twentieth century (28 per cent in 1971 and 22 per cent in 2006).

² Matthew Potter and Sharon Slater, *Limerick's Merchants Traders and Shakers*, (Limerick: Limerick Chamber, 2015), p. 50. The first bacon factory in the city was established by Joseph Matterson; the modern flour milling industry by introducing steam power; the first Limerick lace factory was established by Charles Walker.

³ Cormac Ó Gráda, *Ireland A New Economic History* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 324-30.

Census of Ireland, 1841. The population of Limerick stood at 48,391 with 5,519 more women than men.

Among Limerick's most famous traditional industries in this period were the four bacon factories (Matterson's, Shaw's, which became Clover Meats in 1950, O'Mara's and Denny's); flour mills (such as Russell's, Bannatyne's, Goodbody's and Rank's); tobacco (Spillane's and Clune's); dairy products (Cleeve's); lace manufacturers (such as Walker's, Lambert and Burys, Leicester Greaves and the Good Shepherd nuns) and clothing factories (such as Limerick Clothing and Danus). Practically all of these were native-owned.

David Lee and Debbie Jacobs (eds.), *Made in Limerick: History of Industries, Trade and Commerce*, Volume 1, (Limerick: Limerick Civic Trust, 2003).

Dublin Evening Post, 06 February 1865.

It had been supposed that Tait's sister had married Martin Honan a former mayor of the city, while Honan actually married Anne Marie Kane of Whitehall on 01 December 1826 in Parteen, Co. Clare. The rumour began in 1955, in a paper in The Old Limerick Society.

⁹ Ó Gráda, *Ireland A New Economic History*, pp. 324-30. Cumine and Mitchell bought an established drapery business in 134 George Street from Thomas Waller.

¹⁰ John E. Waite, *Peter Tait : A Remarkable Story* (Stoke: Milford Publication, 2005), p.3.

¹¹ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 5 August 1853.

¹² *Ibid*, 5 August 1853.

¹³ This discussion centred on whether the female inmates would benefit more from training in embroidery or simple stitching as well as the expense of supplying material for training. Mr. Barrington stated that they would be able to acquire the necessary material without cost to the Board.

¹⁴ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 12 August 1853.

¹⁵ This conflict pitted Russia against an alliance of Britain, France, the Ottoman Empire and Sardinia. The Crimean War was fought mostly in the Crimean Peninsula.

¹⁶ Despite popular belief Tait never owned the *Elvie* and the *Kelpie*.

¹⁷ Tait had spoken to the Lord Lieutenant in Dublin, who had communicated with the War Office in London on his behalf.

¹⁸ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 30 March 1855. On 8 October 1853, the Board of Guardians verify that work is to be on the manufacture of shirts by girls in the Boherbouy Workhouse for Peter Tait. Tait paid the Board of Guardians four pence per dozen for the making up of shirts.

¹⁹ Waite, *Peter Tait*, pp.18-19.

²⁰ Lease between Peter Tait and John Westropp, 13 December 1858.

²¹ Waite, *Peter Tait*, p.13.

²² *Ibid*, pp. 29-30.

²³ Jim Kemmy, 'The Tait's in Limerick and Melbourne' in *The Old Limerick Journal*, No.23. p.83.

²⁴ Waite, *Peter Tait*, p.17.

²⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 03 October 1864.

²⁶ *Wellington Independent*, 12 April 1859.

²⁷ *Ibid*, p. 6.

²⁸ *Freeman's Journal*, 26 December 1862.

²⁹ *Inverness Courier*, 25 June 1863. The banquet was held in his Boherbouy factory and was attended by 140 guests.

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- ³⁰ *Freemans Journal*, 26 December 1862.
- ³¹ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 15 October 1853. According to the report she was extremely destitute before being employed with Tait.
- ³² HC 1864 [3414] [3414-I] *Children's Employment Commission (1862). Second and third reports of the commissioners. With appendices.* Session 4 February - 29 July 1864.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ *The Times*, 3 August 1867.
- ³⁵ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 24 August 1860.
- ³⁶ Frederick R. Adolphus, *Imported Confederate Uniforms of Peter Tait & Co., Limerick Ireland* (Louisiana: Adolphus Confederate Uniforms, 2010), p. 9.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.9.
- ³⁸ *Cork Examiner* 03 October 1864; *Freeman's Journal* 14 January 1865.
- ³⁹ Alexander Collie was born in Aberdeen in 1824, where his father George was a merchant. On 12 April 1860, Alexander, described as a commission agent, married Irish-born Flora Jane MacNeill, a descendent of Flora MacDonald, in Edinburgh.
- ⁴⁰ David Burt 2008. 'Peter Tait, The Man, the Firm and the Uniforms Supplied to the Confederate States' in the *Civil War Historian Magazine* September/October 2008, pp 28-29.
- ⁴¹ Craig L. Barry & David Burt, *Supplier to the Confederacy: Peter Tait & Co, Limerick* (London: New Generation Publishing 2011).
- ⁴² Another of the ships to carry Tait uniforms was the *Condor*, which ran aground off Fort Fisher in North Carolina in late 1864. Though her cargo was safely loaded onto another ship and brought ashore, famous Confederate agent Rose O'Neal Greenhow who had been returning from Europe aboard the *Condor* was drowned.
- ⁴³ Frederick R. Adolphus, 'The Irish-Made Confederate Uniforms of Peter Tait,' in *North South Trader's Civil War*, Vol. 35, No.4, 2011, p.39.
- ⁴⁴ *The Tuscaloosa News*, 13 May 1932.
- ⁴⁵ Michael Clarke, 'Alexander Collie: The Ups and Downs of Trading with the Confederacy' in *Northern Mariner/Le Marin du Nord*, Apr 2009, Vol. 19 Issue 2, p. 135.
- ⁴⁶ Adolphus, *Imported Confederate Uniforms of Peter Tait*, p. 9., consulted at <http://adolphusconfederateuniforms.com/peter-tait-trousers-finally-surface.html>.
- ⁴⁷ Leslie D. Jensen, 'A Survey of Confederate Central Government Quartermaster Issue Jackets' in *The Military Collector and Historian*, 41, No 3 (Fall 1989) pp 109–22, and 41, No. 4 (Winter 1989), pp 162-71.
- ⁴⁸ Damien Shiels, <http://irishamericancivilwar.com/2010/05/11/clothing-the-confederacy-taits-of%20limerick/>, accessed 13 April 2016.
- ⁴⁹ Jensen, 'A Survey of Confederate Central Government Quartermaster Issue Jackets'. Tait jackets and buttons for the most part have been located in battlefields associated with Northeastern Carolina, the Petersburg Campaign and the Appomattox Campaign.
- ⁵⁰ Bernadette Whelan, *American Government in Ireland, 1790-1913: A History of the US Consular Service* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010), p.120.
- ⁵¹ In 1875, a trial to deal with Collie's multiple fraud cases was to be held in London but he did not appear and he was charged with absconding. A reward of £1,000 was put up by the London and Westminster Bank for his arrest and a wanted notice was widely circulated in the press. It was noted that he had left the country for America where he lived out his life under the pseudonym George MacNeill. Like Tait, Collie died penniless and alone in 1895.
- ⁵² *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 16 July 1869.
- ⁵³ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 28 July 1869.
- ⁵⁴ Waite, *Peter Tait*, p.117.
- ⁵⁵ *The Cork Examiner*, 7 May 1866.
- ⁵⁶ *The Tablet*, 24 July 1869.
- ⁵⁷ D David Morier Evans, *The Banking Almanac Directory Yearbook and Diary for 1870* (London: Richard Groombridge, 1870), p.79.

⁵⁸ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 06 December 1870.

⁵⁹ *Clutha Leader*, 3 February 1876.

⁶⁰ *Dublin Weekly Nation* 01 January 1876.

⁶¹ *Otago Witness*, 13 May 1876.

⁶² Matthew Potter, *First Citizens of the Treaty City*, (Limerick: Limerick City Council, 2007), p. 126.

⁶³ Frances Twomey, 'Cannock's' A Social and Economic History of the Limerick Company from 1840-1930'. (Unpublished BA thesis, National Institute of Higher Education, 1980).

⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 9. *Morning Advertiser*, 01 April 1871, George Cannock had retired to London with a fortune of £150,000 but was forced to return due to Tait's bankruptcy.

⁶⁵ *Irish Examiner*, 25 January 1864; Hannan, 'Sir Peter Tait', p. 27.

⁶⁶ *The Times*, 3 August 1867.

⁶⁷ The case was ultimately rejected by the courts and an order was created to prevent Lynch from taking any further action against Tait on this matter. The following year, Lynch's wife unsuccessfully sued Tait for £594 in entertainment expenses incurred during his three term Mayoralty. To complicate matters further Cannock sued Lynch in 1870 for seducing his eighteen-year-old daughter, Mary and was awarded £100 plus costs.

⁶⁸ *Census of Population*, England, Wales and Scotland, 1871, Lime Grove Park Crina House, Putney, Wandsworth, London, England.

⁶⁹ Waite, *Peter Tait*, p.282-3.

⁷⁰ *Shetland Times*, 13 November 1880.

⁷¹ John E. Waite, *Peter Tait : A Remarkable Story* (Stoke, Milnford Publication 2005), p.282-3.

⁷² *London Evening Standard*, 19 December 1890.

Tait Clothing
Factory sword
Canada militia

Courtesy Jim Noonan



The Tait Family Ties

“Peter Tait was a man of many parts. His early life and business career have been dealt with in detail in chapter one. However, there were many other sides to him, Tait was also a public man and a family man.”

A picture of Peter Tait taken in 1874 in Constantinople

Courtesy John Waite Collection



Tait's Political Career

It was not surprising that Tait entered politics, as he was a very flamboyant character as well as being a close friend of William Monsell, MP for County Limerick.¹ Tait's step onto the political ladder came in 1865 when he was elected to Limerick City Council as an alderman for the Castle ward. Praise of him was not universal, as a letter to the *Limerick Reporter* in November 1865 stated:

*..our best citizens should stand aside, hat in hand, the moment the magic name Tait is mentioned... Is it not notorious that in the parishes of St. John's and St. Mary's the people have protested, and are protesting indignantly against the degrading Tait-worship that is being crammed down their throats?...where are the generous deeds done for the public by Mr Tait? Where are the public fountains, the lecture halls, the libraries for the working classes? Except his contributions to the public charities – given by every other citizen as well as him – where was even one pound of Mr Tait's money ever laid out except for his own direct profit and gain?*²

On 2 December 1865, he was unanimously elected as mayor, a role he would fill until 1 December 1868. He filled the role with pomp and splendour, reintroducing lost traditions of the role such as the 'throwing of the dart', in which he sailed to Scattery Island and fired three silver arrows into the Shannon. After this event in July 1867 he hosted a dinner at the Royal George Hotel, which was one of many lavish dinners that characterised his time in office.

In 1866, Tait became a founding member of the Shannon Rowing Club. In the same year Limerick held its first official regatta which was won by this new club. Following the win the club changed the name of their only boat from 'Brunette' to 'Rose' in honour of Tait's wife.

Tait resigned as both Mayor and from his seat in the Council, citing business commitments.³ This was followed by a squabble over the mayoral chain, in which Tait had removed two links and replaced them with a larger link of his own in recognition of his three-year mayoral reign. Eventually his link was returned to him and this was never replaced, leaving his mayoralty unrecognised on the chain.

On 5 December 1868, Tait was knighted by the Lord Lieutenant of Ireland 'in recognition of the services that he had rendered to the people of Limerick'. He was also appointed as a Deputy Lieutenant of Limerick.⁴ Tait's crest was described as follows 'out of a civic crown an arm in armour embowed, the hand grasping a red rose, slipped and leaved' with the motto the Latin of 'God give Grace'. These arms are on the Tait Clock, Baker's Place and the water fountain in O'Brien's Park, Clare Street.⁵

In 1868, Tait stood for parliament as an Independent although this was not clear during his election campaign and he was presumed to be a Conservative, which damaged his reputation with the local Catholic population. This signalled the end of Tait's popularity in the city. During the election 'an effigy of Sir Peter Tait was burned amid the mock 'keening' of the populace'.⁶ He failed to be elected and the *Limerick Reporter* later commented that:

When Sir Peter Tait started in Limerick as a candidate for popular favour, he was respected and esteemed, because the people did not then know him, and it was only on the occasion of the last election that the wolf in sheep's clothing stood forth in his true colours.⁷

Subsequently he unsuccessfully stood for Parliament in 1873 in his native Shetland as a Liberal and in 1874 in Limerick as a supporter of Home Rule.⁸

Tait the family man

On 23 June 1853 Tait married Rose Abraham (1834-1906) of 'Fort Prospect' near Janesboro in the Independent Chapel on Bedford Row.⁹ They had seven children:

- Elizabeth Anna (1855-1930) unmarried
- Margaret (1857-1933) unmarried
- Rose (1858-1946) married Salmon Linton
- Mary Jane (1859-1932) married Osborne Limrick
- Peter (1861-1902) married Emmeline Vavasour
- Barbara Isabella (1862-1950) married Edward Wilkins Waite
- Thomas William (1865-1904) married Amelia Jane Harding
- Evelyn Rosina (1866-1926) unmarried
- Alice Emily (1868-1944) married Isaac Bomford Emerson¹⁰

From 1853, the family lived in Southill House, near Limerick city, which had been built in the 1820s for the O'Brien family. In 1863 following a serious fire, it was extensively rebuilt at a cost of £1,500 under the direction of William Fogerty, who had previously worked for Tait on the building of the Cannock, Tait and Co. department store in 1858.¹¹ The grounds of Southill House contained a Richard Turner vinery erected by Tait, the shell of which still survives.¹² Tait sold the house in October 1873.

After Tait left Limerick he lived in various locations including Tingwall House, Poynder's Road and Clapham Park, London where he was residing in 1877.¹³ In 1881, Tait's wife Rose and children Elizabeth, Barbara and Thomas were living in 3, Boston Villas, Richmond, Surrey, England. Rose's occupation was 'Knights Wife Annuitant', as Tait was not at the address as he was in Eastern Europe attempting to secure new contracts.¹⁴ On his death in Georgia, he bequeathed his belongings of books, furniture and linen and the sum of just £50 to his wife Rose.¹⁵ Surprisingly his death was not recorded in the *Limerick Chronicle*, which had been one of Tait's strongest backers twenty-five years earlier.

Tait's Family Business

The Limerick Clothing Factory was very much a family concern and the following members of his family played a role in Peter Tait's business empire:

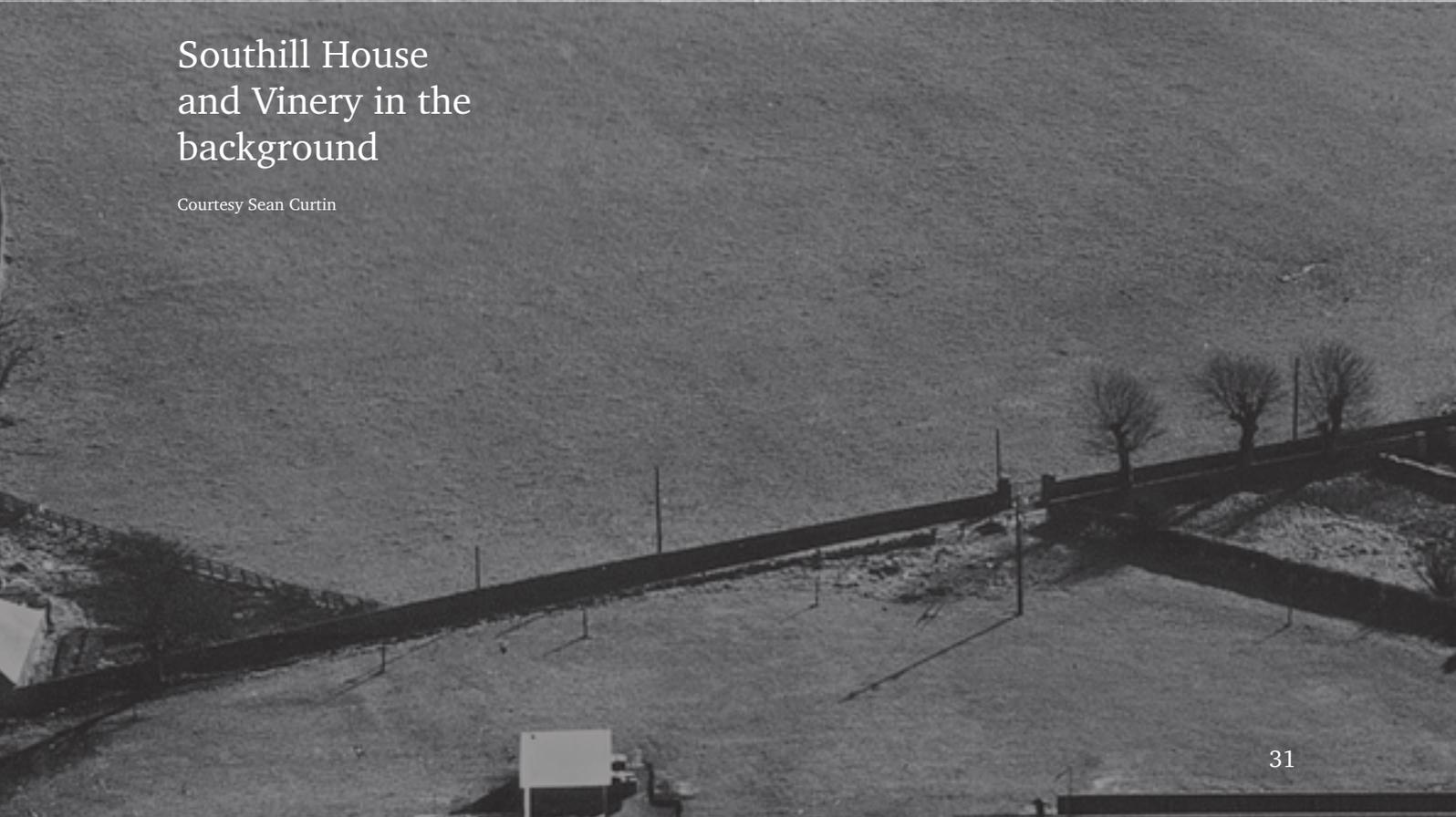
- James Tait (1824-1903) brother
- Robert Tait (1838-1903) brother
- Barbara Tait (1820-1885) sister
- Thomas Nicol (1843-1915) nephew
- Laurence Nicol (1847-Unknown), nephew
- Balfour Logie (1829-1915) brother-in-law
- William Abraham (1840-1915) brother-in-law
- Thomas Bruce Hamilton (1819-1896) husband of sister-in-law Margaret Abraham (1828-unknown)
- Peter Thom (1821-1886) husband of sister-in-law Marianne Abraham (1833-unknown)

In 1841, Barbara Tait married Alexander Nicol (1817-1848) and they had three sons including Thomas and Laurence and two daughters. After Barbara was left widowed with small children she entered into business with her brother James in Lerwick, Orkney, Scotland. In the 1851 census



Southill House and Vinery in the background

Courtesy Sean Curtin



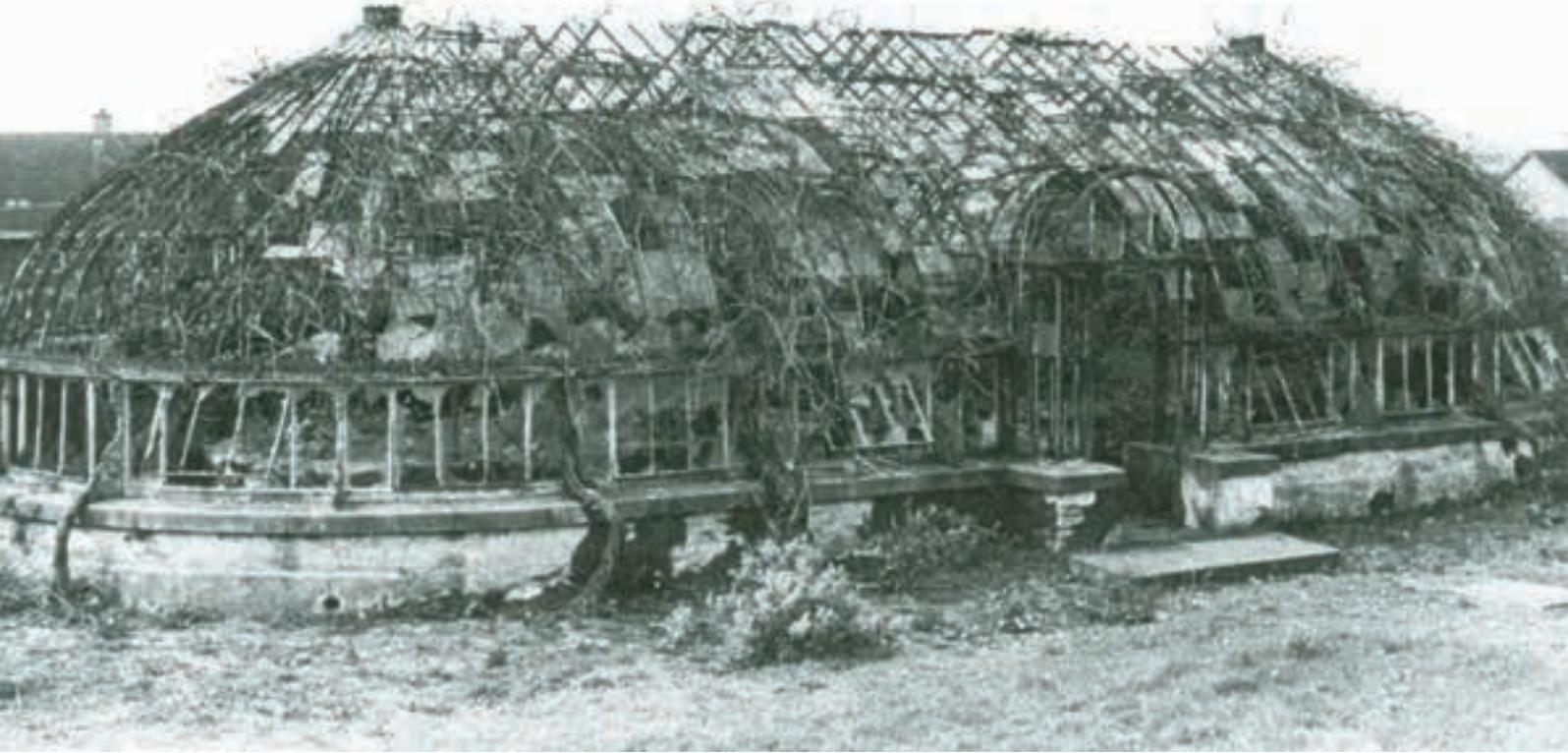
A picture of Rose
Tait taken in 1874
in Constantinople

Courtesy John Waite Collection





Southill House
Courtesy Limerick Museum



they were both recorded as 'Draper and Grocer'.¹⁶ It was through this business that she met Balfour Logie, nine years her junior, who worked for her as a storekeeper. The pair married in 1854 and had four children. Three years later, the company became Tait & Logie in Kirkwall, Orkney, Scotland. Following the closure of this business in 1860 Balfour Logie joined Peter in Limerick, while James Tait established Tait Bros & Co. in 190 Union Street, Southwark, London.¹⁷

It was through James' contacts in London that the Tait family became involved in the production of Confederate army uniforms. James was twice married, first in 1850 to Barbara Leslie (1830-1863), then in 1865 to seventeen year old Annabelle Noble (1848-1932) whom he met in Montgomery, Alabama during the American Civil War. While in America, James who already had a regular commission as a captain in the British army and a degree from the Bureau of Mines at Oxford University, received the honorary title of colonel from General Robert E. Lee. After some years in Europe, James and his family returned to America and lived on a large ranch near San Antonio, Texas for the rest of their lives.¹⁸

Robert Tait both lived and worked with Peter in Limerick and London. Robert was primarily responsible for the management of the Limerick branch of the Clothing Factory while Peter resided in London. During his time in Limerick, Robert became involved with one of the nursemaids at Southill House, Eileen Hinchy (1822-1881) who became pregnant with his son James Tait (1859-1892) and possibly a second child in 1862, which died in infancy. The affair became public knowledge when it was extensively and gleefully reported in the local press. After her son was removed from her, Hinchy was imprisoned a number of times for threatening the life of Peter Tait. In 1867, she was incarcerated in Limerick Lunatic Asylum where she remained until her death. Her son James remained for the most part with the Tait family until 1877 when he immigrated to Australia to take over a mining company.¹⁹

William Abraham was the son of William Abraham Senior (c.1793-1843) of Mount Prospect, Roxborough, Limerick, plant nurseryman, and his wife Elizabeth Knowles (1797-1871). One of William junior's sisters Rose Abraham was married to Peter Tait. From 1867, William junior worked as managing partner in the Limerick Clothing Factory.²⁰ He remained involved in the management of the factory through various changes in its management structure, even after it was finally sold by Tait in 1884, and in 1890 became a director of its successor, the Auxiliary Forces Uniform and Equipment Company. As an MP in 1886 and 1895, Abraham lobbied with some success to secure government contracts for the factory.²¹ The Abraham family were all connected with the Limerick Clothing Factory as William's other two sisters were married to two of its managers Peter Thom and Thomas Bruce Hamilton.²²

Endnotes

¹ Potter, Matthew, *First Citizens of the Treaty City*, (Limerick, 2007), p.126.

² *Limerick Reporter* 17 November 1865.

³ He was only in office a few short months when the seat of Mayor was being contested. Those months were filled with controversy as Tait was seen a puppet for the Protestant Conservatives in the city. In 1865 he spent a great deal of his time in London; in 1866 he attended nearly all the meetings of the council, and the following year this was down to eight of eighteen, then by in 1868 he only attended three meetings.

⁴ *Limerick Chronicle*, 28 November 1965. Shaw's *The Knights of England* (1906).

⁵ Burke, Bernard, *The General Armory of England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, Comprising a Registry of Armorial Bearings from the Earliest to the Present Time* (Harrison & son; London, 1884), p.995.

⁶ *Evening Post*, Volume V, Issue 50, 9 April 1869, P. 2.

⁷ *Limerick Reporter* 04 June 1869.

⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 30 September 1989. *The Nation*, 11 January 1873. Potter, *First Citizens of the Treaty City*, p.126.

Limerick and Clare Examiner, 29 June 1853.

'Peter Tait', p.286-8.

Hannan, Kevin, 'Sir Peter Tait', *The Old Limerick Journal*, Vol. 31, Winter 1994, p. 27; *Dublin Evening Mail*, 12 August 1863.

[http://www.buildingsofireland.ieReg. No.21901301](http://www.buildingsofireland.ieReg.No.21901301). Turner had also designed glasshouses at the National Botanic Gardens, Dublin and Kew Gardens, London.

Bassett Trade Directory, 1877, p. 3. *Guy Trade Directory*, 1886, p. 624.

Census Returns of England, Scotland and Wales, 1881.

'Peter Tait', p.285.

¹⁶ Census England Scotland and Wales, 1851, Yates Close, 1, Lerwick, Orkney, Scotland.

¹⁷ 'Peter Tait', pp.3, 9.

¹⁸ *The Tuscaloosa News*, 13 May 1932.

¹⁹ 'Peter Tait', pp. 94-103.

²⁰ *Cork Examiner* 21 September 1867. *Bassett's Trade Directory* 1875, p.16.

²¹ Patrick Maume, William Abraham, *The Dictionary of Irish Biography*, 2013, <http://dib.cambridge.org>.

²² T. B. Hamilton married Margaret the eldest daughter of William Abraham in 1851. He had worked as a bookseller in William Street. Peter Thom married Marianne the second daughter of William Abraham in 1852. He had worked in Arnott & Co.



Peter Tait and Company's Confederate Uniforms

By Fred Adolphus

Fred Adolphus is a native of Houston, Texas, with an abiding interest in his Confederate ancestors and Southern history. He holds history degrees from Texas A&M University and Louisiana State University (Master's). He has written numerous studies about Confederate uniforms, and regularly gives lectures on this and other Confederate topics. His book, "Peter Tait's Imported Confederate Uniforms" is the first in a series about Confederate uniform that he has completed. Fred presently works as the director of the US Army's museum at Fort Polk, Louisiana.

Peter Tait is best known in Limerick as a successful entrepreneur, business leader and a former mayor of the city. In the American South, he is remembered for the iconic uniforms that he supplied to the Confederacy during that country's civil war, from 1864 to 1865.

The Southern Confederacy could not manufacture all of the clothing it needed to supply its armies. It relied heavily upon imports to clothe its troops. From the start of the war, in 1861, Southern agents approached European suppliers to purchase the war material needed for their military. European merchants welcomed this source of revenue, and their industries moved quickly to furnish the Confederacy with weaponry, clothing materials and all sorts of equipment. This study focuses on the South's need for clothing, clothing materials and related items.

One of the South's most pressing needs was for the basic uniform cloth used to make its uniforms: the dark, blue-gray woolen kersey, called cadet or Confederate gray. To a lesser degree, Confederate agents sought out light blue kersey for making trousers, that being the regulation color of Confederate pants. It so happened that the British army used a dark, blue-gray kersey for its overcoats, and this fabric was suitable for making Confederate uniforms. Having already been in production, it was not difficult for European mills to manufacture Confederate gray and provide it quickly to Confederate agents. The Confederates also needed brass uniform buttons, trim cloth, gold lace, lining material, thread and various other accessories needed to finish military uniforms. Europe's factories all had the capability to provide such articles quickly and efficiently. The South also had to purchase shoes, due to the limited output of its own factories, and blankets, socks (stockings) and hats, since the factories for these articles were almost non-existent in the South. Many other sundry clothing items and materials were sought after, as well. Some of these articles were made to the specifications of the British army, such as shoes, and blankets (that were made in the standard, blue-gray British army color). In the case of hats, British factories provided a simple, cheap, wool felt, black-colored hat suitable for the common soldier.

Private Henry "Harry" Pillans, Company H, 62nd Alabama Infantry (1st Alabama State Reserves) owned the jacket.

Courtesy Mobile Museum of History, Mobile, Alabama

By 1863, about half way through the war, Southern agents began buying more ready-made clothing, as well as clothing materials. Such ready-made clothing included overcoats, made to the specifications of the British army in blue-gray kersey; shirts, also often made to British army specifications; and jackets and pants, the jackets made of blue-gray kersey, and the pants made either of blue-gray or light French blue kersey.

Confederate contracts often called for elaborate uniforms that included double-breasted great coats, French-style 'kepi' caps, and light blue trousers. These contract specifications were normally relaxed once in the hands of Confederate purchasing agents in Europe. The purchasing agents determined that better value could be obtained by utilizing the single-breasted, British army overcoat instead of the more elaborate Confederate greatcoat, and, by substituting the regulation light blue pants cloth with Confederate blue-gray kersey (the same color of cloth used for the over coats and jackets). Orders for caps were also dispensed with, and substituted with the more practical black, wool-felt hat.

Numerous countries provided war material to the South, some of the chief ones being France, Belgium, Prussia, Austria, and Mexico. Foremost of all the exporting nations, however, was England. Nonetheless, the best remembered for the finished uniforms it sent to the Confederacy was Ireland: home of Peter Tait's factory in Limerick.

Peter Tait, who had long been furnishing the British army with uniforms, entered the Confederate uniform trade in 1864. His first bid, in December 1863, to supply the Confederacy with pre-cut sets of clothing and some finished articles for £158,475, was declined as over-priced. The proposal included 50,000 cut sets that required sewing, of each: gray cloth caps, great coats, jackets, trousers, and gray flannel shirts, plus 50,000 finished army blankets, haversacks, and 100,000 pairs of army boots and woolen stockings. Tait lost the contract to his competitor, Alexander Collie. Subsequently, Tait completed much of the work he had proposed as a sub-contractor for Collie. This arrangement went badly, as Collie cheated Tait by not reimbursing him fully and by sending portions of Tait's cargo back to Great Britain. In any case, at least 53,600 uniform suits of jacket and trousers were delivered on the Alexander Collie contract, of which Tait had manufactured 48,100. Hebbert and Co., London manufactured the other 5,500. Tait also furnished an unspecified quantity of overcoats, shoes, socks, shirts, drawers, and blankets under the Collie contract.

Having learned from his overbid, Tait won at least two Southern contracts, thereafter. The first was for an unknown quantity supplies, similar to his first proposal, with the State of Alabama. This included pre-cut sets of jackets, pants and overcoats (omitting the caps, haversacks, stockings and shirts), and army blankets and shoes, as well as fine and coarse grade Confederate gray cloth. This invoice was delivered in September 1864, and was paid for in early 1865.

The second contract was with the Confederate government for completely finished, ready-made uniforms in October 1864. It included 40,000 suits of jacket and trousers, without caps and shoes, that the Tait company manufactured, but did not deliver because the war had come to an end. All three of the contracts that Tait made uniforms for amounted to approximately 100,000 uniforms.

Of all of Tait's contracts, he is best remembered for the uniforms that he provided to the Confederate quartermaster. These consisted of cadet gray jackets and trousers, the jackets having eight buttons on the front, and being cut to the pattern of the British army tunic without the skirt. The salient feature of this jacket is the single-piece back panel. Some of the jackets had shoulder straps, depending upon the contract specifications, and the uniforms were made for either the infantry or the artillery. Infantry suits had royal blue trimming, and the jacket buttons were stamped with the letter 'I' for infantry. The artillery suits had madder red trimming, and buttons stamped with 'A' for artillery. The jackets and pants were lined with unbleached linen, a typical Irish fabric. The size of the garment was stamped in the lining with black ink, per British army specifications. Tait's 'A' and 'I' buttons came in either a Roman block font or a manuscript font, but what is remarkable about them, is the innovative 'floating shank' that Tait introduced. The loose, movable shank on the backs of Tait's buttons mitigated button shank breakage when the uniforms were tightly bound in bales for shipping. As such, the uniforms withstood the process involved with handling, packing and moving, without sustaining broken buttons, and arriving at their destination in good order.

Tait made four variants of his jackets: a version with colored facings on the collar and shoulder straps (in either red or royal blue); a version without shoulder straps, but with colored facings on the collar (in red or royal blue); a plain version devoid of shoulder straps or colored collar facings; and, a version with edging on the collar and shoulder straps (only in royal blue). There are no records left to explain why Tait made all of these variants. We can only assume that he may have offered a reduced price for omitting shoulder straps or trim colors. Likewise, he made his trousers with either red or royal blue edging along the outer seams of the legs, and perhaps a simplified, plain version without edging. Tait did not make any cavalry uniforms, that would have had yellow trim color, presumably because the Confederate purchasing agents omitted this branch of service from the contract.

Tait also manufactured clothing for the Alabama State quartermaster. These were pre-cut sets that required assembly. This led to some irregularities, because the jackets were intended to be made on a machine, but were stitched together by hand. The Alabama quartermaster also reduced the number of buttons on the front from eight to five. The one surviving Alabama Tait jacket follows the pattern of Tait's infantry jacket with shoulder straps and royal blue-colored facings on both the collar and shoulder straps. The only surviving pair of Tait trousers is one of the Alabama contract pair. These trousers, made of the same dark, blue-gray kersey as the jackets, have red edging along the outer seams of the legs, signifying artillery.

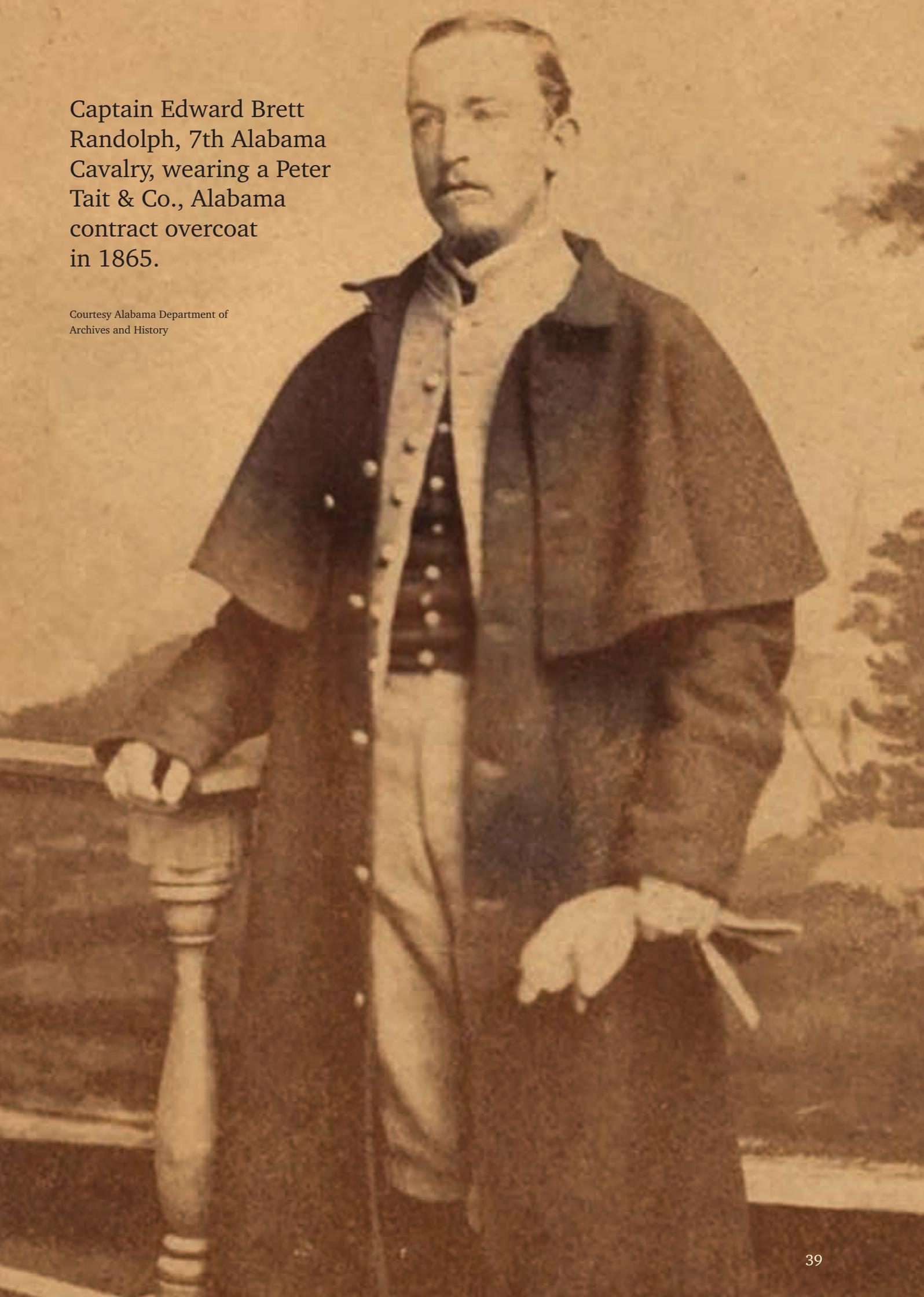
Tait also supplied the Alabama quartermaster with pre-cut overcoat sets, of the same pattern that an English firm had provided to the Confederate quartermaster in 1863, and cut to the same British army specifications. The Alabama contract also included 'English army' shoes.

When the Confederacy collapsed in April of 1865, Tait's business was destroyed. The loss of the payment for the final 40,000 uniforms that he made, and Collie's embezzlement, were too much for his company to bear, and Peter Tait went out of business. His remaining Confederate uniforms were sold to the Argentinian army in 1865, which used them during the War of the Triple Alliance in Paraguay the following year.

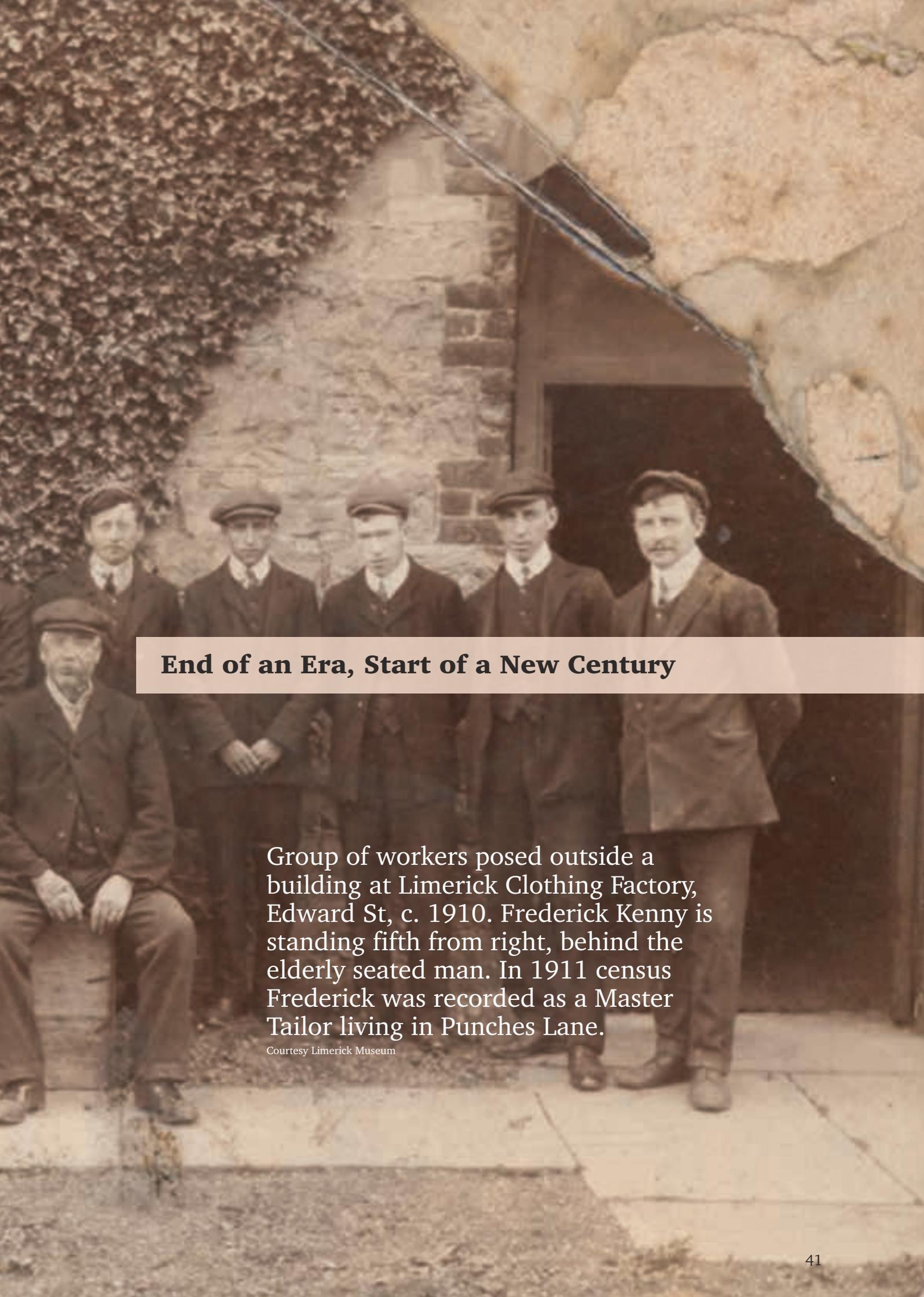
Ironically, Peter Tait's most enduring legacy, with regards to his exported Confederate uniforms, was that he produced a standardized type of uniform that was worn throughout the Confederacy. Due to a lack of centralisation, each Confederate factory produced its own type of jacket, giving each field army a different appearance. By contrast, Peter Tait produced a single type of uniform that was issued all across the South. From Virginia to Texas, Tait gave the Confederate army its one truly universal uniform. For his universal uniform and for having supplied the Confederate army so prolifically with clothing, Peter Tait will be remembered, and honored, in Dixie for all posterity.

Captain Edward Brett Randolph, 7th Alabama Cavalry, wearing a Peter Tait & Co., Alabama contract overcoat in 1865.

Courtesy Alabama Department of Archives and History







End of an Era, Start of a New Century

Group of workers posed outside a building at Limerick Clothing Factory, Edward St, c. 1910. Frederick Kenny is standing fifth from right, behind the elderly seated man. In 1911 census Frederick was recorded as a Master Tailor living in Punches Lane.

Courtesy Limerick Museum

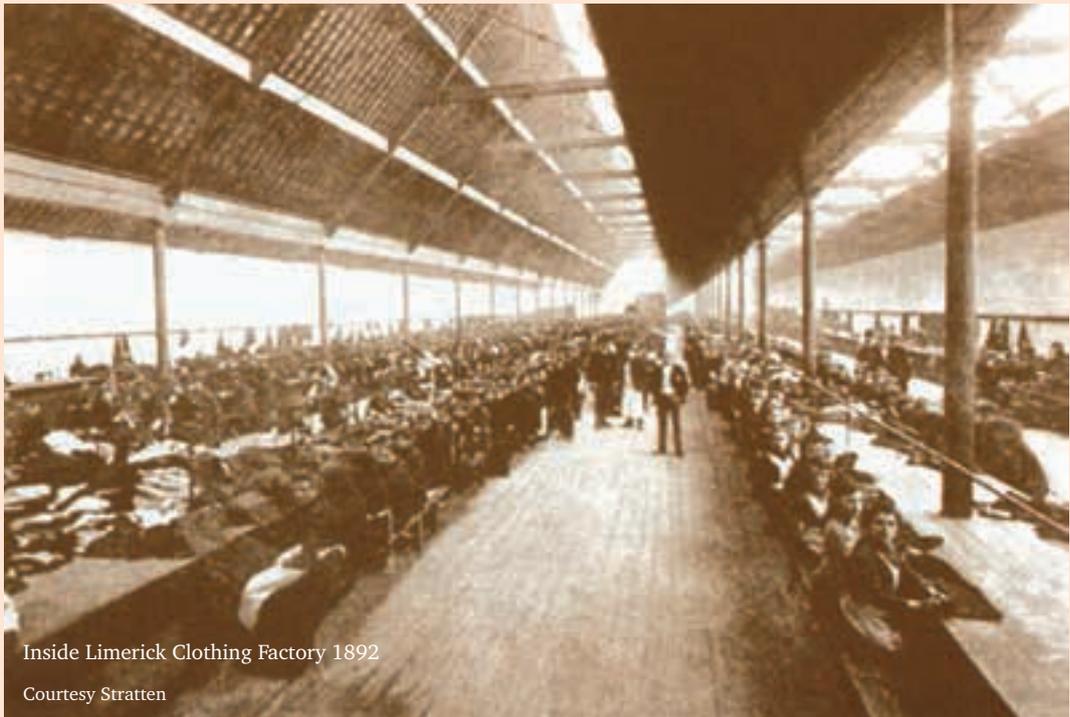
A military cloak
made in the
Limerick Clothing
Factory in 1879

Courtesy Armémuseum, Sweden



Post-Peter Tait

At the time of Peter Tait's departure from the Limerick Clothing Factory (LCF), Ireland as a whole was at the end of the mid-Victorian economic boom (1850-73) and was entering into the Long Depression (1873-96).¹ The fact that Tait's departure and the Depression coincided contributed to a widespread belief that Tait's departure had caused Limerick to slide into a recession, just as his arrival had brought prosperity to the city in the 1850s and 1860s. In reality, the rise and fall of his business ventures mirrored the economic cycle, not the other way around. The LCF continued to be influenced by the national economy, and enjoyed renewed success during the Edwardian Boom (1896-1914).² A partial exemption to this pattern is the period of the First World War when the LCF prospered due to the inevitable increase in demand for military uniforms, while the Irish economy experienced mixed fortunes.³



Inside Limerick Clothing Factory 1892
Courtesy Stratten

The Factory Re-Opens under New Management

Two years after its closure, the LCF reopened in 1877 under a new Board of Directors. The factory then traded as the Limerick Army Clothing Co. Ltd. To resolve his debts in Ireland, Peter Tait relinquished all interest in the factory to his brother, Robert, who became Managing Director.⁴ However, Robert was largely a figurehead and real control rested with the Board of Directors. In 1882, when a group of well-connected English army officers joined the Board of Directors, the LCF was incorporated as the Auxiliary Forces Uniform & Equipment Co. Ltd, 'to supply to the Auxiliary Forces and to persons connected therewith and others, uniform clothing and equipment of every description'.⁵ In the ensuing seven years (1882-9) the LCF only produced military uniforms.

The reopening of the factory brought with it fresh contracts from both the military and commercial sources and ensured that the LCF continued for the next ninety-seven years. In 1880, Robert Tait acquired a new contract for the 'uniforms of the artillery, the cavalry, and several of the line regiments. The estimated weekly wages, expenditure of the factory is calculated at close upon £400'. This kept over six hundred hands employed for three years.⁶ In 1880, Hugh Childers, the new Secretary of State for War was on a tour of Ireland to investigate the condition of the population following poor harvests. The Board of the LCF took advantage of the visit and invited him to view the factory and this proved fruitful as:

The right hon. Gentleman in conclusion promised that he would consider the claims of the Limerick army clothing factory on the Government for clothing contracts and also the other local matters mentioned in the address.⁷

In 1882, also due to Childers' influence, the factory received a 'fresh contract from the Government for the supply of seventy thousand garments for the British army. This is the third extra contract, which they have obtained within the past two months'. The local economy benefited greatly as 'some five hundred of whom, chiefly women, are now working overtime at the factory'.⁸

Despite these successes, the LCF became the subject of local concern in 1885 as English manufacturers demanded that army clothing contracts should be concentrated in the Government's army clothing factory in Pimlico. The loss of contracts would have had a detrimental impact on the local economy in Limerick. Fortunately, for the LCF due to their established track record, it was regarded by the Government with a degree of importance not offered to other companies of a smaller size in England. They weathered the storm and at the beginning of the year, LCF received another order for uniforms for the army posted in Egypt with a promise of further contracts throughout the year. This contract was due for completion in September without an order for renewal.⁹

Aerial Drawing c. 1900
Courtesy Limerick Clothing
Factory Anniversary Book



The cause of LCF was even taken up by Thomas Sexton, Nationalist MP for Sligo, acting on behalf of Charles Stewart Parnell who enquired in the House of Commons whether the 'contract for the Army at the Limerick Army Clothing Factory costs less than similar work done at the Government Clothing Factory in Pimlico'. He went on to ask:

whether the existing contracts now being executed by the Limerick Factory will be completed about the end of September, and whether, as a consequence of this and of the absence of fresh Government contracts, about a thousand hands are likely to be thrown out of employment in the city of Limerick, while the hands of the Pimlico Factory will be maintained in full work; and, whether, under these circumstances, the Department will give the Limerick Factory sufficient work to keep their hands employed during the winter months on the same terms as in the Government Factory at Pimlico?¹⁰

Dated 9th April 1884

*William Emmens Esq^r
and Another*

to

*Conveyance
of Household Premises
at Boherbuoy Limerick
Ireland*

Robert Thomas Tait Esq^r

Conveyance of premises at Boherbuoy, Limerick from William Emmens and Herbert Taylor of 9 & 10 King St., Cheapside, London to Robert Thomas Tait, 9 April 1884.

Courtesy Limerick Museum

Guy Dawnay MP, Surveyor General of Ordnance replied that 'work executed at the Limerick factory usually, but not invariably, costs less than work executed at Pimlico. In their latest contract for kersey frocks and tweed trousers, the Limerick prices exceeded in a marked manner those of Pimlico'. The conclusion was reached that if LCF could produce clothing at a cheaper rate than at Pimlico it would receive another contract.¹¹

As the contract for 1885 reached an end, new contracts were not forthcoming, which led Robert Tait to write to the Lord Lieutenant on 27 October, asking for the LCF to receive a larger share of the annual orders for clothing issued by the War Department. On 21 December, following a slump in production in LCF, R.G.C. Hamilton in the Office of the Lord Lieutenant replied stating that following a discussion with the Secretary of War's Department:

The annual orders for clothing for the year 1886 have now been placed, and that 112,000 garments have been allotted to the Limerick Factory in addition to an interim order for 20,000 given immediately after his Excellency's application. His Excellency hopes that the work upon these 132,000 garments will afford fair employment to the hands of the Limerick Factory during the whole of the year.¹²

This contract equated to:

an outlay among the people of Limerick of some £500 per week for the ensuing year, and is all the more desirable as employment in the city is very much needed just now.¹³

An initial order of 20,000 garments was placed immediately and increased to 100,000 the following year.¹⁴ Although this was warmly welcomed in Limerick it was met with opposition from other clothing contractors, as the LCF tender had been £1,600 below its nearest competitor. This issue was raised in the Commons by Sir Stafford Northcote who stated that the LCF's 'boasted generosity in finding employment for the poor Irish needlewomen' was in fact 'a big piece of 'sweating' in its worst form. He alleged that the LCF had only received the contract due to its exploitation of 'Irish cheap labour'.¹⁵ However, the LCF won its day and continued to receive contracts from the British War Office.

Hugh Childers

Courtesy Vanity Fair 19 June 1869





The Cutting Room

Courtesy John Waite Collection

The Removal of Robert Tait as Managing Director

Throughout this period, Robert Tait continued as Managing Director and in 1884, his contract was renewed for five years at an annual salary of £500 (equivalent to an income of €480,000 in 2017).¹⁶ He was mainly a figurehead and despite enjoying such a large salary, Tait embezzled £258 (€250,000 in 2017) over the next three years.¹⁷ The Board of Directors brought charges of mismanagement against Tait and brought in Edward Taylor (1846-1899) an English auditor to review his activities. However, Tait refused to allow the audit and refused to give up 'possession of anything unless the Board proposed to buy him out'.¹⁸

The Board of Directors did not take into account the popularity that Robert Tait enjoyed due to his brother's legacy in Limerick. On Taylor's arrival at the LCF, 'the workmen commenced cheer for Mr Tait and assumed so hostile an attitude towards Mr Taylor that he was obliged to leave'. This hostility continued for a number of weeks forcing the Board of Directors to seek an injunction in the Vice-Chancellor's Court in Dublin requiring Tait to surrender possession of both factory and its financial records to Taylor.¹⁹ Tait again refused to comply and the matter was only settled through the intervention of William Abraham, M.P. brother-in-law of Peter Tait.

In December 1889, an agreement was reached under which the LCF Board of Directors paid Robert Tait an undisclosed sum in return for his resignation as Managing Director and severance of all connection with the company. Interestingly the lack of any surviving company records before 1885 would suggest that he never complied with the court order to surrender these documents and they may now be lost. The 1889 agreement marked the final break between the Tait family and both LCF and Limerick city.²⁰ Robert moved to London where he lived for the rest of his life.

Taylor as Managing Director

Following the departure of Robert Tait, Edward Taylor was appointed Managing Director, a role he held from 1889 to 1899. Under the guidance of Taylor, the factory was completely reinvented by strengthening both the Board of Directors and the working life for the employees. Among his first acts was to bring in prominent Limerick businessmen James Bannatyne, Thomas Ferguson, Octavius Wallace and Stephen O'Mara as new investors and members of the Board. The company was renamed Limerick Clothing Factory and reverted to the traditional policy of producing uniforms for a wide variety of customers rather than exclusively for the military. Non-military contracts that had lapsed in the previous seven years were renewed and business grew rapidly under Taylor's guidance.²¹

However, the military remained the LCF's principal customer and during Taylor's period the factory not only supplied uniforms to the British Army, Navy and Police Force but also other parts of the British Empire such as British West Africa, British East Africa, Nigeria, Hong Kong, Bermuda, South Africa, Egypt, and Sudan as well as Belgium and Holland²² Ironically, Irish Nationalist Members of Parliament supposedly opposed to British Imperialism, were 'instrumental in securing for this factory several valuable army contracts'.²³

Under Taylor's expert guidance the LCF employed nearly 1,000 by 1892 and was 'by far the largest employment giving establishment in the City or in the South and West of Ireland'. Since his arrival he 'increased the number employed by one half, and practically reorganised the whole business'.²⁴

One of Taylor's most important innovations was the introduction of a civilian clothing section to the LCF. Department stores all over the country took orders and measurements from their customers which they forwarded to the factory for manufacture. The finished clothing was then sent back to the department store. In the 1890s, the LCF also sold clothing from a store in William Street.²⁵ Although an Englishman Taylor supported the fashionable 'Buy Irish' campaign of the period by endeavouring to use Irish made cloth in the civilian clothing sector.²⁶

Wedding Photograph of William Donnelly and Bridget Carroll taken in 1865. William is wearing a uniform created in the LCF for service in the army in India.

Courtesy Marian Neville



Taylor and staff welfare

Taylor was also a pioneer in the promotion of staff welfare in the LCF. At this period many employers introduced generous benefits to their workforce both to improve productivity and management staff relations but also for genuinely philanthropic reasons. Among the most famous of these in Ireland were Guinness Brewery, Bewley's Coffee and Jacob's biscuits.

Under Taylor and with the assistance of the then Roman Catholic Bishop of Limerick, Edward Thomas O'Dwyer, the LCF adopted many of these policies as is described in the Stratten review of 1892. A room was set aside for the workers to avail of:

wholesome food at a minimum cost. This room is capable of seating about 200, and is opened for breakfast, dinner, and tea. Although the hours worked do not necessitate, under the Factory Acts, any allowance of time for meals, except dinner, the operatives are allowed to break their work for the two other meals if they so desire.²⁷

Under Taylor, the LCF also introduced its own company pension scheme, which was not common during this period. Deductions were made from staff salaries from which it was estimated that the 'operatives will themselves provide a sufficient competency at an earlier age than that contemplated in the Government Pension Scheme'.²⁸ This pension could be availed of not only by the elderly but also by the infirm and there was no lower age limit. By contrast, the first state, non-contributory pension scheme in Ireland was not introduced until 1909 and was only available to those over the age of seventy.²⁹ The LCF also had a subscription fund for employees, which provided 'a substantial money payment on the death not only of the subscriber, but of any near relative of the subscriber'.³⁰

Further evidence for the good staff relations that prevailed under Taylor is provided by the very few complaints brought by LCF staff to the authorities. One of the few occurred in 1895 when Margaret Abraham, Inspector of Factories and Workshops based at Whitehall, London brought the LCF before the Petty Sessions alleging that Norah Healy and Bridget Ryan had not been allowed sufficient break time. On the same occasion, Abraham charged that the LCF had not whitewashed the inside of the inside of the factory as required by law to increase light and to prevent dust in the workplace. The company was found guilty on both counts and fined a total of six shillings and eighteen pence.³¹

This period also saw the beginning of the LCF summer excursions, concerts and readings in the winter.³² The 1899 tour was reported as follows:

The annual excursion of the employes (sic) of the Limerick Army Clothing Factory took place, a trip being arranged from here to Cork and Youghal at a very low fares. Some twelve hundred holiday-seekers, mainly Limerick lassies, in all the charm and variety of summer costumes, had a very pleasant day at the Southern capital or at the interesting old town by the estuary of the Blackwater. Two special trains were detailed for the conveyance of the large party, and it was 11 o'clock last night when the last of the party got home.³³

Snell as Managing Director

Following the death of Edward Taylor in 1899, Philip Snell (1855-1922) was appointed as Managing Director, a role he held until his own death in 1922.³⁴ The first major change Snell introduced was the expansion of the company to Dublin. In 1899, rooms were leased at 40 Ormond Quay, Dublin and advertisements were placed for 'Good Tailoresses wanted for finishing military garments'. This suggests that the main portion of the uniforms were still being produced in Limerick.³⁵ In 1900, the LCF moved from Ormond Quay to a factory at Lower Bridge Street, Dublin leased from a Thomas Vance.³⁶ The Dublin factory was primarily used to finish uniforms that had largely been made in Limerick. This expansion was largely due to the increased demand for military uniforms as a result of the second Boer War (1899-1902) in which many Limerick men fought.

THE LIMERICK
ARMY CLOTHING Co.
LIMERICK

8th Dec 1883

William Donnelly has been
in our employment as Porter
for the last year & half, we
have found him very sober
quiet and trustworthy he
leaves in consequence of the
work at the Factory being
stopped - we hope he will
soon find employment
to which we can recommend
him -

Respectfully
J. A. Hamilton

Letter of Recommendation. The Limerick Army Clothing Company. 8
December 1883, 'William Donnelly has been in our employment as porter
for the last year & half, we have found him very sober quiet and trust-
worthy he leaves in consequence of the work of the factory being stopped -
we hope he will soon find employment to which we can recommend him'

Courtesy Marian Neville

An original Royal Irish Constabulary Guards Hat with crowned harp badge, the remains of an old makers label The Limerick Clothing Company and ownership tag inside.

Courtesy Adams



Indeed there was a strong connection between the LCF and Limerick's role as a garrison town. This was symbolised by the close proximity of the factory and the New Barracks (now Sarsfield Barracks) on opposite sides of Edward Street. Many of the factories' workforce had husbands, fathers, sons and brothers in the British military. In 1899, both the company and its staff contributed £50 to the Transvaal War Fund, which provided pensions for soldiers.³⁷ The following year 'one of the wounded soldiers from the Boer war who returned to Limerick a few days ago paid a visit to the Limerick Army Clothing Factory and had a great ovation. He received no less than ten bullet wounds in the first crossing of the Tupelo'.³⁸

The importance of the LCF in Limerick's social and economic life can be seen in the 1901 and 1911 census returns. Around a thousand people worked for the LCF of whom 90 per cent were female. They appeared in the census returns under various occupations including machinist; stitcher; tailor/tailoress; tacker; trimmer; operative; factory worker; clerk; typer cutter; finisher; presser; time hand and stamper.³⁹ There was an increase in the economic standing of the area close to the factory as the workers of the LCF purchased food, clothing and entertainment. In 1891 alone, there were seven public houses on Edward Street, which undoubtedly benefited from their proximity to the LCF.⁴⁰

The First World War

Under Snell, the factory supplied uniforms to the Greek Army in the Balkan Wars (1912-13) but their biggest contracts to date resulted from the outbreak of the First World War in 1914. The start of war had a major though uneven impact on the city's economy. Although the war caused the traffic in Limerick port to drop drastically (from 454 vessels, carrying 190,000 tons of cargo in 1913, to 68 vessels, carrying 60,000 tons of cargo in 1918) the LCF enjoyed a major increase in productivity.⁴¹

During the course of the conflict, they supplied uniforms to the British, American and Australian forces.⁴² In September 1914 'up to 1,600 suits [military uniforms] of three garments each, including overcoats and jackets, are being made up weekly'.⁴³ Although production of civilian clothing continued, it declined as the war went on but as this line of production was only a small proportion of the total, it had little impact on the factory which was operating at full capacity. In 1915, the workers in both the Limerick and Dublin factories received a war bonus due to overtime production.⁴⁴ Many men associated with the LCF enlisted during the course of the war, be they the husbands and sons of operatives or men from the cutting room. One of these was Philip Snell Jnr, son of the Managing Director who was killed in action at Gallipoli in 1915.



Eamon de Valera wearing his Limerick Clothing Factory Volunteer uniform at his arrest in 1917.

Courtesy Military Archives

The LCF and 1916

The LCF did not allow politics to interfere with business, producing clothing for both sides of major conflicts. This was most strikingly illustrated during the First World War when the factory produced uniforms for the British armed forces while also acting as main contractor for the Irish Volunteers.

The Irish Volunteers were a paramilitary force founded in 1913 initially to put pressure on the British government to grant Home Rule but were later infiltrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood who hoped to use them as a means to fight for Irish Independence. From the start the leadership of the Volunteers clearly understood that the new movement would form the nucleus of an Irish national army and accordingly placed considerable emphasis on providing them with a proper uniform.

The first contract for supply of 300 Volunteer uniforms was awarded to the LCF, who would not proceed with manufacture unless a guarantee for £450 was signed by the Provisional Committee of the Volunteers.⁴⁵ This contract was awarded through the Dublin branch of the LCF as the Volunteers were based in Dublin. However, the uniforms themselves were largely made in Limerick and finished in the Dublin factory. The idea of 'Buy Irish' was integral to the Volunteer movement and the Morrogh Brothers, woollen merchants, Cork supplied the material for this order.⁴⁶

Among those whose Volunteer uniforms were made by LCF were Edward Daly, Pdraig Pearse and the future President Eamon de Valera. In 1933, de Valera visited the LCF in Limerick and referred to his Volunteer uniform having been 'turned out' at the factory.⁴⁷

Ironically, Philip Snell the Managing Director of LCF was among those injured in the 1916 Rising. In Easter 1916, he visited the company's Dublin factory, which was situated across the Liffey from the rebel stronghold in Four Courts. During the fighting he was accidentally injured which resulted in the amputation of his left leg. On his return to Limerick, he was met with a warm reception and was loudly cheered by his staff of LCF.⁴⁸

From Soviet to Civil War

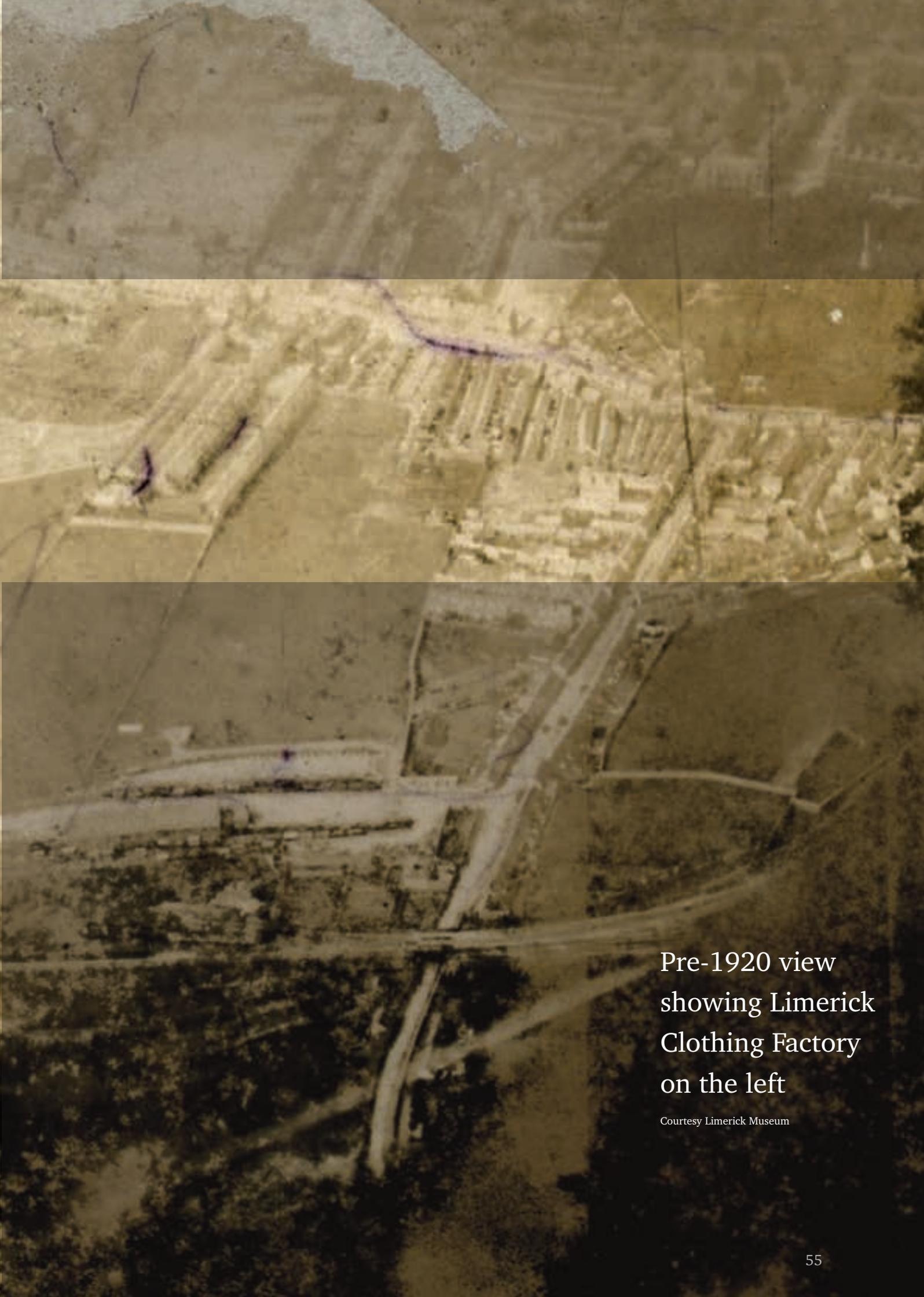
The unfortunate Snell continued to face serious challenges for the remainder of his term as Managing Director. In 1919 the Limerick Trade Council orchestrated a strike which lasted two weeks and became known as the Limerick Soviet. The strike was in reaction to Limerick city being placed under martial law by the British army.⁴⁹ The staff of LCF, consisting of approximately 600 workers were involved in this strike and the factory remained closed for the duration, only returning to work on Friday 25 April.⁵⁰ Although it is not known what effect the Soviet had on the LCF it was undoubtedly considerable as the dispute cost the city's economy £42,000 in lost wages and £250,000 in business turnover.⁵¹

During the War of Independence (1919-21) the LCF continued to supply uniforms to both sides in the conflict: the Irish Volunteers known after 1919 as the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and the British Armed Forces. However as the IRA were a guerrilla force and for the most part did not wear uniforms the factory relied chiefly on British contracts. Oddly enough the LCF seems not to have attracted any criticism from the local Sinn Fein and IRA for continuing to make uniforms for the Crown Forces presumably because of its importance to the local economy and the large number it employed.

During the War of Independence and subsequent Civil War (1922-1923), the LCF suffered a great many thefts of its uniforms. In 1921, the Royal Irish Constabulary claimed compensation for four bales of police uniforms valued at £780 stolen from a lorry travelling from the LCF to Limerick Railway Station which were never recovered.⁵² The following year a consignment of Irish military uniforms were stolen from the factory.⁵³

In 1921, Limerick Corporation established a short-lived police force for which the LCF provided uniforms. This contract came with an unprecedented informal tax on the company. This police force relied for funding on subscriptions from local businesses determined by a valuation carried out by the police themselves. LCF property was within the £200-£300 category, which carried an annual payment of £30.⁵⁴

The turmoil of this period was of great concern to both management and staff of the LCF. In 1922, Managing Director Snell died at the age of 67 having never fully recovered from the injuries he sustained in the 1916 Rising. Sean O'Dwyer recalls that his grandfather Tommy O'Connell who worked at LCF from 1916 to 1927 feared that an independent Ireland 'would be a disaster because the army [as he thought] would not need uniforms because the Volunteers wore trench coats, and he would be out of a job'.⁵⁵ However, his fears were not to be realised. The LCF still had a half century of business ahead of it.



Pre-1920 view
showing Limerick
Clothing Factory
on the left

Courtesy Limerick Museum

Endnotes

- ¹ Census of Ireland, 1871 and 1926. In 1871, 35 percent of the population in Limerick were employed in industrial employment this would fall to 24 percent by 1926.
- ² The LCF were gold medallist in Men and Boys clothing at the Belfast Industrial Exhibition 1895.
- ³ *Irish Examiner*, 20 May 1915.
- ⁴ Waite, *Peter Tait*, p.273.
- ⁵ *Limerick Chronicle*, 11 December 1883.
- ⁶ *Limerick Chronicle*, 7 March 1881.
- ⁷ *The Daily News*, 25 September 1880.
- ⁸ *The Standard*, 26 September 1882.
- ⁹ *The Star; Guernsey*, 24 January 1885.
- ¹⁰ Report of debates in Parliament, HC Deb 07 August 1885, vol.300, c1458.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*,
- ¹² *The Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser*, 28 December 1885.
- ¹³ *Ibid.*,
- ¹⁴ *The Aberdeen Weekly Journal*, 2 January 1886.
- ¹⁵ *The Western Times*, 17 February 1887.
- ¹⁶ <https://www.measuringworth.com/>, accessed 07 December 2016.
- ¹⁷ *Irish Examiner*, 6 December 1889.
- ¹⁸ Tait, through his solicitor John Dundon (1846-1915), informed Taylor that he would not allow the stock-taking to go ahead John Dundon was the law advisor to the Limerick Corporation from 1894 until his death in 1915.
- ¹⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 6 December 1889.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*,
- ²¹ The Story of LCF 1850-1950.
- ²² *Ibid.*,
- ²³ *New Zealand Tablet*, 30 January 1891.
- ²⁴ *Dublin, Cork, and South of Ireland: A Literary, Commercial, and Social Review* (London: Stratten and Stratten, 1892), pp 275-76.
- ²⁵ *Irish Examiner*, 23 August 1897.
- ²⁶ Stratten, pp 275-76.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*
- ²⁸ *Ibid.*
- ²⁹ Old Age Pensions Act 1908.
- ³⁰ Stratten, pp 275-76.
- ³¹ Limerick Petty Session records, 3 May 1895, items 636-8.
- ³² *Irish Examiner*, 4 September 1899.
- ³³ *Ibid.*, 8 August 1899.
- ³⁴ *Yorkshire Post and Leeds Intelligencer*, 29 July 1922. He left £18,458 in his will.
- ³⁵ *Freeman's Journal*, 7 December 1899.
- ³⁶ Limerick Museum, 1994.0056. Three members of the Board of Directors signed the lease Thomas B. Ferguson, Alexander William Shaw and Octavius Wallace the latter two taking responsibility for rent while Philip Snell, manager and H.M. Griffiths, accountant (later Managing Director) witnessed the signing of the lease.
- ³⁷ *The Standard*, 18 November 1899.
- ³⁸ *Catholic Journal*, September 1900.
- ³⁹ Census of Ireland, 1901 and 1911.

⁴⁰ *The Limerick city and counties of Limerick and Clare* (Limerick: Ashe, 1891).

⁴¹ Liam Cahill, *Forgotten Revolution: Limerick Soviet 1919 : a Threat to British Power in Ireland* (Dublin: O'Brien Press, 1990), pp 32-36.

⁴² *The Story of LCF 1850-1950*.

⁴³ *Evening Herald*, 23 September 1914.

⁴⁴ *Irish Examiner*, 20 May 1915.

⁴⁵ Irish Volunteers Uniform Subcommittee report dated August 12th 1914, South Dublin Libraries Subcommittee.

⁴⁶ John Morrogh (1849 - 1901) he was involved in the working of the Kimberley diamond mines and became a director of De Beers Consolidated Mines, South Africa, founded Morrogh Brothers following his return to Ireland in 1887.

⁴⁷ *The Kerryman*, 7 October 1933.

⁴⁸ *Irish Independent*, 8 September 1916.

⁴⁹ Cahill, *Forgotten Revolution*, pp 59-78.

⁵⁰ *Irish Examiner*, 14 & 28 April 1919.

⁵¹ Potter & Slater, *Limerick's Merchants Traders and Shakers; Limerick Leader*, 12 May 1919.

⁵² *Limerick Leader*, 25 October 1921.

⁵³ *Anglo-Celt*, 18 March 1922.

⁵⁴ Limerick Archives, Limerick Police Force 1922 IE LA L/PC.

⁵⁵ Interview Sean O'Dwyer by Sharon Slater, 15 June 2015.





A New Country, a New Factory

The Limerick Clothing Factory c.1950

Courtesy LCF booklet

"Shannowear" D.B. Fawn Overcoat



Sample of overcoat created in
Limerick Clothing Factory 1950

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book

Post-Independence

New Economic Climate

After Independence, the Limerick Clothing Factory (LCF) faced new challenges as the economic landscape of the country changed radically.¹ The most serious of these was the potential loss of the British market as that country's armed forces had long been the LCF's main customer. Also, the Great Depression of the 1930s posed unprecedented challenges to the entire world economy and Ireland was no exception. Independent Ireland's response to these challenges can be split into three distinct periods. The first from 1922 to 1932 saw the continuation of free trade with the United Kingdom.² The second from 1932 to 1959 was a period of economic protection when tariff walls were constructed behind which indigenous Irish industries were developed. Every effort was taken to boost tillage farming and industry and to encourage the population to avoid British imports and 'Buy Irish Goods'.³ During this period, the Economic War waged with Britain from 1932 to 1938 proved particularly challenging to the Irish economy. The third period from 1959 to the present saw the slow removal of tariffs and a major emphasis on foreign direct investment (FDI). This prepared the way for the introduction of free trade as a result of the Anglo-Irish Free Trade Agreement (1965) and Ireland's accession to the European Economic Community (1973) and the collapse of most Irish indigenous industries in the 1960s and 1970s.

Until the 1960s the LCF met these challenges successfully and remained the largest clothing factory in the State.

Griffiths as Managing Director

The new era in Ireland coincided with the appointment of a new Managing Director in LCF, Henry Maxwell Griffiths (1868-1951). He took office in 1922 following the death of Phillip Snell and served until 1933. Unlike previous Managing Directors, Griffiths was Limerick-born and had worked his way up through the ranks of the LCF.⁴

After Independence a new police force, an Garda Síochána, was formed in the Irish Free State. The LCF had previously held the contract for uniforming the RIC. Therefore it is not surprising that in 1922 the factory won the first tender to supply the entire Garda Síochána with uniforms.⁵ This was to be the largest order issued by the Gardai for many years as the entire force was being outfitted for the first time. Subsequent contracts were much smaller as they consisted only of orders for new recruits and replacements for worn out uniforms. The LCF were not always successful in securing the annual Garda contract which was won over the years by several different clothing companies.⁶

In addition, the LCF secured the contract from Dail Eireann for uniforming the newly created Irish Army. Dail Eireann stipulated that the cloth for this order should be Irish made. The first order of cloth was manufactured in Galway.⁷ Unfortunately due to the disruption of the time three bales of cloth ordered for this contract and valued at £200, were stolen on route from Galway to the LCF.⁸

Buy Irish

Both before and after Independence, Irish Nationalists hoped to promote economic growth by encouraging the public to purchase Irish products, which became known as the 'Buy Irish' policy. The LCF supported this policy, by using Irish cloth where possible, aggressively advertising their products as Irish made and developing its relationship with the Tailoring Trade Board established in 1926 by Patrick McGilligan, Minister for Industry and Commerce, to promote the Irish clothing industry.⁹ Furthermore, the company took an active part in the 'Buy Irish' campaign of 1932.¹⁰

Realistically, the LCF demand for cloth far outweighed what could be produced in Ireland, so throughout this period cloth continued to be imported from Leeds and London. This was recognised even by Sean Lemass, Minister for Industry and Commerce when in 1938, he told the Managing Director of the LCF that he understood that although the company wished to produce clothing from locally sourced material, this was not commercially viable.¹¹ During the Second World War the LCF could no longer rely on England for the bulk of its raw material and had to source it from Brazil, Argentina, Mexico, Switzerland, Portugal and Spain.¹²





Staff members in 1927.

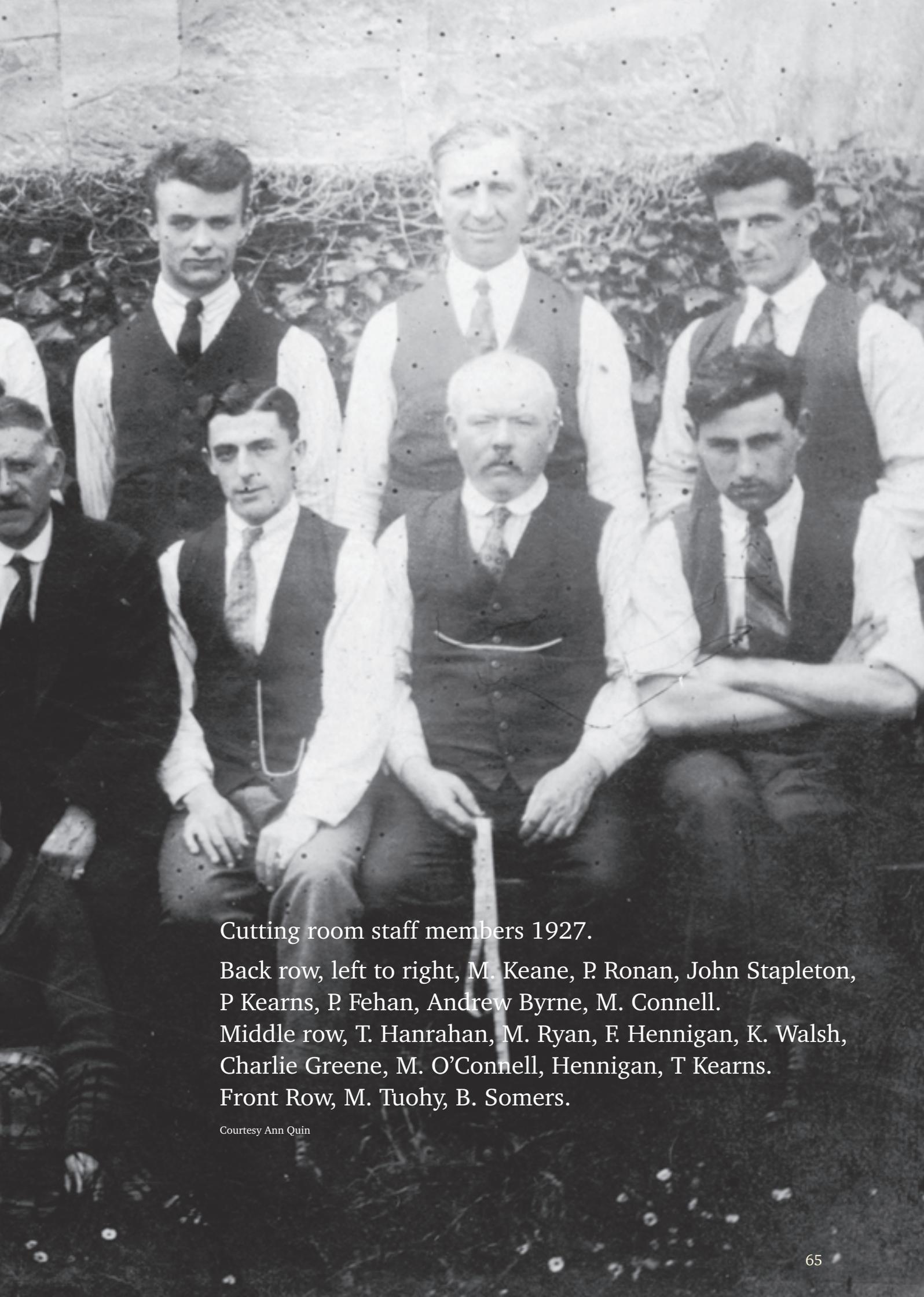
Back row, left to right, B. Magee,
Lizzie Williams.

Middle row, Tom Hannon, N. Tracey,
L. Gubbins, unknown, J Hanrahan.

Front row, Kate Walsh, unknown,
Leamy, Roche.

Courtesy Ann Quin





Cutting room staff members 1927.

Back row, left to right, M. Keane, P. Ronan, John Stapleton, P Kearns, P. Fehan, Andrew Byrne, M. Connell.

Middle row, T. Hanrahan, M. Ryan, F. Hennigan, K. Walsh, Charlie Greene, M. O'Connell, Hennigan, T Kearns.

Front Row, M. Tuohy, B. Somers.

Courtesy Ann Quin



A military jacket made by
Limerick Clothing Factory in
1927 for the Branch army
Courtesy Armémuseum, Sweden

Overall, the 'Buy Irish' campaign had little impact in the clothing sector in Ireland. Irish produce already dominated the domestic clothing market. However like the wider Irish industrial manufacturing sector, clothing manufacturers failed to penetrate the export market to any great extent. In 1920 in Dublin alone, of the sixty-four clothing manufacturers only nine exported their produce.¹³

Shannowear: The transition to Civilian Clothing

A major turning point in the history of LCF occurred in the 1920s when the company greatly increased its output of civilian clothing. Although it had produced civilian clothing since the 1890s, it was available on a made-to-order basis and never amounted to more than an estimated five percent of total output.¹⁴ In the aftermath of the First World War the market for military uniforms dropped sharply while increasing prosperity led to a corresponding increase in demand for mass produced off-the-peg civilian clothes. The LCF responded to this shift by increasing its output of civilian clothing tenfold.¹⁵ By 1950, uniforms accounted for less than a third of the factory's overall output.¹⁶

In the early 1930s the introduction of the 'Shannowear' and 'Shannomac' labels at the height of the 'Buy Irish' campaign, led to the names becoming synonymous with quality Irish clothing. In 1940, it was stated that:

The Limerick Clothing Factory is the only factory in Eire manufacturing every variety of clothing: raincoats and waterproofs for ladies, men and boys, attractively cut in the newest styles and a household word under the brand name of 'Shannomac'. Men's and boys ready-to-wear suits, overcoats, sports coats, flannel trousers, golf jackets, pull-ups, ladies coats, etc., market under the brand name of 'Shannowear'. It is most interesting to note here that the coat of a man's suit passes through 22 hands and 22 machines before it is completely ready for wear.¹⁷

The LCF was very protective of its reputation for innovation. In 1932, there was a public controversy over the question of what company in Ireland had first produced the waterproof raincoat bonded with an iron, rather than sown, as had previously been the case.¹⁸ Hargreaves Ashmore and Co., a Dublin Company, claimed that they were about to produce a gabardine style raincoat for the first time in Ireland. The LCF rebutted this in the *Irish Independent*, stating 'as a matter of fact the Limerick Clothing Factory have manufactured such garments for some years'.¹⁹



A military coat made by Limerick Clothing Factory in 1926 for the British army

Courtesy Armémuseum, Sweden

Right: *Cork Examiner* 24 August 1932

Left: *Cork Examiner* 22 August 1934



Crabtree as Managing Director

Between 1933 and 1944, the position of Managing Director (MD) was left vacant though Charles Arthur Crabtree (1888-1973) acted as General Manager throughout this period before becoming Managing Director.²⁰ A native of Leeds, Crabtree served as MD until 1961 making his twenty-eight years in both roles the longest period at the helm of the LCF in its entire history. He was responsible for many changes in the company, including the provision of a hall for the social club, the organisation of the 100th anniversary celebrations and the encouragement of many other social events within the factory. This bolstered a sense of community in the LCF that would remain up to the factory's closure.

The advent of the Second World War created another boom for the LCF. New sewing machines were introduced into the factory which rapidly increased production and the need for additional staffing. Immediately prior to the war, the Irish Department of Defence placed an order for 16,000 uniforms to dress the Volunteer Force, which later became known as An Forsa Cosanta Áituil (FCA).²¹

In August 1940, the LCF also received an urgent order from the regular Irish Army. In order to complete this on time the government requested the LCF to cancel their annual two-week closure, which would mean that the staff working on military contracts would have to forego their summer holidays. The



Arthur and Gladys Crabtree seated 4th and 5th from the left.

Courtesy Sean Curtin

Sample of men's suit created in
Limerick Clothing Factory 1950

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book



"Shannowear" 3-piece suit

Speeches at the anniversary luncheon 1950

Courtesy Limerick Museum



employees, a considerable number of whom were affected, promptly fell in with the suggestion and agreed to a postponement of their holidays. The immediate response of the employees to the 'work-on' appeal was much appreciated by the management. The employees who were engaged on civilian work got their holidays as usual.²²

The LCF also received many war related contracts at this time including uniforms and anti-gas clothing for the newly established Air Raid Precaution (ARP) wardens and uniforms for the Naval Service as well as the contract for the Garda Síochána.²³ Although Ireland remained neutral during the war, the LCF produced uniforms for the British and American Armies.²⁴ The British Government even supplied the LCF with material for the production of their own uniforms.²⁵ Throughout the war, the factory turned out between three and four thousand complete military uniforms per week.²⁶

The war also affected the LCF in other ways. The LCF was designated as a 'Fire-fighting, Rescue and Demolition' zone with a dedicated trained squad assigned to the building.²⁷ This meant that in the case of a fire in the city the LCF was to act as a meeting point for volunteer fire fighters and emergency personnel. As part of this role, part of the factory site was used to store large quantities of firefighting and emergency equipment. On the 15 September 1941, ARP wardens issued large numbers of gas masks from the factory to the general public.²⁸

As part of the city's response to the war, Limerick Corporation decided that from 6 July 1940, no sirens would be sounded for industrial purposes in the city but only in the case of emergencies such as an air raid. This meant that the LCF would no longer be able to denote start times, break times and end times using a siren. Regulations were introduced which stipulated that in the event of an air raid all major factories in the city including LCF would sound their sirens for a full two minutes. The all-clear would be given by the ringing of hand bells by the ARP wardens.²⁹

After the War

With the ending of the war a significant birthday loomed. In June 1950, three years before the official founding of the company, the 100th anniversary of LCF was marked in two ways.³⁰ A commemorative book was produced and issued to each member of staff.³¹ This book, which is lavishly illustrated is a major source for the history of the factory. Maura Stapleton who was interviewed in connection with the present publication is pictured working at her machine. A series of on-site and off-site events were

Centenary lunch, Mr Crabtree at left end of the table.

Courtesy Limerick Museum



also held on 12 and 13 June 1950. On the 12 June, several dignitaries were given a tour of the factory followed by a luncheon in Cruise's Hotel. They included Taoiseach John A. Costello, Minister for Local Government Michael J Keyes - a Limerick man, Minister for Industry and Commerce Liam Cosgrave, Mayor of Limerick, G.B. Dillon, and the Roman Catholic and Protestant Bishops of Limerick. To mark the occasion Managing Director Crabtree announced that the staff working after 2:15pm that day would be paid double time for their services.³²

Maura Stapleton recalls that on the following day:

For the 100 anniversary we had a Garden Party in the yard [for all the staff], they brought in the Boherbuoy Band, everyone wore their best dress and hat. I wore a grey dress with pink flowers embroidered on it and an off-white hat. We danced to the band and ended up in the crowd dancing in the yard who danced out the gate and down the street.³³

She also remembers that 'there was a fashion show and Chrissy Ryan won the fashion show. She wore a green frock with matching hat. That day she came in and no one knew her'.³⁴ Rachel Carey recalls that other members of staff dressed up on the day including her mother Agnes Carey who played the part of Rose Tait, Peter Tait's wife while Annie Keyes played the role of Tait himself.³⁵

Despite these celebrations, LCF faced many challenges at this time. The end of the war resulted in an inevitable decline in the production of military uniforms. During the generally peaceful 1950s, demand for military uniforms remained low and the established civilian line did not compensate for this loss as the overall Irish economy went through a major crisis in the 1950s, which reduced domestic demand considerably. The LCF had to work three-day weeks on a regular basis.³⁶ Breda Finn remembers that her aunt Mary Welsh would be in a foul mood during these slack times, so much so that the family would call anyone in a foul mood 'like Mary Welsh on short-time'.³⁷ In 1959 the Minister for Posts and Telegraphs stated in the Dail that 'the Limerick Clothing Factory Ltd. have contracts at present for the supply of approximately 20,000 articles of woollen clothing, of which 18,500 remain to be delivered.' The cost of this tender was not disclosed.³⁸ The reality was that while the LCF was still receiving contracts, they were fewer than in previous decades.



“For the 100 anniversary we had a garden party in the yard, they brought in the Boherbuoy Band, everyone wore their best dress and hat. I wore a grey dress with pink flowers embroidered on it and an off-white hat. We danced to the band and ended up in the crowd dancing in the yard who danced out the gate and down the street.”

Maura Stapleton



Factory workers in their best dress
for the 1950 Garden Party
Courtesy Limerick Museum



Groups of factory workers and children outside the old helmet building, 1950

Courtesy Limerick Museum





Annie Keyes & Agnes Carey dressed as Mr & Mrs Tait at the 1950 Garden Party. The woman in back left holding the handbag was Nellie Clancy.

Courtesy Limerick Museum

Rival Clothing Factories in Limerick

The LCF also faced new challenges in the post-war years from the emergence of two rival clothing factories in Limerick, Danus and Crescent Clothing both of whom specialised in civilian clothing.

Anthony O'Donovan whose family had been tailors for several generations founded what became the Danus Company. In 1918, O'Donovan and his wife opened his first workshop at 27 Patrick Street, Limerick above a show store where the couple produced twelve handmade suits per week. In 1936, they opened a factory at 10 Patrick Street, where they began a production line and supplied wholesalers and large Limerick stores. The firm changed location several times before settling in Dominic Street in 1953. Soon the O'Donovan's were joined in the firm by their children and in 1947, the firm changed its name to Danus.³⁹ The O'Donovan's business emerge as serious competitor to the LCF in 1957 when it switched from predominantly hand stitching to full mechanisation. This led to a major increase in production and by 1961, Danus was able to produce a staggering 1000 suits a week.⁴⁰ This shift to mechanisation caused some of the staff from the LCF who were skilled in machine work to move to Danus.

Another rival to the LCF civilian range was Crescent Clothing Ltd. established in 1953 by Florence O'Shea, Stephen Kearney, Joe Hannon and Paddy Finucane, all former employees of Danus. Originally located at the site of the Belltable Theatre, 69 O'Connell Street, Crescent Clothing later transferred to the former Leamy's School, Hartstonge Street. Eventually its workforce grew to a total 150. Crescent Clothing continued trading in Limerick until 1993 when it was forced to close due to poor sales.⁴¹

The Arrival of Aquascutum

In 1961, Crabtree retired and the title of Managing Director retired with him. Frank Grayson (1919-2007), a floor manager replaced him as general manager overseeing the day-to-day running of the factory until the merger with Aquascutum in 1969.⁴²

Grayson's term of office coincided with a major change in the economic climate for Irish clothing and textile industries. The slow dismantling of tariffs that began in the late 1950s resulted in a steady increase in cheap foreign imports. The numbers employed in the sector declined by 0.2 percent from 1961 to 1971, by 28.7 per cent from 1971 to 1981 and by 19.9 per cent from 1981 to 1991.⁴³ By 1977, Free Trade was firmly established and the 44 firms attending a meeting of the Irish Apparel Industries Federation were struggling. A decade later, at the same meeting only four of them were still trading, reflecting the economic woes of indigenous Irish industries as members of the European Economic Community.⁴⁴

Inevitably, the challenge of Free Trade affected the LCF, who found it difficult to compete with the influx of foreign import throughout the 1960s. In 1966, the factory suffered due to a major strike by the Electricity Supply Board. A strike at the hydro-electric power station at Ardnacrusha stopped the supply of electricity to Limerick for three weeks. Factories such as Krups, who had their own backup generators, were able to continue for a short period but by contrast, many others including LCF and Danus had to shut down completely.⁴⁵

By 1968, due to these challenges, the LCF was at a low ebb. It had a capital value of only £100,000 with a small profit of £12,000.⁴⁶ This left no scope for essential modernisation and reinvestment. From its height of over 1000 employees the LCF now only had a staff of 270. To deal with these challenges the LCF had little option but to accept a takeover offer from British waterproof coat manufacturing company Aquascutum.

Aquascutum was founded in London in 1849 and its history closely resembles that of the LCF. Aquascutum also received an early boost through securing contracts from the British Army during the Crimean War. During the First and Second World Wars, it produced waterproof fabric coats for officers, as well as the trench coats worn by soldiers of all ranks.⁴⁷ From the 1950s onwards Aquascutum specialised in civilian wear.



Workers in the Limerick Clothing Factory 1972
Courtesy Limerick Leader

The name Aquascutum was immortalised in a song 'London in 1849'.⁴⁸

*O such a town, such a classical metropolis;
Tradesmen common English scorn to write or speak;
Bond-street's a forum – Cornhill is an acropolis.
For every thing's in Latin now but what's in Greek:
Here is a Pantehnicon, and there is an Emporium,
Your shoes are "antigropelos", toy boots of "pannuscorium;"
"Fumi-porte chimney-pot," "Eureka shirts" to cover throats,
"Idrotobolic hats," and patent "Aqua-scutum over-coats".⁴⁹*

Aquascutum's connection with Limerick began in 1969 when it took over the Danus company. Danus had faced losses of 30 per cent in the previous year.⁵⁰ As part of the trade deal Danus retained its own brand identity and Donal O'Donovan remained on as manager.

While in Limerick, the management of Aquascutum saw the potential of the LCF and set about acquiring this company for its portfolio. Negotiations lasted a few months and by November 1969, the merger was complete.⁵¹ The LCF was led by chairman of the Board of Directors, George Edward (Ted) Russell, a prominent Limerick businessman and politician, while Aquascutum was represented by their chairman Gerald Abrahams.⁵²

As with Danus, LCF was to retain its own identity, with Russell remaining as chairman of the Board of Directors while Jack O'Toole and Patrick Fagan became Irish directors and the English directors were



Limerick Clothing Factory press conference 27 April 1970
Courtesy Limerick Leader

Abrahams and Frank Larcombe of Aquascutum.⁵³ As part of the deal Aquascutum modernised the existing factory and erected a new office wing.⁵⁴ Both factories ceased producing boys clothing following their merger.⁵⁵

Although Aquascutum acquired both Danus and LCF the two companies retained their separate identities and continued to trade under their respective company names. This gave great hope in Limerick for the survival of both of these clothing industries after the arrival of Aquascutum. As the two largest clothing factories in Limerick were now owned by the same company it became easier for staff to relocate between Danus and LCF as required.⁵⁶

The Limerick Clothing Factory under Aquascutum

However, Aquascutum also made a number of promises that were not realised. They undertook to increase the combined workforce of Danus and LCF from 700 to 1000 and export sales were to quadruple to a quarter of a million pounds over the following two years.⁵⁷ Indeed Aquascutum proved not to be the saviour of the LCF but in many respects hastened its downfall.

Discontent with the new owners emerged within six months of the merger. Early in 1970, a strike affecting one hundred workers occurred in the cutting room when Aquascutum attempted to introduce a new payment system. Previously cutting room workers received a higher rate of pay when they produced specialised individual pieces than when they produced uniform sized pieces. The workers argued that specialised sized clothing required extra attention to detail, as each section of cloth was cut by hand whereas uniformed sized pieces were stacked and cut with a clothes saw. The dispute was quickly resolved when the company agreed to retain the original system.⁵⁸

In 1971, concern over the position of both LCF and Danus was raised publicly when Councillor Joe Quinn told his colleagues in Limerick Corporation that both were flourishing under Aquascutum's ownership. The staff at LCF were all members of the Irish Transport and General Workers Union



Limerick Clothing Factory press conference 27 April 1970
Courtesy Limerick Leader

(ITGWU) as were their colleagues in Danus. In response Robert James Richardson, secretary of the Danus section of the ITGWU, told the Council that this was not correct and Donal O'Donovan told the press that 'in fact some sections have been slack for five to eight months'.⁵⁹

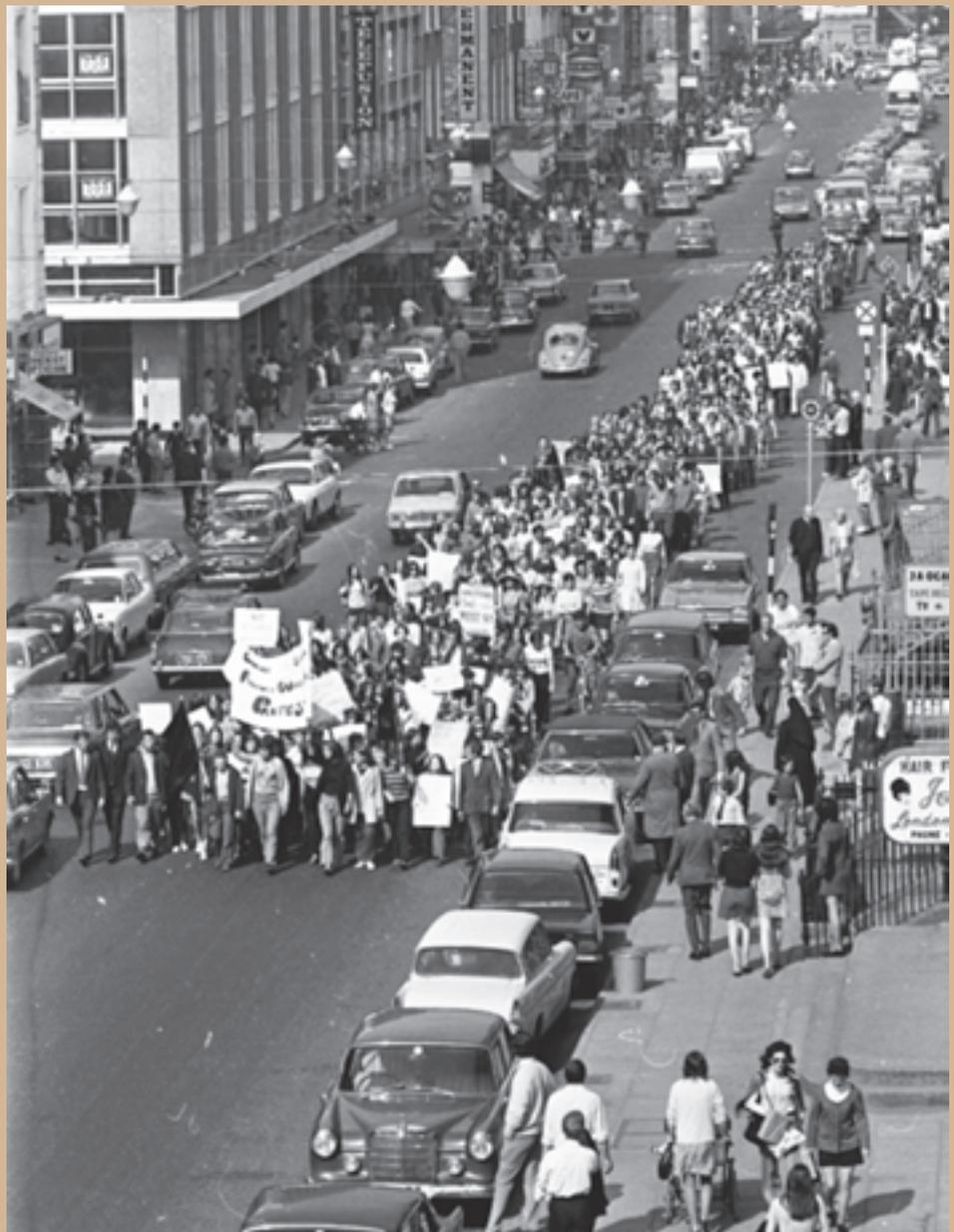
In 1972, Aquascutum sought to completely alter the 120-year-old system of paying staff by replacing the bonus payments for complex orders with a set hourly wage for all work completed. This change was strongly opposed by the 240 strong workforce who immediately went out on strike. In response, the company issued a statement that the staff 'had terminated their employment by staging a walk-out', after which picketing outside the factory began.⁶⁰ The ITGWU announced that a one-day stoppage of all its members in Limerick would take place if the dispute were not settled quickly.⁶¹ In response to this, the company backed down and agreed to retain the bonus payment system. The strike had lasted only five days.⁶² The 1970s saw a peak in industrial action throughout Ireland, the LCF were not unusual in their involvement in strike action during this period.

In 1973, another strike took place, this time at both Danus and LCF due to the dismissal of an employee who was also a union leader.⁶³ This was an unofficial strike and did not have the backing of the ITGWU. Aquascutum, no doubt tired of backing down to the pressures of strikers, obtained an injunction from the High Court in Dublin preventing picketing at both premises.⁶⁴ This did not stop an all-out strike from occurring, which involved the entire 700-strong staff of both factories.⁶⁵ This strike lasted almost two weeks and was settled when the union official was merely suspended for eight-weeks rather than permanently dismissed.⁶⁶

The LCF Closes

By 1973, it was clear that Aquascutum's takeover of LCF and Danus was not working out. Both companies were beset by strikes and Irish clothing continued to be undermined by a flood of cheap foreign imports. As if the situation was not bad enough, the economic boom of the 1960s was brought

Limerick Factory Workers Protest
March 1 September 1971.
Courtesy Limerick Leader



Limerick Factory Workers Protest
March 1 September 1971.
Courtesy Limerick Leader





Retired workers of Limerick Clothing Factory outing to beach May 1973

Courtesy Limerick Leader

to an abrupt end by the Oil Crisis and the resulting downturn in the world economy.⁶⁷ Indeed the 1960s and 1970s saw a collapse in many traditional Limerick industries including the flour milling and bacon industries.⁶⁸ The combination of local, national and international factors was destined to bring about the demise of LCF.

The beginning of the end was signalled by the departure of Danus from Aquascutum in May 1974. Donal O'Donovan, dissatisfied with how his former company was being run bought it back from Aquascutum at a cost of £750,000 in contrast to the £200,000 for which he had sold it in 1969. The repurchasing cost could have been a culmination of both industrial improvements brought about by Aquascutum and personal connection between O'Donovan and the Danus company. O'Donovan took with him the trade names 'Danus', 'Danus Executive', 'Donal O'Donovan' and surprisingly - 'Peter Tait'.⁶⁹ With Danus' departure, the LCF brand name was also dropped and the company traded as Aquascutum Products Limited. Unfortunately, Danus survived for only a few short months and closed later the same year with the loss of 325 jobs.⁷⁰

The LCF (or Acquascutum as it was now known) did not long survive the departure of Danus. In October 1974, Aquascutum introduced a three-day week for all 220 workers. Joe Skerrit of the ITGWU stated 'we were picking at the bones before the animal was dead'.⁷¹ However, it was now too late to save the dying factory. On 13 November 1974 Aquascutum announced, it would close in the following two weeks. The announcement was made following the arrival of a 'telex' from the Aquascutum main office in London.⁷²



Match Play: The winners are always Pure New Wool.

Pure new wool swings in colour, matched with the easy styling of these Danus Casual outfits. Jackets: top-scoring Glencheck plaid designs, in red and blue basic shades. Approx. £15.75. Partnered by smooth fitting, slightly flared trousers; with dark blue herringbone stripe, and yellow checked patterns. Approx. £5.75.



Superb executive motoring—the impressive Opel Commodore. 4-door, 2.5 litre, 6 cylinders. Safety and luxury features include radial tyres, power steering and brakes, vinyl roof, fully reclining seats, electrically heated rear window and sliding sun roof. £2,159. (automatic trans. £194 extra).

Photographed at Delgany Golf Club.

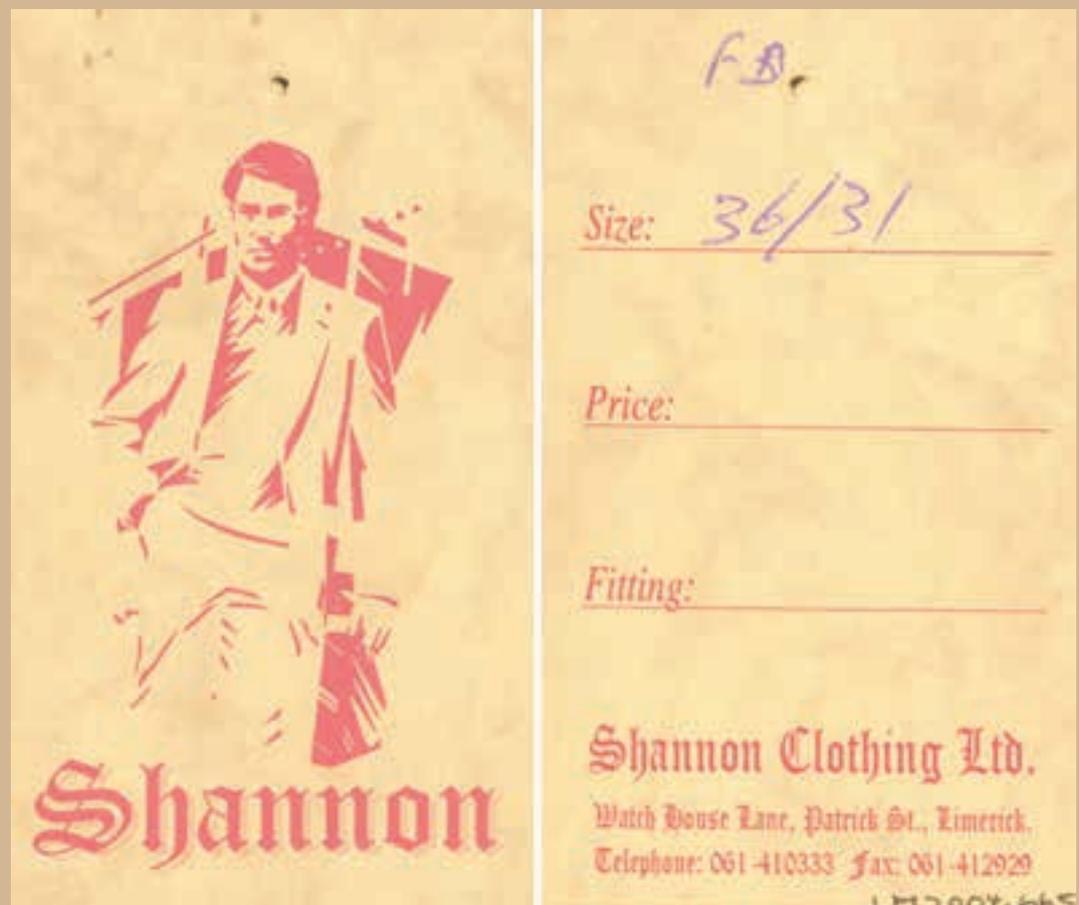
DANUS 



Although the staff had long feared this announcement, it was still traumatic for them to learn that their factory was finally closing. Mary Nihill, who worked in the costing office, recalled that all the staff were called into a meeting by the management and a Mr Duffy announced the closure.⁷³ For others the announcement came more rapidly than they had anticipated. For instance, Marianne Cassidy, was 'down town at the time and had sprayed perfume, I panicked because of the strong smell of the perfume and missed the announcement'.⁷⁴ She was not the only one to miss the announcement. Gerry Cronin had worked as a quality inspector for two years before the closure; he went 'into hospital and when I came out it was closed'.⁷⁵ The ITGWU travelled to London to appeal to Aquascutum at a meeting in Heathrow Airport but to no avail.⁷⁶

Indeed, 1974 was to prove a disastrous year for Limerick's economy. As well as Danus and the LCF, Savoy Cinema (70 employees) and Scripto, a writing implements factory, located in Shannon Industrial estate (190 employees) also closed. In 1974, over 800 jobs disappeared from Limerick and its environs which had a devastating effect on the city.

Although the factory closed down in Limerick in 1974, it was another ten years before the Limerick Clothing Company finally went into liquidation. It was officially wound up at a general meeting held at the then Aquascutum offices of 100 Regent Street London on the 5 November 1984.⁷⁷



Advert from Shannon Clothing Ltd.

Courtesy Limerick Museum



Right: Advert from
Loretta Bloom Ltd.,
Tait's Business Centre,
Dominick Street in 1991
Courtesy Limerick Museum

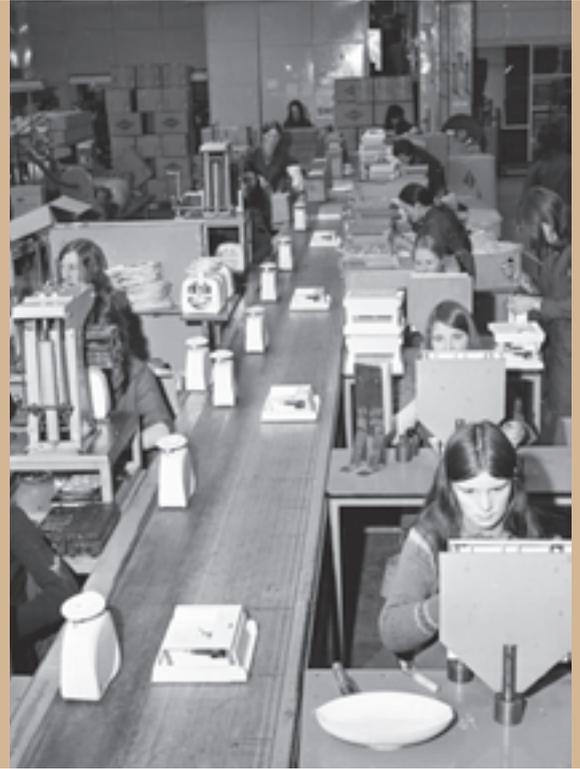
Loretta Bloom

SPRING '91



Right: Aerial view of Lord Edward Street with Limerick Clothing Factory on bottom left in the 1950s.

Courtesy Alexander Campbell Morgan



Far right: Krups Factory production lines 1972.

Courtesy Limerick Leader

The Impact of Limerick Clothing Factory's Closure

The impact of the company's closure was not only felt by the local economy, but by the employees themselves who had regarded the factory as virtually a 'home from home'. Inevitably, the closure of two factories with a total workforce of 545 had a traumatic impact on Limerick city. At the time of its closure, the LCF had been in production for 124 years and was one of the oldest clothing factories, if not the oldest, in the world. Many of its staff had thirty, forty and fifty years' of service and the chances of them being able to take up any other form of employment, even if it were available, which it was often not, were negligible.⁷⁸ Their plight worsened by the derisory redundancy payments they received. Marianna Cassidy who had been employed in LCF for nine years received a mere £20.⁷⁹

Some of the former workers moved onto other factories in the area such as Krups while others emigrated to find employment in other countries.⁸⁰ Others opened their own companies. In 1976, the Shannon Clothing Ltd. was founded in Watchhouse Lane off Patrick Street by George Ryan, Liam MacNamara, Charles Greene and Frank Grayson, all of Limerick Clothing Factory.⁸¹ Loretta Bloom Ltd. was founded in 1982 in Tait Business Centre, Dominic Street by Tony Hartigan of Crescent Clothing and Paul Tiernan with an initial staff of seven. This later increased tenfold and many of the staff had formerly worked for LCF.⁸² Loretta Bloom Ltd. closed in 2003 while Shannon Clothing closed in 2007.⁸³ The Irish clothing companies could not compete in a global market with cheap imports from China and Asia resulting in an end to an over 150-year tradition of clothing manufacturing in the city. The premises were subsequently occupied by Bord Telecom as an engineering depot before being acquired by Limerick City Council in 2001. Unfortunately a fire in 2003 destroyed most of the factory.





Female workers form a guard of honour as dignitaries arrive for the 1950 anniversary celebrations

Courtesy Limerick Museum

Endnotes

¹ The Irish Free State governed the 26 counties from a parliament in Dublin, while the six counties of Northern Ireland were governed from Belfast, both of these remained under the banner of the British Commonwealth. The 1937 Constitution distanced the governance of the twenty-six counties further away from British Rule. Finally, in 1949, the 26 counties were declared an independent Republic.

² In 1922, the Irish national income per head was 56 percent of that in Great Britain, while thirty-five years later the ratio was down to 49 percent.

³ This 'battle' stemmed from the question of which government should receive annuities from the Irish tenant land purchasers. To recover the annuities, British Prime Minister Ramsay MacDonald retaliated with the imposition of 20% import duty on Free State agricultural products into the UK, which constituted 90% of all Free State exports. UK households were unwilling to pay twenty per cent extra for these food products. The Free State responded in kind by placing a similar duty on British imports.

⁴ Ireland Non-Conformist register, Limerick, Methodist, 18 April 1868.

⁵ *Limerick Leader*, 18 June 1927.

⁶ *Irish Independent*, 24 September 1931.

⁷ *Donegal News*, 06 May 1922.

⁸ *Donegal News*, 06 May 1922.

⁹ Statutory Rules and Orders. 1926. No. 26; *Irish Independent*, 29 February 1928. General Manager of LCF Griffiths was a member of this board. This board represented those who produced 'Men's and boys' readymade and wholesale bespoke tailoring; men's and boys' retail bespoke tailoring, carried on in a factory where garments are made up for three or more retail establishments; and the making from any material of men's or male children's headgear'.

¹⁰ *Irish Press*, 4 November 1932.

¹¹ *Irish Independent*, 14 April 1938.

¹² *Limerick Christmas Gazette*, 1993.

¹³ Ó Grada, *The Irish Economy since the 1920s*, p. 51.

¹⁴ Without access to the stock books, it is impossible to accurately quantify the total amount produced.

¹⁵ *Cork Examiner*, 6 January 1926.

¹⁶ LCF 1850-1950.

¹⁷ *Limerick Leader*, 09 November 1940.

¹⁸ Noel Kilbridge, Interview with Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.

¹⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 24 August 1932; *Irish Independent*, 03 & 05 September 1932. This was not the only occasion when Hargeaves Ashmore and Co. were guilty of dishonesty as in 1935 one of its founders Arthur Hargeaves, was brought charged with fraud relating to this raincoat factory.

²⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 11 November 1944.

²¹ *Sunday Independent*, 14 May 1939.

²² *Limerick Leader*, 3 August 1940.

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ *Irish Independent*, 18 May 1962.

²⁵ *Irish Examiner*. 11 January 1972.

²⁶ *Limerick Leader*, 03 August 1940.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 3 July 1940.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 13 September 1941.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3 July 1940.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 24 May 1950.

³¹ The commemorative book was produced by O'Kennedy Brindley Ltd. which was founded in 1927 and by the early 1960s it was Ireland's biggest advertising agency. In 1979 the UK agency Saatchi and Saatchi took an 80 per cent share in the company.

³² *Limerick Leader*, 16 June 1950.

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- ³³ Interview Maura Stapleton by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015. The Boherbouy Band was formed in 1850, in a stable in Hifle's Row, between 15 and 16 Parnell Street. In 1963, the Boherbouy band uniform was made by the LCF. The St John's Brass and Reed band was formed in 1866 and the cymbals were donated by Sir Peter Tait who had his name engraved on them.
- ³⁴ Maura Stapleton, 27 June 2015.
- ³⁵ Interview Rachel Byrne nee Carey by Sharon Slater, 27 Jun 2015.
- ³⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 30 October 1956.
- ³⁷ Interview Breda Finn by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ³⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 27 April 1959.
- ³⁹ *Irish Independent*, 21 October 1957. Danus stood for the names of the family members Donal, Anthony, Noel and Us, which stood for the women of the family.
- ⁴⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 14 February 1959.
- ⁴¹ Frank Prendergast 'The Decline of Limerick's Trade Industries' in *Made in Limerick; History of Industries, Trade and Commerce, Vol. 1*, edited by David Lee and Debbie Jacobs. Printed by *Limerick Leader*, 2003.
- ⁴² *Nenagh Guardian*, 30 June 2007.
- ⁴³ Proinnsias Breathnach, 'Women's Employment and Peripheralisation: the Case of Ireland Branch Plant Economy', *Geoforum*, Vol 24, p.22, 1993.
- ⁴⁴ Frank Prendergast 'The Decline of Limerick's Trade Industries'. *Made in Limerick; History of Industries, Trade and Commerce, Vol. 1*, edited by David Lee and Debbie Jacobs. Printed by *Limerick Leader*, 2003.
- ⁴⁵ *Limerick Leader*, 09 May 1966.
- ⁴⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 12 November 1969.
- ⁴⁷ Aquascutum continued to be family owned until 1990 when it was purchased by a Japanese textile conglomerate company, Renown Incorporated. In 2008, Renown announced that it would sell Aquascutum, after the parent company experienced three straight years of losses. It was sold to Jaeger in September 2009. In April 2012, the company went into bankruptcy administration. FRP Advisory were chosen to act as the administrators. Shortly after Aquascutum's Asia licensee, YGM Trading, acquired the company for £15 million.
- ⁴⁸ Aquascutum was founded by John Emary (1811-1892) and George Fennell as a waterproof coat manufacturers, in 1851, they were located in 46-48 Regent Street, London. John Ladbury Emary (1839-1933), took over the running of the company, which relocated to the flagship store to 100 Regent Street in 1895. That same year Aquascutum became the trademarked name of the company.
- ⁴⁹ *Yorkshire Gazette* 19 May 1849.
- ⁵⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 7 June 1969.
- ⁵¹ *Irish Press*, 12 November 1969.
- ⁵² *IrishTimes*, 4 December 2004. George Edward (Ted) Russell was a five times mayor of Limerick, a member of the City Council for 37 years until he retired in 1979, as well as a member of the Seanad in 1969-77. Mr H. Harris was the general manager and J.P. Wallace was the director at LCF in 1968.
- ⁵³ *Irish Press*, 12 November 1969.
- ⁵⁴ Limerick City Council Planning Considerations 4 December 1969. Limerick City Council Minutes.
- ⁵⁵ *Irish Press*, 28 April 1970.
- ⁵⁶ Clement Cassidy interview by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵⁷ *Irish Press*, 28 April 1970.
- ⁵⁸ *Irish Examiner*, 9 June 1970.
- ⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 30 March 1971.
- ⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10 October 1972; The bonuses were given on items such as individual measured suits as these required a finer attention to detail than mass produced uniform clothing.
- ⁶¹ *Irish Press*, 8 October 1972.
- ⁶² *Irish Independent*, 13 October 1972.

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- ⁶³ *Irish Examiner*, 22 August 1973.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 23 August 1973.
- ⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 28 August 1973.
- ⁶⁶ *Irish Press*, 4 September 1973; *Irish Examiner*, 16 October 1973.
- ⁶⁷ Census of Ireland, 1971.
- ⁶⁸ Kieran Kennedy, Tom Giblin & D McHugh 'The Economic Development of Ireland in the Twentieth Century' (Routledge, London; 1988). p.33, 41.
- ⁶⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 11 May 1974.
- ⁷⁰ *Irish Independent*, 11 September 1974.
- ⁷¹ *Irish Examiner*, 22 October 1974.
- ⁷² Des O'Malley, Dáil Debates, Vol. 276 Nbr. 2, 26 November 1974; *Sunday Independent*, 17 November 1974.
- ⁷³ Mary Nihill interview by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁴ Marianne Cassidy interview by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁵ Gerry Cronin interview by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 29 November 1974.
- ⁷⁷ *London Gazette*, October 1984.
- ⁷⁸ O'Malley, Dáil Debates, 26 November 1974.
- ⁷⁹ Marianne Cassidy interview by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸¹ Prendergast,. Made in Limerick.
- ⁸² *Ibid.*
- ⁸³ *Irish Times*, 20 May 2003. Loretto Bloom lost 46 jobs on closure.



C E N T E N A R Y

C E L E B R A T I O N

L U N C H E O N

1950

The Men behind the Managing Directors

Although not as flamboyant as Peter and Robert Tait, the other Managing Directors were interesting men in their own right.

Edward Taylor

Edward Taylor (1846-1899) was the youngest son of Joshua Taylor and Jane Charlesworth, who were textile merchants of Gormsersal, York. He was well educated, attending Fulneck Boys Boarding School as a teenager.¹ By 1871, Edward Taylor had entered the family trade as a master dryer, and in ten years had risen to manager and woollen merchant.² In 1872 he married Theresa Madeline Hassé (1848-) in Camden, London and they had two children.³

As mentioned in chapter two, Edward Taylor was managing director of the LCF from 1889 to 1899. His health began to fail in early 1899 and he travelled to Cairo for a period before returning to Westgate-on-Sea, Kent where he died on 31 August 1899. The LCF was closed the Monday following his death as a mark of respect and wreaths were sent on behalf of the staff.⁴

The Taylor Family, including both of Edward's grandparents and his aunts Mary (1817-1893) and Martha (1819-1842) featured prominently in Charlotte Brontë's (1816-1855) novel *Shirley* (1849), as the 'Yorke' family. Brontë had attended boarding school with both Mary and Martha and they became lifelong friends, visiting each other's homes and exchanging hundreds of letters. Charlotte Brontë wrote in 1839 '...the society of the Taylors' is one of the most rousing pleasures I have ever known'. In the novel their home in Gormsersal was described in detail as 'Briarmains'. Brontë described the family so well that Mary wrote 'There is a strange feeling in reading it, of hearing us all talking'.

Philip Snell

Philip William Snell (1853-1922), born in England, was the managing director of LCF from 1899 to 1922. He was a practicing Presbyterian and married to Frances Sarah Hardy. They had two daughters and a son.⁵

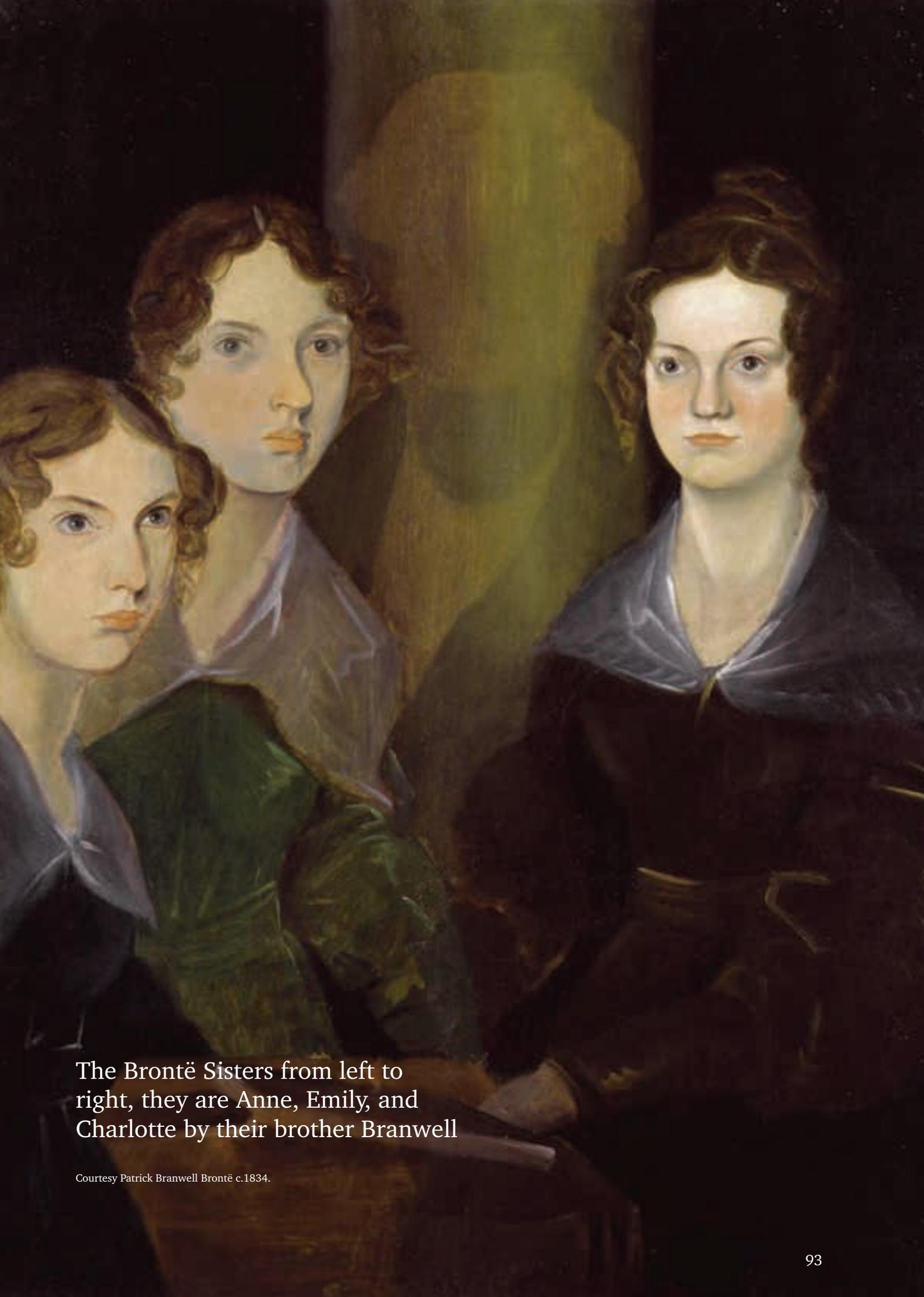
At the outbreak of the First World War, his only son, Philip Sidney Snell, was training to be a doctor at Trinity College, Dublin when he joined the 6th Battalion, Royal Dublin Fusiliers.⁶ He was killed in action on 9 August 1915. Afterwards one of his brother officers sent the following letter to Philip Snell Senior:

...the last time I saw him he was very gallantly leading his men in the face of very heavy shrapnel and rifle fire ... We carried out a prolonged attack on 6 August on Chocolate Hill ... In doing this he was struck in the small of the back by a spent bullet which bruised and hurt him, but he carried on as if nothing had happened.⁷

During the Easter Rising of 1916, Philip Snell Senior was injured and lost one of his legs. He died six years later in Wharfedale, Yorkshire, England.⁸

Henry Maxwell Griffiths

Henry Maxwell Griffiths (1868-1951) was born in Colooney (now Wolfe Tone) Street, the son of Louis Lambe Griffiths (1830-1898) and Elizabeth Ruttle (1842-1926).⁹ Griffiths learned his trade from his parents who ran a drapery business at 20 Patrick Street from at least 1879 until 1920.¹⁰ In 1900, he was working in the Limerick Clothing Factory as an accountant and ten years later as a commercial clerk.¹¹ Griffiths took over the office of Managing Director in 1922, following the death of Phillip Snell, and held this office until his retirement in 1933. Griffiths was the only one of his four brothers and one sister to marry. In 1904, he married Eleanor Lilian Lloyd in Newcastle upon Tyne.



The Brontë Sisters from left to right, they are Anne, Emily, and Charlotte by their brother Branwell

Courtesy Patrick Branwell Brontë c.1834.



Charles Crabtree and his wife seated to the left
 Courtesy Limerick Museum

Charles Arthur Crabtree

A native of Leeds, Charles Arthur Crabtree (1888-1973) was originally a director of a printing company and in 1933 came to Ireland to take up the post of manager of the LCF.¹² In 1944 he became managing director, after ten years serving as the general manager.¹³ Crabtree was responsible for many changes within the LCF, including the provision of a hall for the social club, the organisation of the 100 Anniversary celebrations and the organisation of many other social events in the factory. This enhanced the sense of community within the factory, which would remain up to its closing. In 1961, he retired as managing director and was presented with a television set by the staff of the company.¹⁴

Crabtree was a noted philanthropist, and along with his daughter, Winifred (1915-2009), pioneered the development of services for children with disabilities in the Limerick region. Father and daughter were instrumental in establishing what later became St Gabriel's centre. Following Crabtree's death, Winifred continued his work, which in 1997 resulted in the opening of a modernised St Gabriel's School & Centre in Dooradoyle.¹⁵

Frank Grayson

Born in Dublin Frank Grayson (1919-2007) moved to Limerick at the age of five. As a youth, he was a member of the Boy's Brigade.¹⁶ He originally worked as a floor manager in the LCF and in 1961 took over the day-to-day running of the factory. He held this position until the both the LCF and Danus merged with Aquascutum in 1969, when Donal O'Donovan took over. In early 1974, following the departure of Danus from Aquascutum, Grayson once again took over the daily running of the LCF until it finally closed in late 1974.

Afterwards he established Shannon Clothing at Watch House Lane, Patrick Street, Limerick, which he ran up to the time of his retirement. In his private life Grayson was an avid golfer.¹⁷



Frank Grayson, 1950
 Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book

Endnotes

¹ Census of England and Wales, 1851.

² Census of England and Wales, 1871 & 1881.

³ Edward Reginald Taylor (1873-1932) and Susan Mary Taylor (1877-).

⁴ *Irish Examiner*, 4 September 1899 & 8 September 1899.

⁵ Wife Frances Sarah Hardy (1862). Children Mary Eileen (1890), Phyllis Annie (1891) and Philip Sidney (1893-1915) Census of Ireland 1901 & 1911.

⁶ *Freeman's Journal*, 19 August 1915.

⁷ Regimental War Diary of 6Bn, Royal Irish Rifles, at Armagh Regimental Museum. E Lendrum, 'The 10th (Irish) Division at the Battle of Kiretsch-Tepe-Sirt, August 1915', *Battle Lines (Journal of the Somme Association)*, Vol.2 (1990), p.19. Supplement to *Irish Life (SIL)*, 24 September 1915.

⁸ Register of deaths England & Wales, 1837-2007.

⁹ Ireland Non-Conformist register, Limerick, Methodist 18 April 1868.

¹⁰ Limerick Trade directories, Limerick City Library
<http://www.limerickcity.ie/webapps/TradesReg/Search.aspx> accessed 25 October 2016.

¹¹ Census of Ireland 1911, Limerick_South_Rural/Ballinacurra__Hart_/625281/. Limerick Museum 1994.0056. . *Irish Independent*, 15 April 1952. At his death he left a will of £5,683.

¹² *The Times*, 17 May 1920; *The Irish Press*, 2 January 1935.

¹³ *Limerick Leader*, 11 November 1944.

¹⁴ *Irish Independent*, 15 November 1961.

¹⁵ *Irish Examiner*, 31 March 2009.

¹⁶ *Limerick Leader*, 30 June 2007.

¹⁷ *Nenagh Guardian*, 30 June 2007.





Home Away from Home



Limerick Clothing
Factory night out

Courtesy Maura Stapleton

Social Life

Working Conditions and Social Life

The LCF was much more than just a place of work for those employed there, it was a way of life. The experiences of the workforce were just as much a central feature of the factory's history as the clothing they were producing. Unfortunately, there are very few primary records relating to the LCF so the information supplied by former workers is invaluable when piecing together the history of the factory. These interviews brought to life the family connections within the factory, the rich sports and social activities among the workers, and even include stories of nightlife dancing and shared holidays.

The LCF had a predominantly female staff outnumbering the male staff ten to one. The factory would have been emancipating for the female staff as there was little opportunity outside of domestic service for women to earn their own wage. Unlike many other employment sectors between 1932 and 1973, the LCF did not require its female staff to leave their position on marriage. There were a number of factories in Limerick in the early nineteenth century but these mainly employed men as the work was of a very strenuous nature.

'You had to be related to someone in there to join'¹

The oral histories reveal that despite its size, the LCF had a family atmosphere as many of the LCF staff were related to each other. When recruiting new workers, the company often asked relatives to provide character references. Mothers vouched for their daughters, aunts for their nieces and fathers for their sons. This promoted harmony and proved advantageous to management, as those providing the references would usually ensure that their relatives worked diligently for fear of damaging their own reputation. In return, the practice led to less discipline and human resource issues for the company.

Rita Flynn nee Byrne's story is typical of the employment profile. Her mother Mary Kate O'Halloran worked in the LCF (from the age of fourteen until the age of eighty) as did her aunt Madgie O'Halloran; her brother Seamus Byrnes, worked as a floor manager; her sister Josephine as a supervisor and her sister Celine 'was on the machines'.²

In 1960, Noel Tuite then aged seventeen followed his mother and sister into the factory. His 'mother worked here [LCF] as a wage clerk'. Noel remained in the factory as a cutter until its closure.³ Similarly, Maura Stapleton who was employed in the factory for thirty years followed in the footsteps of her father John Stapleton (employed in the LCF for forty years), as well as her aunt and sister.⁴ Joan Finucane followed her father and two brothers into the factory in 1961 when she was only thirteen years old.⁵

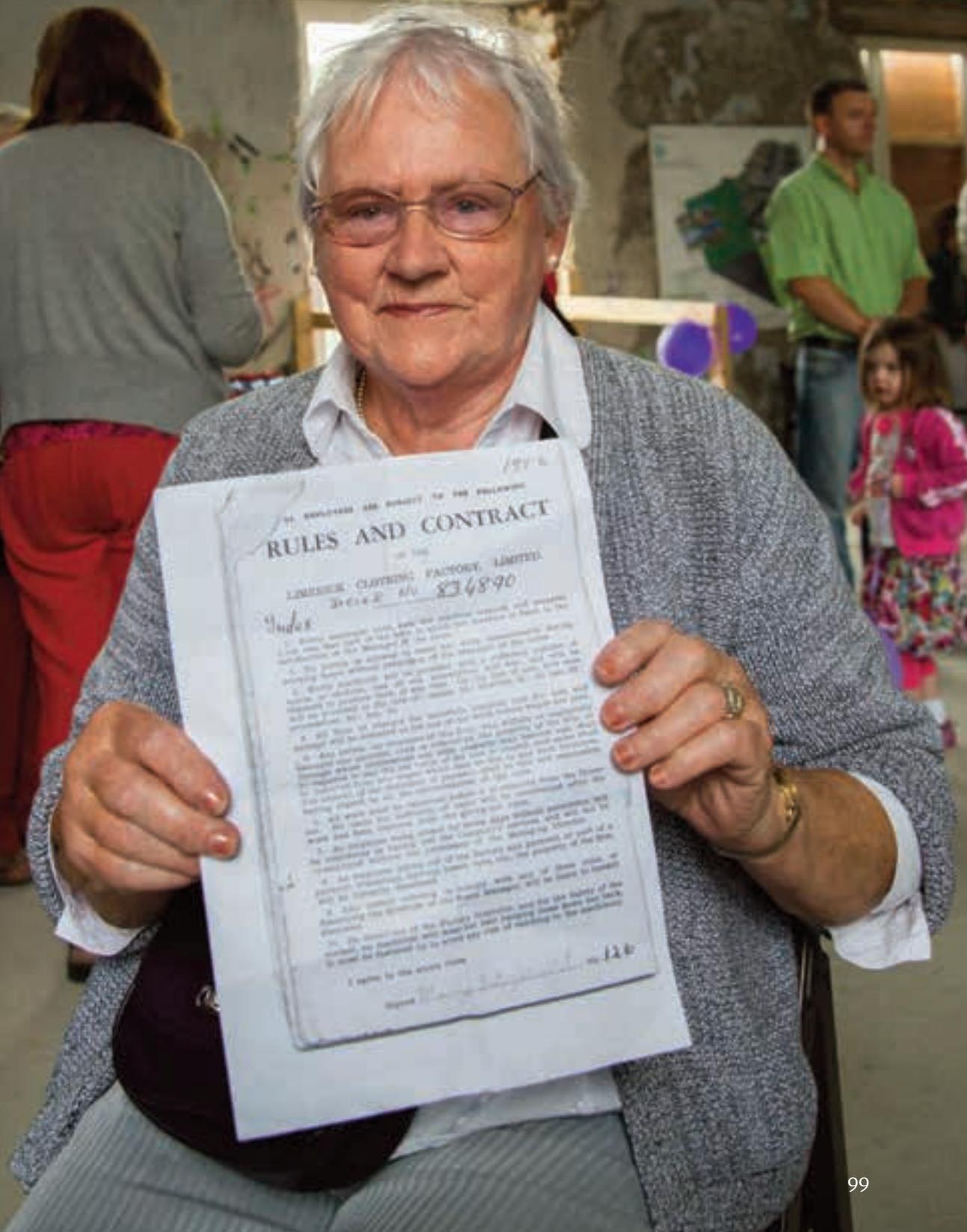
Clement Cassidy followed his mother into the factory in the late 1950s. He was only fourteen at the time and started as a messenger boy, later progressing to the cutting room. His sisters Lily and Nuala also worked in the LCF while his sister Angela worked in Danus.⁶ This pattern was reflected in Limerick's other traditional industries notably milling and bacon, and meant that intergenerational members of families identified with key industries.

'There was great camaraderie; it was like one family with a big mix of ages'⁷

Many former staff remember the LCF as a place where they both worked hard and played hard. The working hours varied through the decades and for fulltime or apprentice staff. The factory

Mary Fitzgerald (Ryan),
Parteen who spent 7 years
working at the factory,
1956-1963. Mary is
pictured with a copy of
her contract from the
factory.

Courtesy Alan Place



Rachel Byrne, South Circular Road. Rachel's mother, Agnes Carey née O'Mahony started working at the factory at the age of 14. Rachel holds a photograph of her mother right in picture at a fancy dress event at the factory.

Courtesy Alan Place



Liam McNamara, Drombanna Co. Limerick and Dessie Boland, Janesboro, Limerick. Liam worked at the factory from 1962-1974 and Dessie worked at the factory from 1960-1974.

Courtesy Alan Place



originally operated on a six-day week. When the Factory and Workshop Act 1878 was introduced no child under the age of 10 could be employed and children aged 10–14 years could only be employed for half days. Women were prohibited from working more than 56 hours in a week. A former employee Maura Stapleton remembers that during her time in the factory:

‘the usual working day started at 9am, dinnertime was between 1pm and 2:15pm and the finishing time was at 6pm. Overtime was set between 7pm and 9pm, no extra rate was paid for overtime. If you lived close by you went home for lunch’.⁸

By the 1960s staff had become used to working a five day week and looked forward to their weekends off. Some were more enthusiastic than others were, such as: Mary Meaney who would start a sing- song every Friday, she always started with ‘We’re all going on a Summer Holiday’ – the whole factory would join in.⁹ The entire factory closed for two weeks in August to facilitate the maintenance of the machines. Noel Tuite also remembers Mary’s excitement over upcoming summer holidays: ‘a week prior to that Mary and all the girls, and some of the boys would start singing and they’d lift the roof’.¹⁰

Christmas Day did not become a public holiday until 1939 and therefore there was no legal requirement for the LCF to pay staff on that day. However from at least 1935 the factory closed on that day and the staff were paid.¹¹

The former workers recall a great sense of camaraderie; Every Friday, the female machinists were allocated thirty minutes at the end of the working day to clean and oil their machines, but Pat Finucane laughed that they were ‘too concerned with their night out and he would stay back for hours doing it for them’.¹² Mary Moore nee O’Grady worked in the factory for six years as a machinist and recalls the:

great camaraderie, it was like one family with a big mix of ages... [She remembers] packets of sweets being bought and thrown onto the shaft to share down the bench.¹³

Many of the staff, like Breda Morrissey, began their working lives at fourteen. As a trainee she worked a shorter day than the more senior staff. Although this was not a requirement many of the women finished their working lives in the factory when they were married. This was the case for Mary Fitzgerald Ryan who started working in 1956 aged sixteen. She operated the sewing machine, which attached seams to jackets before being moved to a supervisory role. Her role was to ‘get out the work in time’. Some left and returned such as Margaret Doran who worked in the LCF from 1961 to 1965 before going to England for a few years and returning to the factory in the late 1960s.¹⁴

Most of the men worked in the cutting room, which Clement Cassidy recalled was:

almost as big as the front room [badminton room], ten people worked there... [including]...Pat, Joe and John Kinarge, Vincent Lyons, Pat Kinarry, Tony McInerney, Pat Shortt... it was a great place to work... Mr Crabtree was boss at the time... Thomas Crean was the floor manager.¹⁵

Until its closure in 1974, it was common for staff to start working in LCF at the age of fourteen. A typical employee attended primary school until they were twelve and then attended secondary school for one or two years.¹⁶ Teresa Roche nee Fitzgerald remembers that when she was fourteen she:

came for an interview during the summer but the man said for her to come back when she was fifteen in August... neighbours came in on my birthday and said I’d got the job... I worked as a machinist... I loved the duffle coats, camel coloured, you would be afraid you’d break a needle making the hood... you would have to oil the thread to get it into the needle.¹⁷

Noel Tuite

Courtesy Alan Place



Maura Stapleton

Courtesy Alan Place





Maura Stapleton
operating the button
hole machine, c.1949

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book



Damian, Amy, Sheena and
John Kinsella, Clareview
Limerick. Amy worked at
the factory over a 12 year
period.

Courtesy Alan Place



Margaret Tydings who
started to work in the
factory at age 14 for 3
years.

Courtesy Alan Place





“almost as big as the front room [badminton room], ten people worked there... [including]... Pat, Joe and John Kinarge, Vincent Lyons, Pat Kinarry, Tony McInerney, Pat Shortt... it was a great place to work... Mr Crabtree was boss at the time... Thomas Crean was the floor manager ”

Clement Cassidy



Josephine and Clement Cassidy with Austin Shortt.

Courtesy Alan Place



Cutting Room
Courtesy Noel Tuite

‘One day a week I had to go to school in St. Anne’s school’¹⁸

The *Vocational Education Act* of 1930 required that all those under the age of sixteen in employment should attend school one day a week. In the LCF, this act was not complied with until 1955, when the Department of Education sent a sharply worded letter ordering the attendance of forty members of staff at a vocational school. Management was far from pleased and one of them, John Hannan, complained that:

The firm experienced difficulty in providing training and employment for young persons. If they had to attend the Vocational School for one day each week it would tend to disorganise the whole business in the factory.¹⁹

LCF management reluctantly complied and Teresa Roche nee Fitzgerald remembers that ‘one day a week I had to go to school in St. Anne’s school in George’s Quay’ and Margaret Doran who had to ‘attend to school in the Red Tech [Technical Institute] on O’Connell Street one day a week we’d get fed there too’.²⁰ Tony Browne also remembers:

you had to go to school until you were sixteen, the one day a week, so Tuesday was my specified day. I went into work at eight o’clock in the morning and I went off to school from the work at quarter past nine... it was known as the One Day.. the building is still there it is now known as the Athenaeum Building... you went down till half twelve.. I went home for my dinner... went back to school from two o’clock till four and then you had to go back to work... some fellas got the full day off I didn’t but I didn’t mind, work was on the way home for me.²¹

Although the One Day school benefitted the teenagers, giving them a break from work life and an opportunity to upskill, it was not of benefit to the factory, which lost hundreds of work hours due to the their absence.

Some Perks of the job

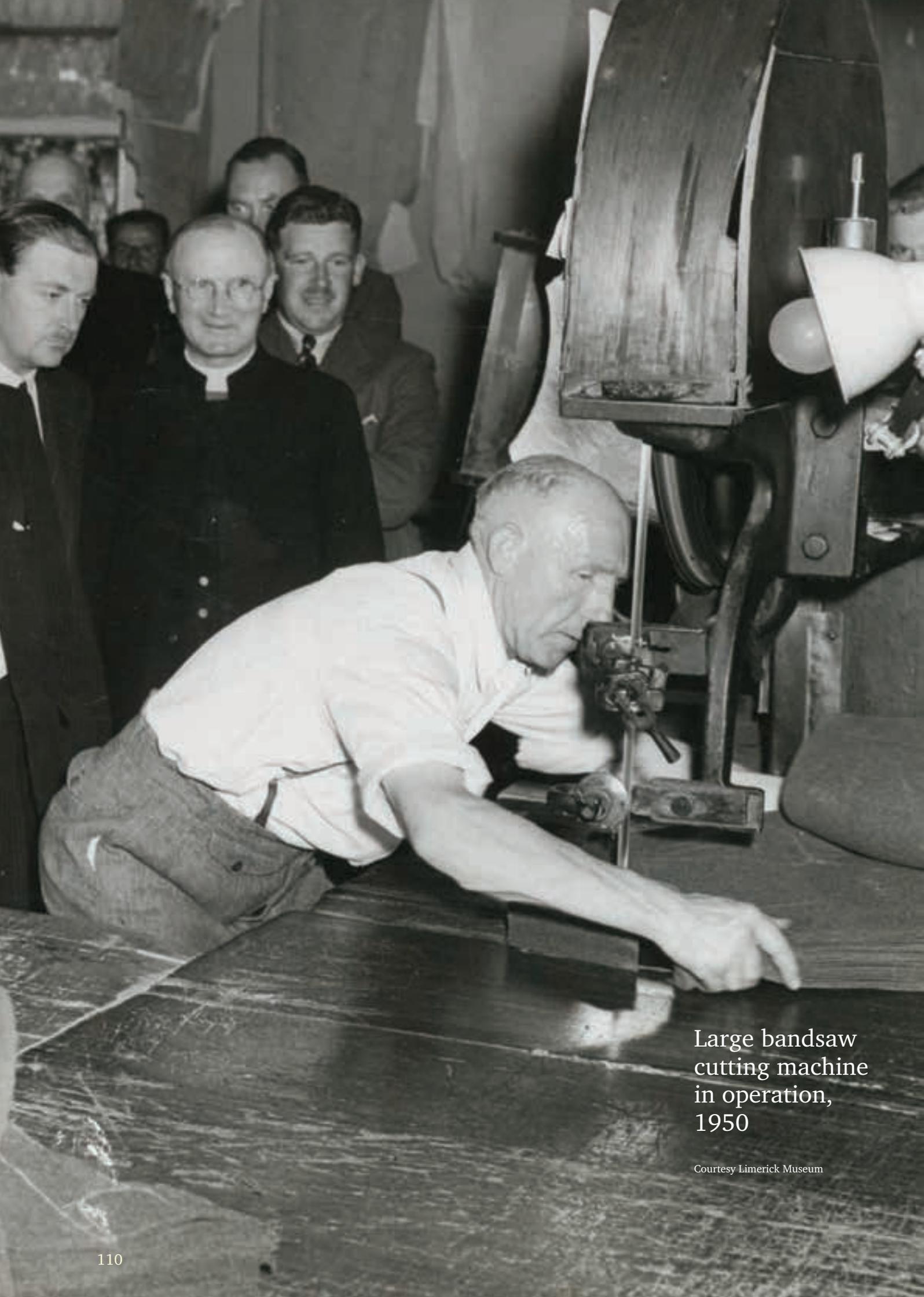
One perk of working in a clothing factory recalled by the former workers was that it was common practice for employees to carry out small private commissions for each other. This was done in the factory 'behind the backs' of the managers. These included sewing non-factory clothing, attaching buttons or pressing clothes. Maura Stapleton remembers that these were known as a 'thank-you'.²²

While 'thank-yous' took place in the factory and management turned a blind eye, major theft and fraud was rare in the LCF. This was probably as a result of the number of family members employed keeping each other in check. One case of major theft was reported in the *Limerick Chronicle* (1931), where it was reported that over the course of a year, fifteen suits to the value of £26 were stolen. The perpetrator was a woman who had been employed in the factory for over forty years. She had passed these suits on to another worker who pawned them.²³



Belt loop making and trouser serging machine, c.1949

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book



Large bandsaw
cutting machine
in operation,
1950

Courtesy Limerick Museum

Accidents in the factory

Large factories in the nineteenth century were dangerous places as machinery works were generally exposed with very little safety legislation. In the LCF, however Tait's purpose-built factory enclosed the main workings of the sewing machines under the factory floor. As a result there were no records of fatalities involving these machines. Sadly, the same could not be said of the boiler room where in 1885, James Tichbourne, a boiler man, was attempting to shut off the steam. During this procedure, he received very severe scalds that proved fatal.²⁴ Another fatality which took place in the helmet section, remained ingrained in factory folklore for over a century. Austin Shortt who began working in the factory in 1943 aged sixteen and remained until its closure in 1974 remembers:

Down the yard there was a building that ran half the length of the yard to make helmets, white cork helmets for the foreign services in the nineteenth century. A petroleum solution was used to make the helmets. There was a fire and a woman lost her life. The mark of the fire could be seen on the rafters for years afterwards.²⁵

The woman in question was fifteen-year-old Mary Margaret Downes, one of the fifty members of staff working in the helmet section at this time.²⁶ It was a dark January day in 1892 and Downes decided to attempt to light the gas lamp in the room, which was usually lit with a taper and only with the permission of the supervisor. However, instead of a taper she used a discarded piece of cork shaving from a helmet, which was highly flammable. As she applied it to the gas, some of the cork fell into the glue underneath the bench, engulfing her in flames. Although Downes survived the initial burns to her 'lower legs and buttocks', she remained in hospital for eight days before passing away due to tetanus.²⁷

Unsurprisingly there were other minor accidents though these were also rare. Amy Kinsella recalls that she was only working in the factory a week when she stitched into her finger.²⁸ In 1899, Patrick Meers broke his leg 'by falling, it is said, off a loft. He was engaged in the machine room'.²⁹ Austin Shortt remembers when he started in the factory in the early 1940s:

the big band knives were powered by steam, they had a big wheel under the table and there was no guard rail, my hand slipped on it – I forgot what happened as it all happened so quickly- I could have bled to death but for Charlie Quin who put a tourniquet on it. I was rushed to Barrington's, as it was the nearest hospital.³⁰

Ironically, the news of the takeover of the LCF by Aquascutum in 1969 brought with it a minor accident.

Three women were taken to Barrington's Hospital. Limerick, yesterday by fire brigade ambulance after an unusual accident, which occurred while they were being given the news that their 119-year-old factory had been the subject of a takeover deal by a British company. The women were amongst about 20 members of the staff of 270 of the Limerick Clothing Company who were standing on a table to get a better view of Mr. Gerard Abrahams, the chairman of the multimillion pounds Aquascutum Clothing Co. of London, when it collapsed. Last night, the hospital stated that Mrs. Margaret Shannon (61), a widow, of 35 Edward Street was suffering from a fractured leg, but comfortable. The other two women, Miss Teresa Woodlands (21), Claughaun Avenue. Garryowen, and Miss Margaret Cullothy (16) of Assumpta Park were discharged.³¹

Early strikes in the factory

For the most part, industrial relations in the LCF were harmonious and the floor staff recall that while there was a separation between the management and floor workers, there was little hostility between them. Prior to 1938, the employees at the LCF were not officially unionised and during the centenary celebrations in 1950, management claimed that the factory had never been affected by a strike, but this was not correct. In fact, there were seven recorded disputes between 1884 and 1911, but the majority of these which were short lived and were settled amicably.

The first of these was in July 1884, when employees feared that as the directors were sending clothing to be finished in England this would threaten their jobs and 'some £15,000 per annum would be lost to the city'. The strike continued for six days until it was announced that clothing would no longer be sent to England for finishing.³² Three years later the tailors of LCF were locked out as they protested that garments were being sent off site to be finished by 'local shop work'. The tailors conceded within a few days.³³

In 1894, the staff downed tools due to a dispute over the 'price to be allowed for making military garments'. All the employees were involved in the strike but it ended quickly.³⁴ That same year tools were downed again in response to a call from the directors to reduce wages by ten per cent.³⁵ In 1895, five hundred members of staff went on strike 'owning to the suspension of an employee for passing clothing which was subsequently rejected by the Pimlico Factory'.³⁶

A major strike occurred in in 1902 when eight hundred female employees stopped working as 'the proprietors were about to introduce machinery for the purpose of saving labour and expense in button-hole sewing, at present done by hand'. The change affected ninety women and as a protest, all the other female hands joined them.³⁷ This was the longest strike of the period and continued for over five weeks. It was resolved due to the mediation of Dr O'Dwyer, Bishop of Limerick. Dr O'Dwyer was instrumental in settling many industrial strikes in Limerick during this period and was a major figure in the wake of the 1916 Rising in opposing proposed conscription to the British Army. It was settled:

on the terms offered by the directors, namely that 90 women who will been disemployed (sic) by the introduction of new machinery have choice of any other department, their earnings being supplemented by three shillings a week for twelve weeks while they are learning the new duties.³⁸

In 1911, the factory closed for almost three weeks owing to a strike caused by a disagreement between 350 member of staff who were members of ITGWU and 50 staff, who were not union members. During this strike, the non-union staff continued to work which caused a number of them to be attacked with stones by the union workers. Two of the attackers, Mary Hartigan and Mary Thompson were arrested and a force of police remained outside the building until the matter was resolved.³⁹ While the LCF was closed, orders were sent to the Dublin factory, which caused further friction.⁴⁰

By 1938, the majority of the staff had become members of the national Irish Transport and General Workers Union (ITGWU).⁴¹ The ITGWU had been founded by Jim Larkin in 1909 as a general union. However, the LCF branch did not always see eye-to-eye on individual issues with the national committee. For instance, in 1948, the LCF members refused to pay their dues until the national council discontinued their support for the National Labour Party's decision to join a coalition government.⁴²

The unavailability of the LCF archives means that it is not always possible to discover how these disputes were resolved. While the local press reported the outbreak of these smaller strikes, generally further details were not reported. It would appear that these were resolved amicably. A number of strikes also occurred in the 1970s, which have been dealt with in chapter three.

Ellen Brennan born 25 December 1879 worked in LCF for 75 years died in November 1962. She put her longevity down to 'early rising and interest in my work'.

Courtesy Irish Press



Secret to Longevity 'early rising and interest in my work'.⁴³

In the days before contributory old age pension was introduced in 1960 it was not unusual for staff members to work for forty, fifty and even sixty years. Noel Kilbridge recalled 'people working here [LCF] until they dropped'.⁴⁴ The factory called these members of staff the 'gay forties'. Andrew Byrne of Wolfe Tone Street was one of these long-term members of staff. He began working as a cutter in the factory in 1907 aged fifteen in 1907 and retired in 1962 after fifty-five years of service.⁴⁵

The longest serving member of staff was probably Ellen Brennan (1858-1962). Born Ellen Lyddy on Christmas Day 1858 and married to Patrick Brennan in 1880, Ellen was widowed by 1901.⁴⁶ She worked in LCF for seventy-five years and seems to have enjoyed

factory life. When asked the secret of her longevity she replied 'early rising and interest in my work'.⁴⁷ She lived for a period in the Widow's Alms Houses, Church Street, until she moved to St Camillus Hospital for a number of years before her death. While in the hospital, she was visited each Christmas by members of the staff of LFC.⁴⁸ Ellen passed away on the 12 November 1962, aged 103, and she was buried in Mount Saint Lawrence cemetery.⁴⁹ At the time of her death, she was the oldest person in Limerick.

'It was a great place to get married off'⁵⁰

The factory was the place where many of the staff spent the majority of their adult lives whether at work or at events organised by the Social Club. Here, people from all corners of the city met, mingled, and in some cases got married. Noel Cassidy, who worked at LCF for six years, recalls that his 'best memory was meeting my wife' while working in the factory. It was from these marriages that the next generation of workers were recruited to the factory. Noel Kilbridge's parents met in the factory and later both his two brothers and sister worked there.

Marriages were a celebration not only for the couple but also for the factory as a whole. Joan Finucane recalls that 'when anyone got married we would all cheer and hit our scissors off the machines'.⁵¹ Noel Tuite met his wife in the factory and said that:

down at the back the toilets used to be there and if anyone was getting married they'd lock the bathroom door [to lock the future bride or groom into the toilet and on release]... they'd cheer the whole room down.⁵²

As it was a clothing factory, it was not surprising that a number of the suits worn by the grooms were produced in the factory. Geraldine Murphy remembers that her husband's wedding suit was made in the factory 'it was the only suit he ever owned... it was a pinstriped suit that had been made for a very short Spanish man who never collected'.⁵³ Mary Fitzgerald Ryan tells us that her husband's wedding suit was also made up in the factory. 'Mr William Boland fitted him for his suit... the groomsman had his suit fitted here too'.⁵⁴

'Great union, great social clubs, even a make-up club'⁵⁵

The factory was more than just a workplace. Staff returned after work for dances and sports events. The LCF's social club was established in the 1890s and occupied several rooms in the old two storey factory building until 1935 when Westropp's former warehouse was converted into a new Social Club Hall. The opening of this new club building was marked with 'fireworks and dancing continued until a late hour'.⁵⁶ This move was organised by Andrew Byrne, secretary and J. Stapleton, treasurer of the social club.⁵⁷ The Social Club Hall became known as the Badminton Hall, though it was used for many different activities over the years such as the meeting place of the St. Joseph's Scout unit.⁵⁸

The new social club was used as a dancehall and could accommodate 400 people.⁵⁹ Austin Shortt described it:

there was a stage at one end of the badminton room and the room held afternoon dances which were open to the general public who paid a few pence. They played records, there was no band.⁶⁰

In 1936, dances were held in the new hall every Sunday afternoon from 4pm to 6pm and every Tuesday night from 8:30 to 11:30pm with music usually provided by Tom Heath's band.⁶¹

The Social Club organised a whole range of activities from posting notices of sympathy in the local papers when relatives of club members died, to excursions and dinner dances at Christmas.⁶² These dinner dances were usually at Cruise's Hotel and took a great deal of organisation - on one occasion, the organisers put perfume at each plate.⁶³ Staff recall that the LCF had a 'great union, great social clubs, even a make-up club'.⁶⁴ The Social Club organised the summer excursions, which had begun during the tenure of Edward Taylor in the 1890s and continued until the factory's closure. These were feats of organisation as in 1901, the staff went by two special trains to Waterford and thence to Tramore for the day. The Boherbuoy Band accompanied the party which numbered some 1,500 excursionists.⁶⁵

The tradition continued unbroken: 'once a year the factory would rent out ponies and carts and would take factory workers out to Killaloe for the day'.⁶⁶ On Whit Sunday 1948, the LFC Social Club took an excursion to Galway and Salthill and in 1949 they went to Kilkee by train.⁶⁷

As the factory was working to full capacity during the Second World War, the staff were able to assist the wider community with charitable collections. Among the donations made were £10 to the Emergency Fuel Fund; £50 to the Society of St Vincent De Paul and £25 to the Irish Red Cross.⁶⁸

'You didn't have to be able to sing and dance, just to be involved'⁶⁹

Participating together in the Tops of the Town variety show competitions was a highlight for many LCF staff in the 1960's. In 1962, the Tops of the Town competition began in Waterford as an annual contest to put on the best variety show and was open to amateur groups such as community organisations and the staff of companies.⁷⁰ The contest went nationwide in 1964 when company John Player provided financial support and RTE began to televise it. Tops of the Town or as it was later known John Player Tops was a veritable Ireland's Got Talent, which continued until 1997.⁷¹ A 'Tops' show offered huge variety with singers, dancers and comedians interspersed on stage all working together to create a breathtaking 55-minute production.⁷²

In 1963, a similar interfirm event took place in Limerick, which was held over ten days between twelve local companies including the LCF.⁷³ In 1964, the official Tops of the Town competition arrived in Limerick and





Above: LCF at Tops of the Town, 16 Feb 1964 Shannon Arms Hotel. Left to right front row: C Tuohy, M. Meaney, E. Proctor, D. Martin, M. Mulcahy, M. Bushford, D. Keane. Back row: N. Tuite, R. Byrnes, P. Donaghue, C. Carter, A. Shortt, A. Tuohy, S. Byrnes, P. Brown, L. Fitz, J. O'Shea, H. McMahon. Front: M. Ryan.

Courtesy Margaret Doran



Tops of the Town

Courtesy Noel Tuite

the local final was between the Post Office and LCF, who came in second place.⁷⁴ The LCF Tops of the Town performers rehearsed twice a week and one of the participants Margaret Doran, recalls that they 'didn't have to be able to sing and dance, just to be involved'.⁷⁵ In 1968, the LCF show was called 'Golden Days' and was produced by Tom Henn, a highly experienced singer and performer in numerous light operas and other stage productions. LCF beat the Shannon Air Terminal group in the finals, held in the Savoy on the 31 March that year.⁷⁶

Folklore and practical jokes

Like all large places of work, LCF accumulated a fund of interesting folklore and customs over the years. A good sense of humour helps to break up the hours of monotonous work. This characteristic made its way into life at the factory. The men especially often played practical jokes on their workmates. It was a way for the men and women who worked long days, and spent countless hours within the factory's walls to interact, to remain jovial and ultimately to have fun.

A common practice was to play pranks on new employees, Moira O'Halloran recalls that on her first day 'I was sent out to get a bucket of steam'.⁷⁷ Pat McKeon remembers how work and play was combined by their high-spirited messenger boy with his three-wheeled bike with a box freewheeling to the post office at the railway station.⁷⁸

Other stories have woven their way into the folklore of the factory and live on in the memories of former workers. Paddy Finucane tells of a ghost, which hid in the machine works:

The factory closed for two weeks during the summer, a company was brought from Dublin to clean the pressing machines. An apprentice came with the company; his job was to go under the floorboards to guide the pipes in. The apprentice saw a ghost, a midget dressed as Napoleon, he refused to go under the boards again without another person. He quit and left. When the factory reopened Tony the boilerman came back I told him what happened and he was delighted that someone else saw him 'was it a young fella dressed as Napoleon?!'.⁷⁹

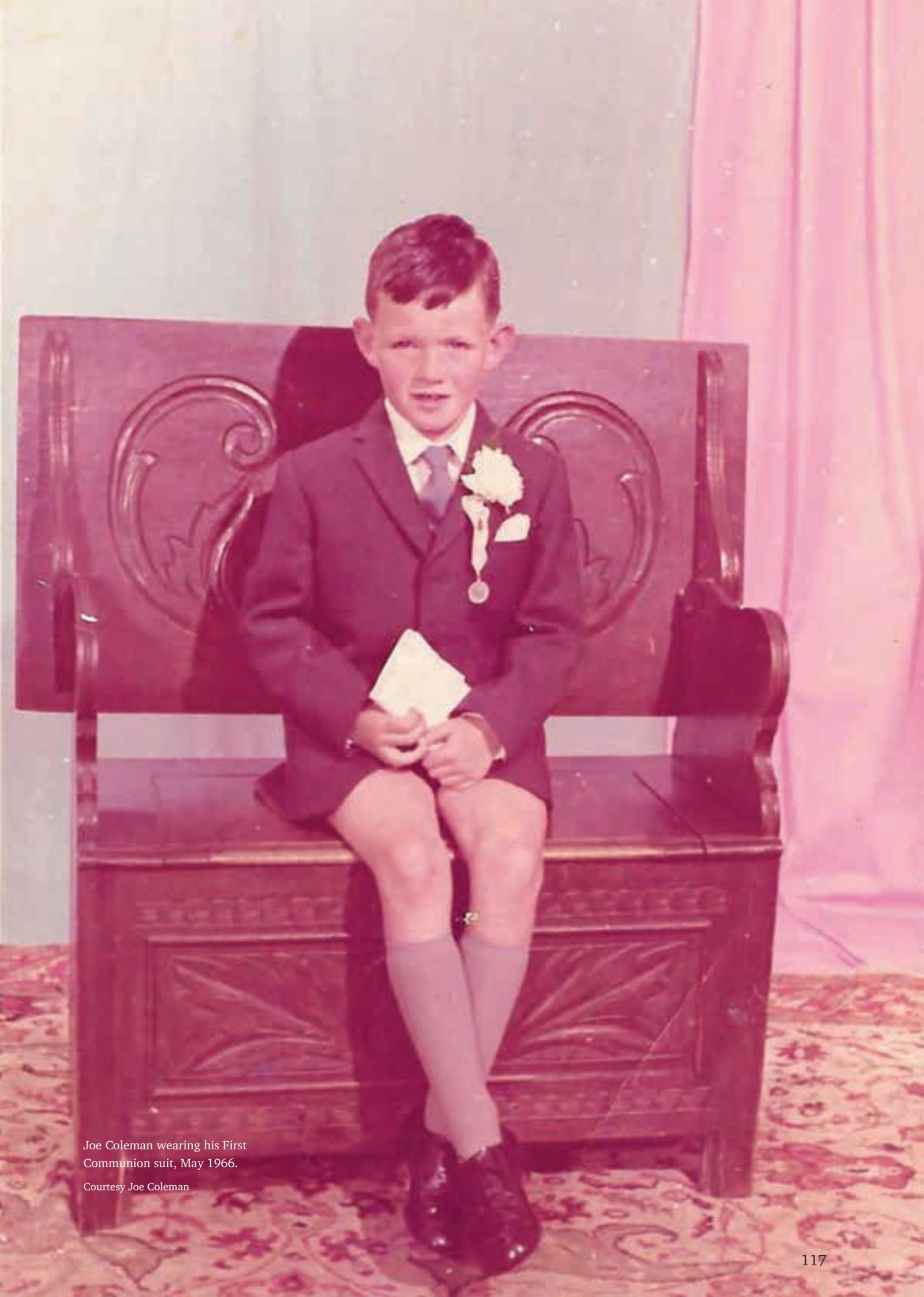
The Factory and the city

A number of stories also grew up around the water supply that fed the boilers for the LCF. As young teenagers, Pat McKeon a former employee and his friends 'would fish for roach in the water tank as the fish came in from the quarry...Hartigan, the caretaker, would run them, [chasing them off the premises]'.⁸⁰ The quarry, which was located near the factory, had its own folklore. Joe Hannan, remembers that the 'water tank held fish, [which came from the quarry] and there was a water spring in the quarry'.⁸¹ Sarah Lee Kiely who lived in the area remembers that:

some children are said to have died in the quarry. So the older people in the community said there was a big black snake in the water who ate the children. This was to stop children being drowned in the quarry, to make them afraid to be near it.⁸²

With a major clothing factory based in the city Limerick people could easily get measurement taken for formal wear for their important life events. Joe Coleman recalls being taken to LCF in 1966 to be measured for his first communion suit and says that 'in those days it was short pants'.⁸³ Christopher Flynn whose mother Rita Flynn nee Byrnes worked in the factory, he remembers being taken to the factory to be measured for his confirmation suit in the office.⁸⁴ When the company was taken over by Aquascutum in 1969 the production of boys' clothing ceased.

'In those days it was short pants'.⁸⁵



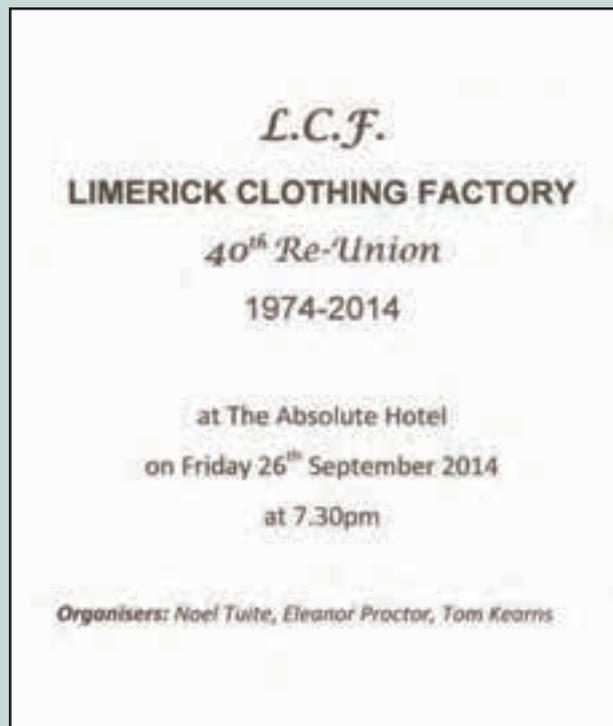
Joe Coleman wearing his First
Communion suit, May 1966.

Courtesy Joe Coleman

40th Anniversary Reunion

Even after the closure of the LCF its memory and traditions continued to live on in the minds of its former employees. Over the years of operation, a community among the employees was formed. The social aspect of working in the factory was very important to the people in the community. It was not just a place to work-it was also a place where friendships were formed, life-long relationships were developed and future generations were made. This deep-rooted community withstood the test of time, and on the 26th September 2014, a gathering was held in the Absolute Hotel to mark the 40th anniversary of the factory's closure. Almost one hundred former employees attended the event which was organised by Noel Tuite, Eleanor Proctor and Tom Kearns. Like their counterparts who donated money during the Second World War the former clothing factory workers donated money raised on the night to the Children's Arc in the University Hospital Limerick.

A large contingent of the former staff attended the OpenHouse Limerick event on the site hosted by the Limerick City and County Council on 27 June 2015. Here they reminisced about their time in the factory and a number took part in interviews on the day.



2014 Limerick Clothing Factory 40th anniversary

Courtesy Noel Tuite



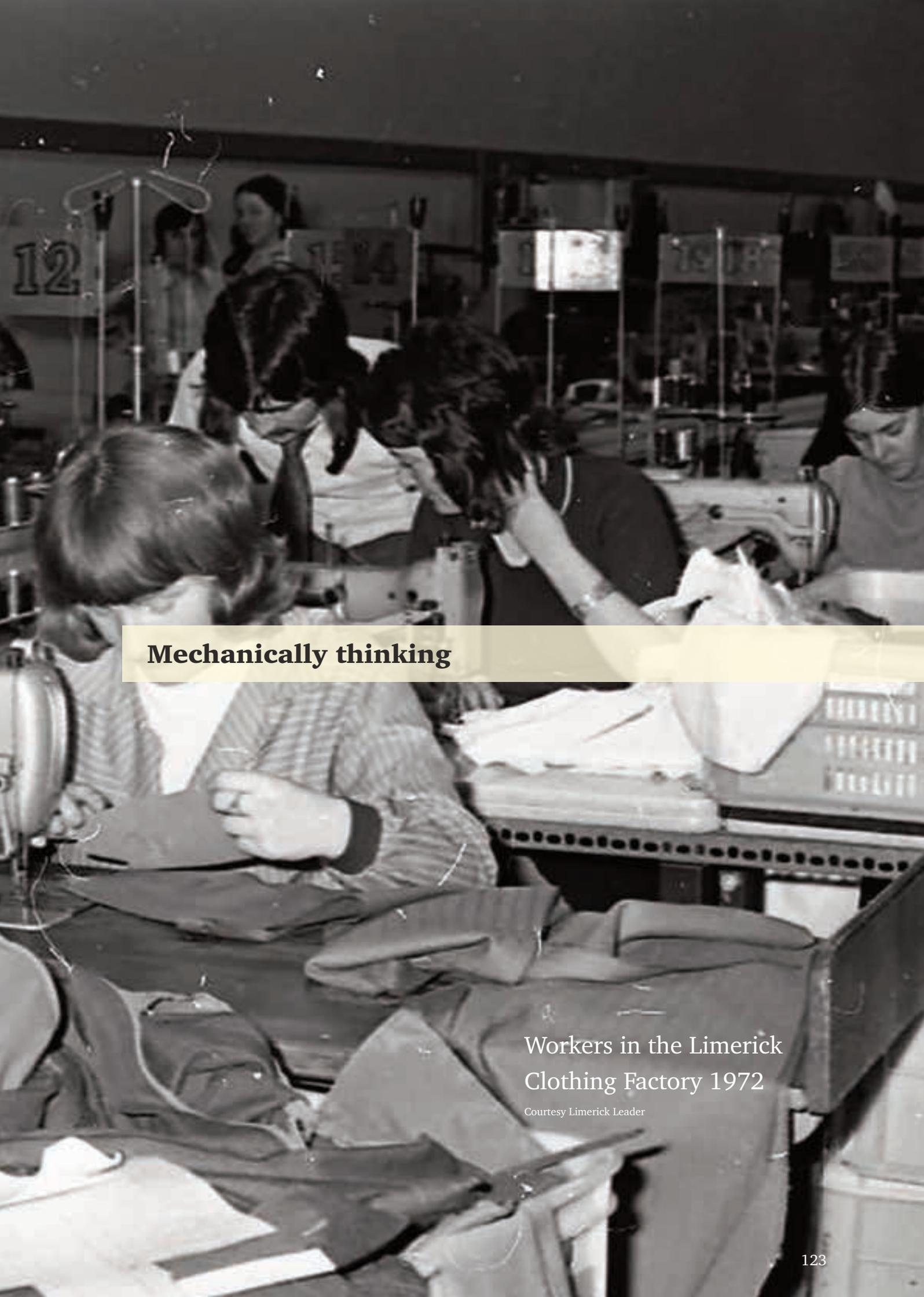


Endnotes

- ¹ Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015.
- ² Rita Flynn nee Byrnes, 27 June 2015.
- ³ Noel Tuite, 15 February 2016.
- ⁴ Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015.
- ⁵ Interview with Joan Finucane, 27 June 2015.
- ⁶ Clement Cassidy, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷ Interview with May O'Grady, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸ Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015.
- ⁹ Interview Maureen Morrissey by Sharon Slater, 27 Jun 2015. Maura Stapleton and Noel Tuite also remember this episode.
- ¹⁰ Noel Tuite, 15 February 2016.
- ¹¹ *Irish Press*, 02 January 1935.
- ¹² Interview Paddy Finucane by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ¹³ May O'Grady, 27 June 2015.
- ¹⁴ Interview Breda Morrissey, Mary Fitzgerald Ryan and Margaret Doran by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ¹⁵ Clement Cassidy, 27 June 2015.
- ¹⁶ Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015.
- ¹⁷ Teresa Roche nee Fitzgerald, 27 June 2015.
- ¹⁸ Interview Teresa Roche nee Fitzgerald by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ¹⁹ *Limerick Leader*, 26 November 1955.
- ²⁰ Teresa Roche nee Fitzgerald; Margaret Doran, 27 June 2015.
- ²¹ Interview with Tony Browne by Sharon Slater, 8 January 2016.
- ²² Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015.
- ²³ *Irish Examiner*, 26 January 1931. *Kerry News*, 4 February 1931.
- ²⁴ *The Irish Canadian*, 5 February 1885
- ²⁵ Interview Austin Short by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ²⁶ Birth, Death and Marriages of Ireland. Limerick, January - March 1892 Vol. 5, Page 352.
- ²⁷ *Limerick Chronicle*, 26 January 1892.
- ²⁸ Amy Kinsella, 27 Jun 2015.
- ²⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 2 September 1899.
- ³⁰ Austin Shortt, 24 January 2017.
- ³¹ *Irish Examiner*, 12 November 1969.
- ³² *Leicestershire Mercury*, 5 July 1884.
- ³³ *Freeman's Journal*, 21 March 1887.
- ³⁴ *North Eastern Daily Gazette*, 29 May 1894.
- ³⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 24 August 1894.
- ³⁶ *The Dundee Courier*, 23 July 1895.
- ³⁷ *Western Times*, 14 November 1902.
- ³⁸ *New Zealand Tablet*, 15 January 1903.
- ³⁹ *Irish Examiner*, 1 August 1911.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 11 & 19 August 1911.
- ⁴¹ *Limerick Leader*, 11 July 1938.
- ⁴² *Irish Press*, 21 February 1948.
- ⁴³ *Irish Press*, 14 November 1962.
- ⁴⁴ Interview Noel Kilbridge by Sharon Slater, 27 Jun 2015.

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- ⁴⁵ *Irish Independent*, 16 Oct 1962; Census of Ireland 1911.
- ⁴⁶ BMD, Jul-Sep 1880. Limerick Vol. 5 P. 203; Census of Ireland 1901. In 1901 Ellen was living with her widowed mother Mary Lyddy and widowed sister, Mary Quin on Mungret Street.
- ⁴⁷ *Irish Press*, 14 November 1962.
- ⁴⁸ *Irish Independent*, 14 November 1962.
- ⁴⁹ Limerick Archives. Mount Saint Lawrence Burial Register. Plot Ic 280.
- ⁵⁰ Noel Kilbridge, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵¹ Marianne Cassidy, Noel Kilbridge and Joan Finucane, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵² Noel Tuite, 25 February 2016.
- ⁵³ Interview Geraldine Murphy by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵⁴ Interview with Mary Fitzgerald, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵⁵ Marianne Cassidy, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵⁶ It was officially opened by Mayor James Casey.
- ⁵⁷ *Limerick Leader*, 20 Mar 1935; *Kerryman*, 23 February 1935. Andrew Byrne was also referred to as Andrew O'Byrne.
- ⁵⁸ Interview with Tom Deegan, 27 June 2015.
- ⁵⁹ *Limerick Leader*, 20 Mar 1935; *Kerryman*, 23 February 1935.
- ⁶⁰ Interview with Austin Short, 27 June 2015.
- ⁶¹ *Limerick Leader*, 05 Dec 1936; Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015. 'the Sunday afternoon dances were 4d for all, men had to pay an extra 4 pence to attend the Tuesday night dances [laughs]. This was seen as expensive at the time'.
- ⁶² Rita Flynn nee Byrnes, 27 June 2015.
- ⁶³ Maura Stapleton, 14 August 2015.
- ⁶⁴ Marianne Cassidy, 27 June 2015.
- ⁶⁵ *Irish Examiner*, 6 August 1901.
- ⁶⁶ Maura Stapleton, 27 June 2015.
- ⁶⁷ *Limerick Leader*, 15 August 1949.
- ⁶⁸ *Limerick Leader*, 16 December 1940; *Limerick Leader*, 15 March 1941; *Irish Press*, 05 February 1945.
- ⁶⁹ Margaret Doran, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁰ *Munster Express*, 23 October 2008.
- ⁷¹ The TAM is the television audience measurement in Ireland. It measures viewing figures and provides precise viewership data for Irish Television.
- ⁷² *Irish Independent*, 20 October 2012.
- ⁷³ *Limerick Leader*, 23 January 1963. It was held at St John's Pavilion, in the first round the LCF with matched against the Limerick Leader, the LCF show put the Leader's 'effort completely in the shade'.
- ⁷⁴ *Limerick Leader*, 19 February 1964.
- ⁷⁵ Margaret Doran, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁶ *Irish Examiner*, 31 March 1968.
- ⁷⁷ Moira O'Halloran, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁸ Pat McKeon, 27 June 2015.
- ⁷⁹ Paddy Finucane, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸⁰ Pat McKeon, 27 June 2015. Hartigan referred to the engineer who lived within the grounds of LCF.
- ⁸¹ Joe Hannan, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸² Sarah Lee Kiely, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸³ Joe Coleman, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸⁴ Rita Flynn nee Byrnes, 27 June 2015.
- ⁸⁵ Interview Joe Coleman by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.





Mechanically thinking

Workers in the Limerick
Clothing Factory 1972

Courtesy Limerick Leader

A picture of Peter Tait
taken in 1882, possibly
in Australia

Courtesy John Waite Collection





Innovate Machinery

Tait was one of the first entrepreneurs in the world to bring together three elements which revolutionised the garment industry: sewing machines, steam power and assembly lines. The technology race was in fact closely run and Tait's role in the combination of these elements is detailed in the following chapter.¹

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, all clothing was made by hand. For thousands of years, from the first bone needles and sinew thread used in the Stone Age to the steel needles and linen threads of the Victorian period, the stitching method varied little. Both tailors (mainly men) and seamstresses (almost always female) worked from home or occasionally on a short term basis in the residence of a well-to-do customer. Hand-made clothing was expensive and time consuming to produce. Consequently, tailors enjoyed high status and were among the first tradesmen to organise into trade guilds, which were forerunners of trade unions. The first Guild of Tailors in England and Ireland was registered in Bristol in 1399 and there was a Guild of Tailors in Limerick by 1741.²

Song of the Shirt – Thomas Hood

With fingers weary and worn,

With eyelids heavy and red,

A woman sat, in unwomanly rags,

Plying her needle and thread, -

Stitch!Stitch!Stitch!

In poverty, hunger, and dirt;

And still with a voice of dolorous pitch -

Would that its tone could reach the rich! –

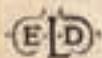
She sang this 'Song of the Shirts!'³

As one of the world's largest industries, textiles and clothing was the principal driving force of the Industrial Revolution. This Revolution was accompanied by a major population explosion, which created a demand for more clothing. This in turn produced a series of innovations, which increased the rate at which clothing could be manufactured. The first stage in this process was to simply concentrate seamstresses in factories where they continued to create garments by hand but in a much more disciplined environment. Here an experienced seamstress/ tailor would take at least fourteen hours to make a dress shirt for a man and ten hours to make a woman's dress. The second stage was the transition to mechanisation with the introduction of sewing machines. With this, the average time for making a dress shirt fell dramatically to one hour fifteen minutes and the time to make a dress to an hour. These innovations tell a fascinating tale of invention and failure.



PORTRAIT DE
Barthélemy THIMONNIER
Inventeur de la première machine à coudre

Éditée par le Comité du Monument Thimonnier
17, place Bellecour à Lyon
Reproduction interdite



The Sewing Machine

No one individual can be credited with invention of the sewing machine. It was developed over an extended period, by several different inventors from Britain, France, Germany, Russia and the USA. The first steps towards a sewing machine was in 1755 by Charles Fredrick Wiesenthal, a German-born engineer living in London who created a new type of needle that produced crude embroidery stitches.⁴ The first practical and widely used sewing machine was invented by a French tailor, Barthélemy Thimonnier (1793-1857), in 1829.⁵ The following year (and some twenty years before Tait in Limerick), Thimonnier opened the world's first factory to use sewing machines for army uniform contracts. Based in Paris, his factory had eighty machines, but a mob of tailors, fearing the invention would rob them of their livelihood, stormed the premises and destroyed all the machines.⁶

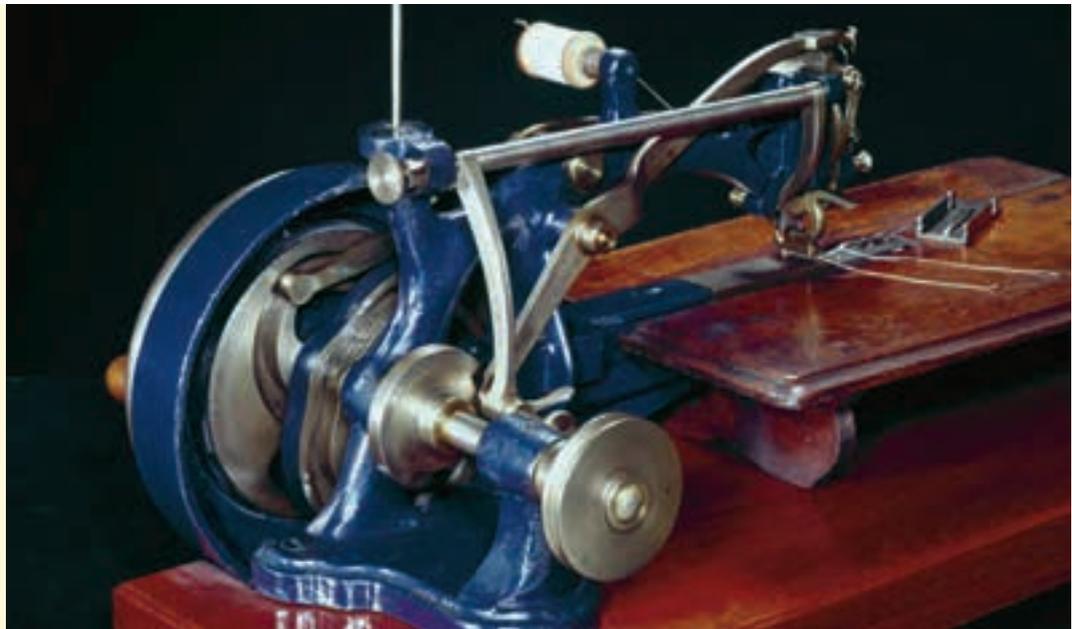
Following a decade of relative inactivity, the 1840s saw several innovations on both sides of the Atlantic in the development of the sewing machine.⁷ The breakthrough in America came with Elias Howe (1819-1867) who in 1845, travelled to London with his machine, where he met William Frederick Thomas (1829-1919). Thomas, whose father owned a factory producing corsets, umbrellas, valises, carpetbags, boots and shoes, all of which were sewn by hand, saw the possibilities in Howe's machine. He bought it for £250, and adapted it for his company's needs, taking out a patent in 1846.⁸

Tait buys his first Sewing Machine

Tait became the first clothing manufacturer in Ireland to use the sewing machine on a large scale. In 1856, he acquired a Howe machine on a Thomas patent, which he disassembled and adapted for his own particular needs, although it is unclear what changes he made. Whatever modifications he made were clearly effective. Tait made good use of his machines as between 1856 and 1858, his factory

Early lock stitch sewing machine made in accordance with W.F. Thomas patent of 1853.

Courtesy National Museum of Science and Industry, London



supplied 120,000 machine made uniforms to various army regiments yielded £250,000 worth of sales (equivalent to approximately eleven million euro in 2017). Appearing before a Royal Commission in 1858, Tait boasted, possibly with some exaggeration, that he could make 250,000 uniforms per year and 10,000 a week in an emergency. He also stated that he was using steam power, employed 1000 people, had invested over £4000 in machinery, and was able to pay his employees more than they would get in London for equivalent work.⁹ By 1864, Tait was using a Thomas No. 3 machine, which had heavy pedals operated using both feet.¹⁰



La Anatomie shirt.

Peter Tait, Simerick, Ireland. Proprietor.

The purpose of utility to which the shape or configuration of the new parts of this design, has reference, is described by the red lines A. A. A. is to render the shirt more convenient & comfortable to the wearer, the gatherings which usually come on the top of the shoulder are now made to come under, as described by the red lines. B. B. are false wrists which are attached by buttons so that the wearer may change the wrists without changing the shirt.

The shape or configuration of the parts A. A. A. and B. B. are new. The rest is old.



Sewing machines were not the only invention that Tait developed as he was interested in the entire process of garment production and how to simplify it for large-scale production. In 1853, he devised a new shirt pattern with three panels on the back and detachable cuffs.¹¹ A typical shirt of the period contained a single back piece. The introduction of a three-panel shirt allowed for ease of varying the size of shirts by amending only one panels as well as reducing the material used. In 1863, he also introduced improvements in the machinery used for pressing and ironing garments.¹² As befitted his well-developed business sense he took out patents for both of these inventions.

Troubled Tailors

Many of the innovations in the LCF resulted in industrial disputes both within the factory and amongst the wider clothing sector in Limerick as craft workers fearing for their futures resisted innovation. Predictably, the Tailors Guild with a membership of 200 were particularly alarmed by the introduction of mechanisation.¹³ Although none of the Guild's members worked for the LCF, any strike by the Guild affected business life throughout Limerick. Although Tait was the first to introduce sewing machines to the city, his example was soon followed by Russell's flax mill on North Strand (now known as Cleeve's Condensed Milk Factory) which produced canvas bags and by Cannock's and Todd's department stores which had clothing manufacturing facilities attached to their retail outlets.¹⁴ The first strike in Limerick caused by mechanisation occurred in October 1858, when tailors employed by Todd's and Cannock's downed tools. Michael Griffin, Secretary of the Guild, stated that while his members were not adverse to sewing machines being used in factories (naming Tait's and Russell's) they objected to their use in department stores and homes, as these would cause poverty to tailors and their families.¹⁵ The tailors employed by the LCF did not go on strike but supported their colleagues in the department stores and issued a statement that 'we would candidly advise the public to have nothing to do with them, but leave the work to the men that is entitled to it, for the machine is more expensive than the man'.¹⁶ In response, management brought in tailors from outside the city, though under armed escort due to violent protests from the strikers.¹⁷ The strike lasted a few months but the department stores refused to discontinue using the sewing machines.

Further strikes protesting against the use of sewing machines in the department stores occurred in Limerick in 1866, 1879 and 1898 but were powerless to reverse the progress of mechanisation. It is interesting to note that during the 1866 strike Tait was the chairman of the petty session law court in Limerick but had to step down temporarily due to a conflict of interest when the tailors brought court proceedings against their employers.

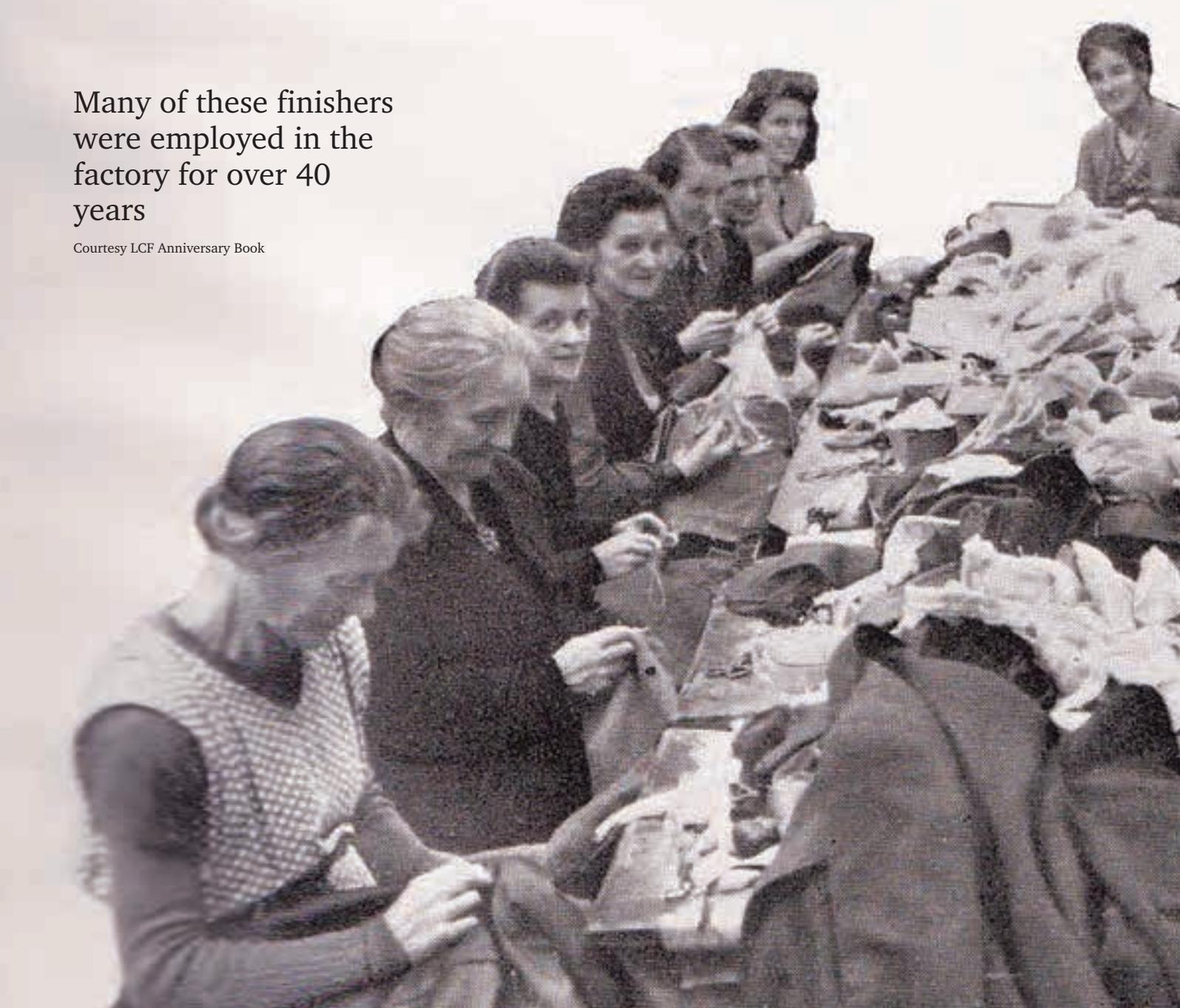
During each of these disputes, the LCF was unaffected and indeed was praised for the large size of its workforce and its welcome impact on the employment of the skilled workers in the city.¹⁸ However it too was affected by industrial disputes caused by mechanisation. In 1884 the following report appeared in the Kerry Sentinel:

a serious strike has occurred amongst the female employees at the Limerick Army and Auxiliary Forces Clothing Factory. On Monday some four hundred females refused to work in consequence of the introduction into the factory of some new machinery by the manager MR Robert Tait. This strike is much to be regretted, as the factory had once again begun to present a busy appearance, and things seemed to be most suspicious for the future. It is not known whether Mr Tait will withdraw the innovation or persist in its use.¹⁹

In 1902, eight hundred female employees at the LCF, went on strike to protest at the introduction of machinery 'for the purpose of saving labour and expense in button-hole sewing, at present done by hand. The change affected 90 women and as a protest the struck work, all the other female hands joined them'.²⁰ Both strikes were unsuccessful and the machinery was retained in the factory.

Many of these finishers
were employed in the
factory for over 40
years

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book



Introduction of Singer Sewing Machines

The LCF continued to use the Thomas sewing machine until the switch from steam to electricity in the 1930s allowed for the introduction of Singer sewing machines in the 1940s.²¹ Mary Bridget Cassidy was the first member of staff in LCF to operate a Singer sewing machine.²² Although Singer had a monopoly on the international sewing machine market, controlling 60 per cent of the American market and 90 per cent of the world market outside the USA by the end of the First World War, it would take another twenty years before its machines arrived in LCF.²³

Both the Thomas and Singer sewing machines were difficult to use and Amy Kinsella who began working in the factory aged sixteen in 1955 recalls that she was 'only there two days and a needle went through my finger and it got stuck and I pulled it out, I had to go to Barrington's. I swore I wouldn't go back on a machine, it [her reluctance to go back on the machine] lasted 3 weeks' she also remembers that there was one supervisor to twenty machinists.²⁴ Rita Flynn whose mother Mary-Kate O'Halloran worked in the factory from aged fourteen to eighty recalled that the women working the machines had to purchase their own thread and needles and the managers were very strict about giving them out.²⁵

Piecework and the Assembly line

Tait was the first to introduce piecework with assembly line production on a large scale to Ireland and this was by far his greatest innovation. Piecework may be defined as any type of employment in which



a worker is paid a fixed piece rate for each unit produced or action performed regardless of time. Piecework is attractive to employers as it only pays employees for what they produce.²⁶ Simply counting the number of pieces produced by a worker is easier than accounting for that worker's time, as would be required for the computation of an hourly wage. Tait introduced piecework as he felt that it would encourage workers to maximise their output.

Tait also grasped that it was more efficient to use an assembly line system as a process of manufacturing. This may be defined as breaking down the making-up of a garment into its constituent components and then assigning each employee to one these tasks. Each item is passed on to another worker for the next step in the manufacturing process. Individual worker only have to develop the skills necessary for his/her specific task rather than be conversant with the entire making-up process.

Each of Tait's uniforms had 36 different components, making up the front, back, arms collar, cuffs, buttons, etc. In the case of tunics, as well as front, back, edges and pockets for trousers. By giving each worker a powered sewing machine, he ensured that his employees could work much faster and have a more consistent quality of output than if working by hand. Tait was thus able to draw on a vast pool of relatively unskilled female labour and train them quickly in a small number of tasks, in contrast to the male-dominated skilled tailoring sector. Where a tailor, working by hand would have to make up an entire garment himself.

Tait also realised that it was much more cost effective to produce clothes in standardised ready-to-wear sizes rather than offer a bespoke tailoring service. Despite this standardisation, it is evident that a great deal of choice was still on offer. For a regiment of 800 men, for example, he could produce 69



Mr. McCarthy Limerick Clothing Factory April 1973

Courtesy Limerick Leader

different sizes of tunic for various combinations of waist (ranging from 31 to 37 inches) and chest (from 36 to 41 inches), and 42 sizes of trouser for various inside legs (from 31 to 34 inches) and waists (from 31 to 37 inches).²⁷

Tait's innovations stood the test of time and throughout its existence, the LCF worked on both a piecework and assembly line system. Attempts by Aquascutum to replace piecework entirely in favour of a complete hourly wage system were opposed by staff and both piecework and the assembly line survived until the closure of the factory.²⁸

Ready-Made and Made-to-Measure clothing

The LCF produced two main types of orders, Ready-Made (for example uniform clothing) which made up the vast majority of its output and a much smaller Made-to-Measure (bespoke) line. In the case of Ready-Made clothing, material was imported in bulk from all over the world as far away as India. By contrast, the material for the Made-to-Measure line was predominately sourced in Ireland. The LCF had its own Made-to-Measure line under which customers could be measured up in the factory for bespoke garments. The LCF was also widely used by tailors from all over the country who supplied material and measurements for individual customers. The garments were made up (cut and sewn) in the factory and returned to the tailors for minor finishing.²⁹

The process of creating an individual garment changed very little from when Tait first introduced the system until the factory's closure. First a design was created internally or supplied by the customer. This design set out the sizing, cut, material to be used and number of buttons and pockets to be inserted. Then the design went to the cloth manager who drew the supply of fabric from the stock room, where the stock room clerk kept a ticket as a record of the amount taken.³⁰ The design was brought to the cutting room, where a supply of standard sized card templates was kept. The appropriate one of these was laid on top of the material and outlined in chalk. Ready-Made clothing was cut in bulk using a bandsaw, a large stationary blade powered by steam and later by electricity. Made-to-Measure clothing was cut by hand using a shears and adjustments in sizing would be made at this stage. A size 33-inch waist trouser for example would be measured using a 32-inch template with a quarter an inch added to each of the four seam edges increasing the total by one inch.³¹

Unlike the rest of the factory, the cutting room was the preserve of men although some cutting room tasks were performed by women such as sorting the cut cloth into bundles and attaching a perforated ticket to each separate piece of cloth.³² Clement Cassidy started as a messenger boy at the age of fourteen before later going into the

cutting room. He remembers that 'the cutting room was almost as big as the badminton room, 10 people worked there, it was a great place to work'.³³

The bundles of cut material for each suit of clothing were then taken to the work stations on the factory floor where the material went through several stages of production. These stages involved a baster who added a thin lining of canvas between the outer material and lining; a fitter who joined the front, back and yokes at the shoulder; a sleever who attached the sleeves with a side seam; a plonker who added shoulder pads; a looper who added belt loops in the case of trousers; a buttoner and a button-holer who added these features and a finisher who touched up loose seams and trimmed edges. Finally they went to an examiner who checked all the pieces. Only then could the completed garments be sent to the pressers for pressing.

The tickets attached to each separate piece of cloth determined a worker's pay for the week. As each piece of cloth passed from person to person, they tore off a section of the ticket indicating that their portion of the work was complete. Each worker placed their portion of the tickets in a box which was kept by their machine.³⁴ At the end of each week they submitted their tickets to the office as proof of work completed where their wages were calculated.

Sometimes, if a machinist did not have enough tickets to make up their normal wages, towards the end of the week they would take some pieces out of the factory without the knowledge of their supervisor to finish at home. These were known as 'dead horses'. Rachel Byrne recalls:

The old ladies were finishers and sometimes they would bring coats home to finish as they were on piecework which meant that they would only get paid when they finished a piece. My mother would be sitting by the fire finishing them.³⁵

Although officially frowned upon by management, this practice was widespread and supervisors frequently turned a blind eye to it.

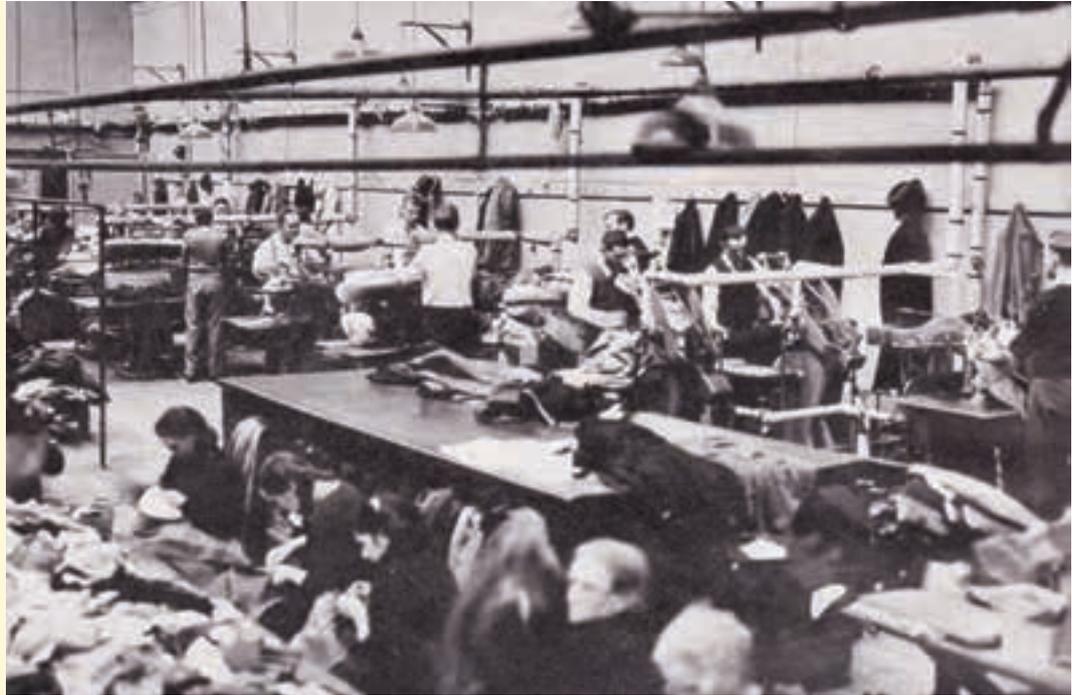
Finally, completed items were sent to the Dispatch Department where quality checks were carried out before being boxed to await dispatch.³⁶ Orders for local tailors were delivered to their shops by a messenger boy on a bicycle while those going further afield were sent by rail.³⁷

Illustration of Singer Sewing Machine from 1853
Courtesy Smithsonian Report, 1929



Tait the Pioneer?

While Tait was undoubtedly a pioneer of assembly line technology in Ireland, he had a rival in the shape of Messrs William Tillie and John Henderson of Derry who also claimed to have been world pioneers in large-scale clothing production. Tillie and Henderson opened a shirt making company in 1851 and six years later established a 19,000 square feet five-storey shirt factory. Like Tait, they also employed women using steam-driven sewing machines on their assembly line.³⁸



Battery of Hoffman pressing machines, c.1949

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book

In three respects, Tait was ahead of the Derry enterprise. Firstly, Tait introduced the sewing machine to his factory floor in 1856 while Tillie and Henderson did so in 1857. Secondly, Tait's factory at Edward Street was over twice the size of his Derry competitors and in the 1860s was considered the largest clothing factory in the Western world. Finally, the LCF production was more simplified than Tillie and Henderson as it was concentrated on a single floor, thus streamlining the assembly line process.³⁹

Despite this by 1890, Tillie and Henderson employed greater numbers with 1,500 hands at its Foyle Road factory and 3,000 out-workers in counties Derry, Donegal and Tyrone.⁴⁰ Their workforce had continued to increase while the LCF had reached a plateau at 1,500 in the factory only.

Steam Power

Steam power was a major catalyst in the development of the Industrial Revolution. Early mills and factories used waterpower which determined their location near to a water supply but a steam powered factory could be located almost anywhere, not just close to water.⁴¹ The 1820s and 1830s saw an explosion in steam engine production in Ireland. Belfast was the centre of this activity with both steam engines for the shipping and manufacturing industry being produced by Coates and Young.⁴² By the time Tait was investing in his clothing factory in the 1850s, steam power was widely used in factories throughout Ireland.

Although the auxiliary workhouse did use steam power in the production of heating, Tait removed the machinery when he took over the building in 1858. Instead, he introduced a new system, which provided steam power for his sewing and production lines. Due to his ever-expanding business, by 1867 Tait was on at least his third boiler system.⁴³ In 1865, Tait replaced a four horsepower model boiler and again in 1867 Lancashire Boilers were bought to replace older four horsepower boilers.⁴⁴



Lancashire Boiler

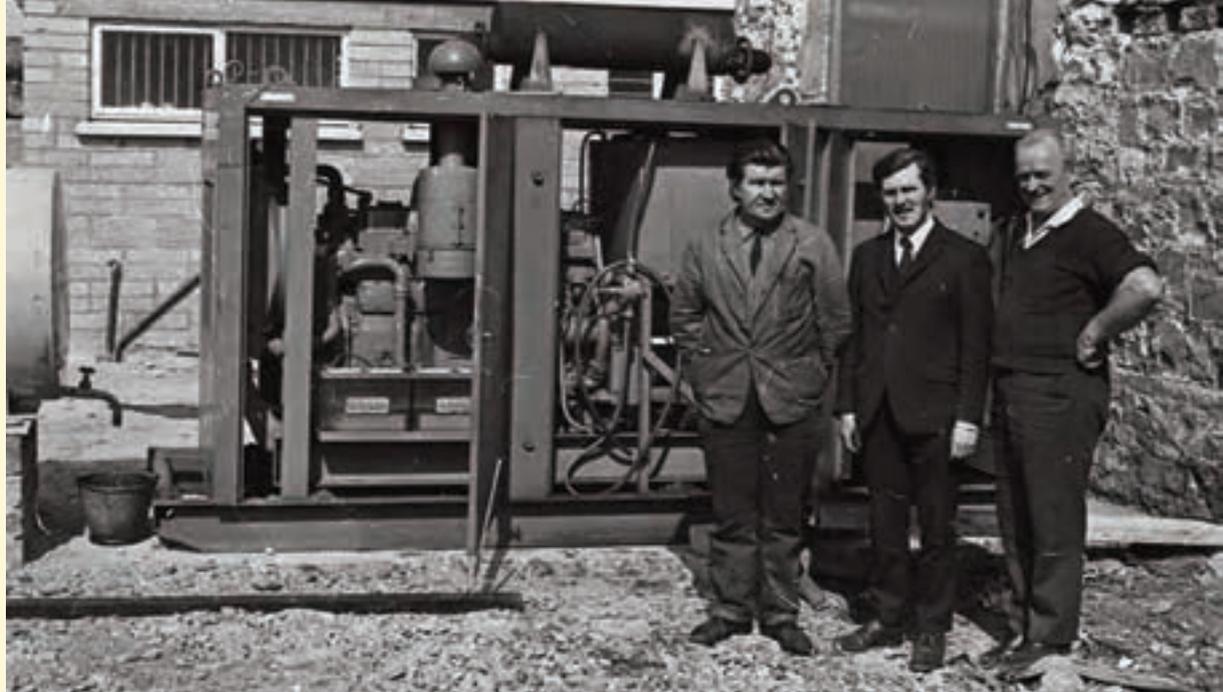
The boiler measured 7.0m long by 2.1m diameter (23ft x 6ft 9in) and was fabricated from riveted curved metal plates. There were two fireboxes at its front end and various pipes in and out of its top and front.

Courtesy Eamon O'Mahoney



Vapour steam generator made by Messrs Stone
Courtesy Eamon O'Mahoney

New Generator at Limerick
Clothing factory May 1972
Courtesy Limerick Leader



The Boiler House was located to the rear of the main factory building and measured 60ft x 41ft (18.3m x 12.5m). It contained two Lancashire Boilers, a model that had been patented in 1844 and provided higher steam pressure and greater fuel economy than earlier models. This boiler weighed around twenty metric tonnes and was manoeuvred in through the gable wall.⁴⁵

Although the boilers themselves were imported, alterations were carried out on site by local iron foundry Harrison Lee. An iron door/damper with the corroded embossed marking reading 'Lee & Sons' can still be seen on the eastern side of the boiler. The Harrison Lee iron foundry was founded in 1828, on High Street and by 1843 employed over sixty men.⁴⁶

These steam boilers which generated steam for the engines to power sewing machines until 1933 when electric sewing machines were introduced to the factory.⁴⁷ In the 1920s, they were also used to produce electric light for the factory. The steam-powered boilers continued to be used for ironing, pressing and for heating the building, until the factory closed.⁴⁸

So important were the boilers that they had their own dedicated caretaker who lived in a house on site named 'The Lodge.' The last person to fill this role was Anthony Hartigan (1912-98) who began working at the factory as a steamfitter and panel beater around 1940. At this time, the boiler was fed by turf and wood, which was stored in a shed on the site. The turf-fired engine room was located between boilers and factory floor. In 1941, the factory claimed to be 'the largest and best equipped factory in Éire'.⁴⁹ After conversion to the oil fired 'Clyde Oil Burner' in the late 1940s this area was converted to toilets.⁵⁰

In 1958, a new oil-fired boiler a 'Multipac' boiler by John Thompson, Glasgow was installed in the same room as one of the remaining Lancashire Boilers.⁵¹ Several mornings during the Big Freeze of 1963, the entire staff of the Clothing Factory turned up for work only to be turned away, as the oil boilers had frozen during the night.⁵² Further modernisation took place in the early 1960s, which resulted in a doubling of the factory's production capacity.⁵³

However, steam was still being generated for hot water, steam pressing, and heating purposes. In fact, the overall production process was probably little changed from the 1860s, albeit with more modern machinery.

A large ornate cast iron water tank is still visible today on the roof of the engine room, as are the remains of a chimney and well adjoining it. This is the only physical evidence of the steam power once used at the factory. The water tank is estimated to have held 145,475 litres of water with a combined weight (of tank and water) of 150 tonnes. The water tank was fed by the valley gutters from the main factory roof and by a well to the rear, which provided a more reliable supply of water.⁵⁴

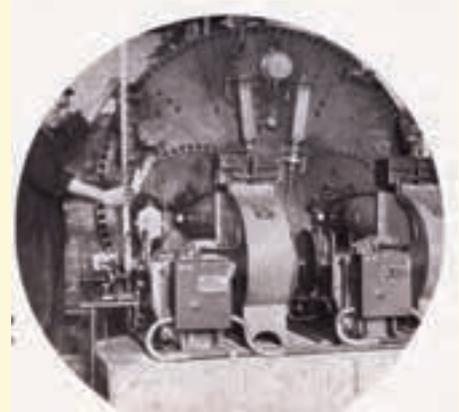
Right: Report of a new boiler being installed into the factory in March 1867.

Courtesy Limerick Reporter

**Steam Engine, &c.,
FOR SALE.**

A HIGH-PRESSURE VERTICAL STEAM ENGINE 8-Horse Power. It has been in use for about 18 months.
About 400 Feet of turned Shafting, 2½in, 2in, and 2¼in. diameter.
A Boiler, 15 x 4½ feet, with all necessary appendages.
The Subscribers having lately erected more powerful Machinery, have no further use of the above, which they will dispose of on Most Reasonable Terms.
May be seen on the Premises.
TAIT & COMPANY,
Prospect Hill, Factory.
(9779)

March 22.



Far right: The Clyde Oil Burner which supplies steam to the entire factory for irons, press and heating.

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book

Helmet Section

The helmet section which was based in a separate building to the main factory was praised for its innovative technology. It produced 'military helmets for home and foreign service, caps, constabulary helmets and caps, post-office helmets and caps, etc.'. The process of creating these helmets was intriguing enough to warrant a visit by the Countess of Aberdeen and her daughter Lady Marjorie Gordon in 1893. The supervisor of this section was John Riordan.⁵⁵

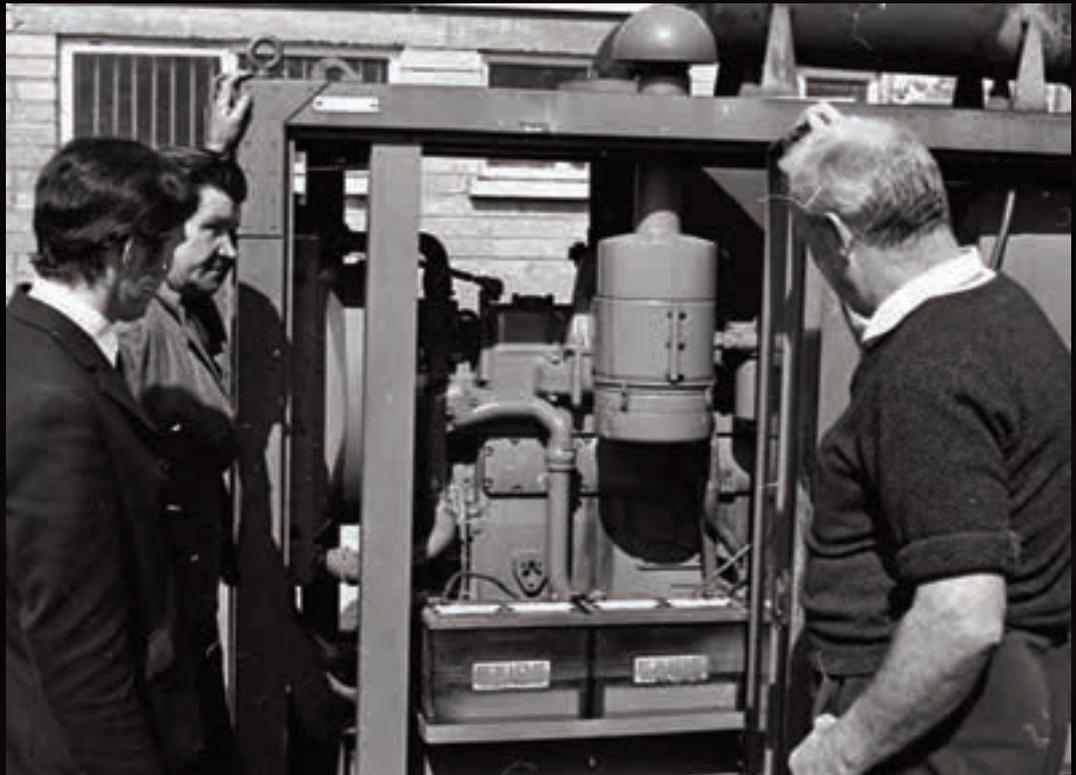
The Stratten Review of 1892 gives an account of how the helmets were produced:

Here all descriptions of caps and helmets are produced, about fifty persons, male and female, being employed. The wooden blocks upon which the headdresses are shaped are first covered with a cotton lining, and this, having been smeared with a solution of India-rubber, is covered with layers of cork, also treated with the solution, and the whole well amalgamated by repeated hammering with a wooden mallet. The cloth cover, also coated on the inside with India-rubber is then drawn over the whole, and, after the helmet has been trimmed to shape, bound around the edges with leather, and its metal ornaments attached, it is ready for issue to the army, police, volunteers, or post office, as the case maybe. A separate engine and boiler serve this room with heat and power.⁵⁶

Tait and the LCF were indeed pioneers in many aspects of the manufacture of clothing for the mass produced market. The use of steam powered sewing machines in conjunction with an assembly line system made it possible for the factory to produce uniformed garments at a greater speed and quality than had been seen previously. These factors were the driving force behind the factory receiving large contracts from both national and international customers and the basic processes remained unchanged throughout the operation lifespan of the LCF.

Liam Hartigan, Janesboro, a former employee of the clothing factory pictured in the Boiler room where his' father Tony Hartigan was the boiler man.

Courtesy: Alan Place.



New Generator at Limerick Clothing Factory May 1972
Courtesy Limerick Leader



Endnotes

¹ LCF Commemorative Booklet 1850-1950.

² Tom Hoffman, *Guilds and Related Organisations in Great Britain and Ireland, A Bibliography, Part II, The English Provincial Guilds, The Irish Guilds, The Scottish Guilds, The Welsh Guilds*, consulted online at <http://www.bbk.ac.uk/lib/elib/databases/tom-hoffman/GUILDS>. In 1741 the Guild invited Edmund Sexton Pery to become an honorary member.

³ *The London Charivari*, 16 December 1843.

⁴ In 1780, Thomas Saint was issued the first British patent for a machine for 'stitching, quilting, or sewing'. Unfortunately, for him, he did not successfully advertise or market his invention, and as a result, it took eighty-four years for it to be rediscovered. Between 1804 and 1816, Thomas Stone and James Henderson from France, John Duncan in Scotland and Austrian tailor, Josef Madersperger, began making leaps forward in sewing machine technology. Though their machines pushed the designs forward, they were still impractical for general use.

⁵ Grace Rogers Cooper, *'The Sewing Machine and its Invention'* (Smithsonian, Washington D.C., 1976), p. 10. Patent issued on 17 July 1830.

⁶ By 1845, Thimonnier's machine could produce 200 stitches per minute, steadily increasing to 300 by 1848. He left France that same year, travelling to England to show his machine at the Royal Institute London, ultimately leading to his machine being patented in America two years later.

⁷ In 1841, two Englishmen Edward Newton and Thomas Archbold introduced the eye-pointed needle and the use of two pressing surfaces to keep the pieces of fabric in position. In 1844, John Fisher combined all the disparate elements of the previous half-century of innovation into the modern sewing machine, but due to an error in processing his application by the British patenting authorities, did not receive recognition for his invention. In contemporary America, a number of attempts at creating a sewing machine were being made during the same period, though records are scant due to a fire at the American Patent Office in 1836. In 1832, Walter Hunt (1796-1859) invented a lockstitch sewing machine and in 1842, John Greenough (1812-1908) patented the first sewing machine in America.

⁸ The invention was entered as 'a communication' and described to be 'Machinery for sewing or stitching fabrics, so as either to unite or ornament the same'. The patent number 11,464, 1st of December 1846. Howe returned to America to find various people infringing his patent, among them engineer Isaac Merritt Singer (1811-1875) who thought the machine clumsy and decided to design a better one. Singer's revision combined elements of Thimonnier, Hunt and Howe's machines and in 1851 was granted an American patent. Howe won the case for patent infringement in 1854, and was awarded the right to claim royalties from the manufacturers using ideas covered by his patent, including Singer. When Singer later arrived in England, he found that the Thomas patents prevented him from making sewing machines in the country, and he was forced to set up a factory in Scotland. Singer's machine was advertised in Limerick in 1860.

⁹ Waite, Peter Tait, p.17.

¹⁰ HC 1864 [3414] [3414-I] *Children's Employment Commission (1862). Second and third reports of the commissioners. With appendices.* 4 February - 29 July 1864.

¹¹ Designs Office Registry, 10 June 1853. National Archives of England.

¹² *The Practical Mechanic's Journal*, Volume 8. April, 1863- March, 1864. Patent number 2961.

¹³ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 17 December 1858.

¹⁴ Other clothing manufacturing stores in nineteenth century Limerick were Cannock; Limerick Warehouse Company; Slattery & Co.; Kears & Co.; McCluine & Co.; McBirney. In 1911, Limerick had at least two Singer Agents, three travelling sewing machine salesmen and two repairmen. John Ward, Bowman Street, Sewing Machine Repairer 1913-14. The Clothing Factory had its own repairmen.

¹⁵ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 17 December 1858.

¹⁶ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 4 February 1859.

¹⁷ *Freeman's Journal*, 31 October 1858.

¹⁸ In 1866, the Limerick Tailors went on strike for six weeks to protest at women sewing men's underwear. Tailors working in Cannock, Limerick Warehouse Company, Slattery, Kears, McCluine and all the other Limerick merchants brought the issue before the petty sessions (law courts). At the time a tailor was earning between £1 5s. to £1 8s. per week. In 1879, the tailors at Limerick Warehouse Company went on strike as they were opposed to women doing what was had previously been determined was men's work. There were riots in the streets, plain clothes policemen were on patrol and a Miss Wilson who was working in Cannock's Department Store was injured during an attack on the building. Details of how these strikes were resolved has

not been recorded. The last such major strike in nineteenth-century Limerick occurred from May to November 1898 when tailors employed by the city's department stores struck in pursuit of higher wages. Tailors from outside the city were brought in to replace them, but were attacked on arrival at the railway station and brought to the department stores under armed escort. The strikers sought a wage increase from 4 pence to 4 ½ pence an hour, but eventually settled for 4 ¼ pence.

¹⁹ *Kerry Sentinel*, 10 June 1884.

²⁰ *The Western Times*, 14 November 1902.

²¹ *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 April 1965, 25 September 1965.

²² Interview Clement Cassidy by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.

²³ Andrew Gordon, *Fabricating Consumers: The Sewing Machine in Modern Japan*, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 2012), p.24.

²⁴ Interview Amy Kinsella by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.

²⁵ Interview Rita Flynn nee Byrnes by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.

²⁶ Breda Lantz, *'Piecework: Theory and Applications to the Motor Carrier Industry'*, (North Dakota State University: North Dakota, 1992). Since incentive systems, pay extra to those who are more productive, workers who are 'inherently' more productive will therefore tend to sort themselves toward incentive-using firms. Consequently, according to this theory, those companies using a piecework form of payment, for example, will get the best workers. Only those people who are productive employees will want to work for a company that pays for how much one produces.

²⁷ Waite, *Peter Tait*, Appendix II.

²⁸ A clock in system was in place for many parts of the factory, though bonuses were given for special orders which were completed in a piecework format.

²⁹ Interview Ger Hannon by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.

³⁰ Geraldine McCarter, *Derry's shirt tale*, (Derry: Guildhall Press, 1993).

³¹ Interview Noel Tuite, 15 February 2016.

³² Geraldine McCarter, *Derry's shirt tale*, (Derry: Guildhall Press, 1993).

³³ Interview with Clement Cassidy by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015.

³⁴ Noel Tuite, 15 February 2016.

³⁵ Interview with Rachel Byrne nee Carey by Sharon Slater 27 June 2015.

³⁶ In the 1950s Thomas Hanrahan worked in this section.

³⁷ Noel Tuite, 15 February 2016.

³⁸ *Children's Employment Commission (1862)*. 4 February - 29 July 1864.

³⁹ Fred Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House at Limerick Clothing Factory, Lord Edward Street, Limerick*, for Newenham Mulligan & Associates, September 2011.

⁴⁰ McCarter, *Derry's shirt tale*.

⁴¹ Maurice Kelly, *The Non Rotative Beam Engine* (Barrow Farm, Rode, Frome, Somerset. BA116PS: Camden Miniature Steam Services, 2002).

⁴² Andy Bielenberg, *Ireland and the Industrial Revolution: The Impact of the Industrial Revolution on Irish Industry, 1801-1922* (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 124.

⁴³ Waite, *Peter Tait*, p.17

⁴⁴ *The Limerick Reporter and Tipperary Vindicator*, 22 March 1867. A high-pressure vertical steam engine 8-horse power. It has been in use for about 18 months. About 400 Feet of turned shafting, 2 1/2 in, 2 in and 2 1/2 in. diameter. A boiler, 18 x 4 1/4 feet, with all necessary appendages. The subscribers have lately erected more powerful machinery, have no further use of the above, which they will dispose of on most reasonable terms. May be seen on the premises. Tait & Company, Prospect Hill, Factory. March 22.

⁴⁵ Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House*.

⁴⁶ Patrick McDonnell, *Limerick Iron Foundries 1806-1989*, (Unpublished article) Researcher with History and Folklore Project, (Limerick Civic Trust, Nov 2008 – May 2010), Limerick Museum.

⁴⁷ *Irish Examiner*, 21 August 1935.

⁴⁸ LCF 1850-1950; Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House*: The configuration of the power transmission system is unknown today as the shafts are long gone; it is unknown whether rope drives, gears or pulleys (or all three) were used to interconnect the engine and shafts. Shafts from the engine room entered the large workroom and powered all the sewing machines there. It is likely that the various appliances and the sewing machines in particular, were driven by pulley belts from below rather than from overhead line shafts. Given the nature of the work and close proximity of staff to machinery, the former would obviously have been much safer and less intrusive on the sewing tables. The cutting room was housed in this bay and the shaft doubtless drove the band saws, which cut multiple layers of cloth.

⁴⁹ *Irish Industrial Yearbook* (Dublin, 1941), p. 90.

⁵⁰ Interviews with Liam Hartigan by Sharon Slater, 27 June 2015 & 4 February 2016. LCF 1850-1950.

⁵¹ *Irish Independent*, 24 September 1958. Messrs Thompson began manufacturing Multipac boilers in 1958.

⁵² *Limerick Leader*, 3 & 14 January 1963. The winter of 1962/3 was the coldest for over two hundred years there were no frost-free days in January and February that year.

⁵³ *Limerick Chronicle*, 17 April 1965 and 25 September 1965.

⁵⁴ Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House*.

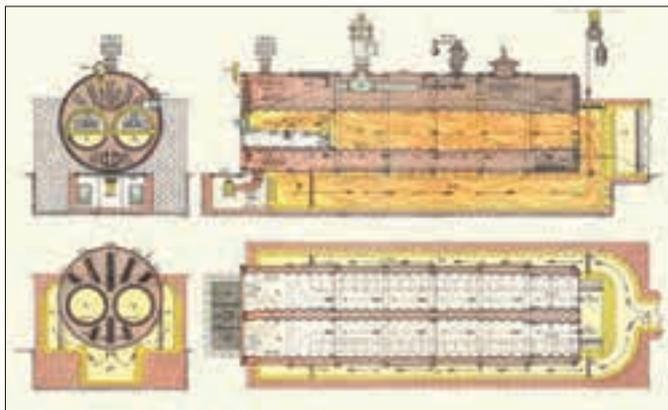
⁵⁵ *New Zealand Tablet*, 12 May 1893.

⁵⁶ *Stratten*. p.287.



This double-tubed boiler is a typical example of a Lancashire boiler. There would originally have been a fire grate inside the front of each of these tubes to generate hot gases which then passed through the tubes to heat the water in the boiler jacket.

Courtesy Fred Hamond



This 1911 diagram shows the passage of the hot gasses through, below and along the sides of the boiler.

Courtesy Fred Hamond



Vapour steam generator
Courtesy Eamon O'Mahoney



The old factory walls

Courtesy Limerick City Council 2011



If the Walls could Talk



At the east end of these bays is a two-roomed building aligned north-south measuring 60ft x 41ft (18m x 12m). This contained a steam engine and boiler. The steam engine at the east end of the site was used to power the sewing machines within the main building. Its north and south elevations are of smooth-faced squared rando limestone with ashlar limestone quoins. Its flat roof supports a cast-iron tank in which water for the boiler was stored.

Boiler House contained 2 Lancashire boilers. Patented in 1844 which enabled higher steam pressure and greater fuel economy than earlier boiler models. Weight of the boiler is approx. 20 tonnes and required a 100 tonne crane to lift it through the roof.

Cast iron water tank estimated to hold 32000 gallons of water (100t). Combined with tank overall weight was 150 tonnes.

The main building is aligned east-west and comprises four bays with an overall footprint of 320ft x 128ft (98m x 39m). Stratten's commercial directory of 1892 states: "At the time of its erection, it was said to be the largest single-span roof in these islands".

There was a long narrow two-storey former dormitory building along the northern boundary of the site, with a store room at its east end. The long building contained the cap and helmet department of the LCF at its east end and was served by its own steam engine, boiler and chimney. This block also contained a canteen and social club.

The three-storey, hip-roofed building was a Constabulary Barracks erected in 1890, the Westropp Warehouse buildings at this end of the site were demolished to make way for it.



Courtesy Sarah Newell

The first bay contained the raw material reception area, packing department and cloth cutting.

The next three bays are described as the 'machine room' and contained five tables stretching the length of the building (some 300ft) and some 200 sewing machines, all driven from underneath the floor to minimise the risk of accidents. There were over 700 workers, mostly female, in this section alone, all engaged in the production of military uniforms.

The Building Works

The Buildings of Limerick Clothing Factory

The site of the former LCF on Lord Edward Street and the buildings constructed on it form a major part of Limerick's industrial heritage. This chapter focuses on this key industrial heritage site and its change in name and uses over the last two centuries. Industrial heritage refers to the physical remains of the history of technology and industry. When combined with the memories of individuals, a picture of the impact this site had on society, the economy and the landscape of Limerick city emerges.

Nursery and Warehouse

The site itself is in a prime location on what was the main route from Limerick to Cork. As the name Prospect Hill suggests, the area is on high ground and during the winter, the hill would frequently become icy. Rachel Byrne née Carey remembers that the women working in the LCF would wear socks over their shoes to stop them from slipping.¹ In the mid-nineteenth century, the predominance of limestone in its geology resulted in the establishment of a quarry to the east of the LCF site.² After its closure at the end of that century, the quarry site was used as a play area by local children, despite frequent accidents caused by it being often flooded.³

In 1798, the New Barracks (now Sarsfield Barracks), was erected as the first large scale development in the area. A temporary railway station opened in 1848, about 500 metres east of the site where the current station exists, which itself opened on 28 August 1858.⁴

As a prime location, the first buildings on the site were constructed as a warehouse and nursery to serve the city's provisions requirements. These warehouses built of cut stone were later re-purposed as a workhouse, military and police barracks, while others were later added for use as an auxiliary workhouse. Its uses reflect the rise and fall of the local economy, from supplying the provisions of the city to supporting the poor during the famine years and later the rise and fall of Limerick's industrial sector.

While the street on which LCF sits is known as Lord Edward Street or Edward Street, it has also gone by the names of Prospect Hill/Row and Boherbuoy/Boherbee/Bothair Bui.⁵ These names were used interchangeably throughout the nineteenth century but by the twentieth century, Lord Edward Street or just Edward Street was generally used. The clothing factory itself was also known at various times as: Tait's Clothing Factory, Peter Tait & Co., Tait's Army Clothing Factory, Prospect Hill Clothing Factory, Limerick Army Clothing Factory, Auxiliary Forces Clothing and Equipment Factory, Limerick Clothing Factory, Limerick Clothing Company and Aquascutum Products Ltd.

The first recorded business owner of the site was John Westropp of Coolrea, Scariff. He first used the land as an agricultural nursery and a warehouse. The land was ideally suited as the clay soil over the limestone base was rich and fertile. Westropp's warehouse and nursery were built between 1827 and 1840.⁶ The frontage on Edward Street was 235 feet long.⁷ Westropp's warehouse contained two smaller internal courtyards and one large courtyard with an entrance from Edward Street.⁸ Although Westropp's warehouse was altered by each of its future occupants, the external structure remains relatively unchanged.

Interestingly and confusingly, Tait's father-in-law William Abraham (c.1793-1834), and uncle-in-law, John Abraham (1791-1857), operated a nursery adjoining Westropp's nursery. The Abrahams opened their nursery in 1826 under the name J & W. Abraham and operated until 1829 when that company was dissolved.⁹ After the brothers split their partnership, John Abraham took over the sole operation of the nursery.

Military Barracks

In 1837, there were four barracks in Limerick city; the New Barracks, Artillery Barracks, Strand Barracks and Infantry Barracks.¹⁰ In 1843, an ever-expanding military sought extra accommodation and Westropp's warehouse was leased to Captain Bligh's 61st company, which were based in the New Barracks.¹¹ During the military's first five-year lease of the warehouse, they upgraded the building at a cost of £2,100.¹² Following a period of use as an auxiliary workhouse, the building was again subleased to the military from 1855 to 1858.

The parallels in the adjoining Westropp and Abraham premises were again repeated as in 1847 Abraham's warehouse building was also converted into a military barracks.¹³

Auxiliary Workhouse

In 1842, the Limerick Board of Guardians built a new workhouse on the Shelbourne Road. They could not have known that the Great Famine (1845-49) would engulf the country only three years later. The new workhouse quickly became overcrowded by throngs of destitute people attempting to seek refuge. As a result, auxiliary workhouses were required and obtained by converting existing buildings in different areas around Limerick.¹⁴

The experience of the Westropp and Abraham sites mirror each other one final time, as during a meeting of the Board on December 22, 1847:

the clerk having produced a tender from Mr. John Abraham offering his premises (occupied until within the last few months as a temporary military barracks) at Boherbuoy, at the rate of £40 per annum, for a temporary workhouse (accommodation, say for about 160) ordered that the proposal be accepted for one year and that the Master forthwith take the necessary steps to remove the aged and infirm women to that building (to make room for the able-bodied).¹⁵

Abraham's building would return to use as a warehouse in the 1850s, and thereafter the parallels between the two properties ceased.

In 1848, Westropp's warehouse was taken over by the Board of Guardians at a rent of £145 per year on an annual review basis. The building was deemed suitable for the housing of approximately 900 people.¹⁶ While it was being used as a workhouse Westropp was not obliged to pay Poor Rates on the building.¹⁷ Despite this, in 1850, Westropp increased the rent to £190 per year.¹⁸

In order to make Westropp's warehouse suitable for its new inhabitants, it underwent a period of refurbishment after the lease was agreed and a tender for £240 by a Mr Duggan was accepted by the Board.¹⁹ The Board also sent in a team of doctors to ascertain if the building would be suitable to house those suffering from infectious diseases, such as cholera and tuberculosis, which were rife during this period.²⁰

In its first few years as an auxiliary workhouse Westropp's warehouse suffered a number of misfortunes. In 1848, a quantity of lead to the value of £15 was stolen from the building, which caused a delay in its development.²¹ The following year, a major fire broke out during the night as approximately eleven hundred inmates slept. It originated in the straw-house under the infirmary and:

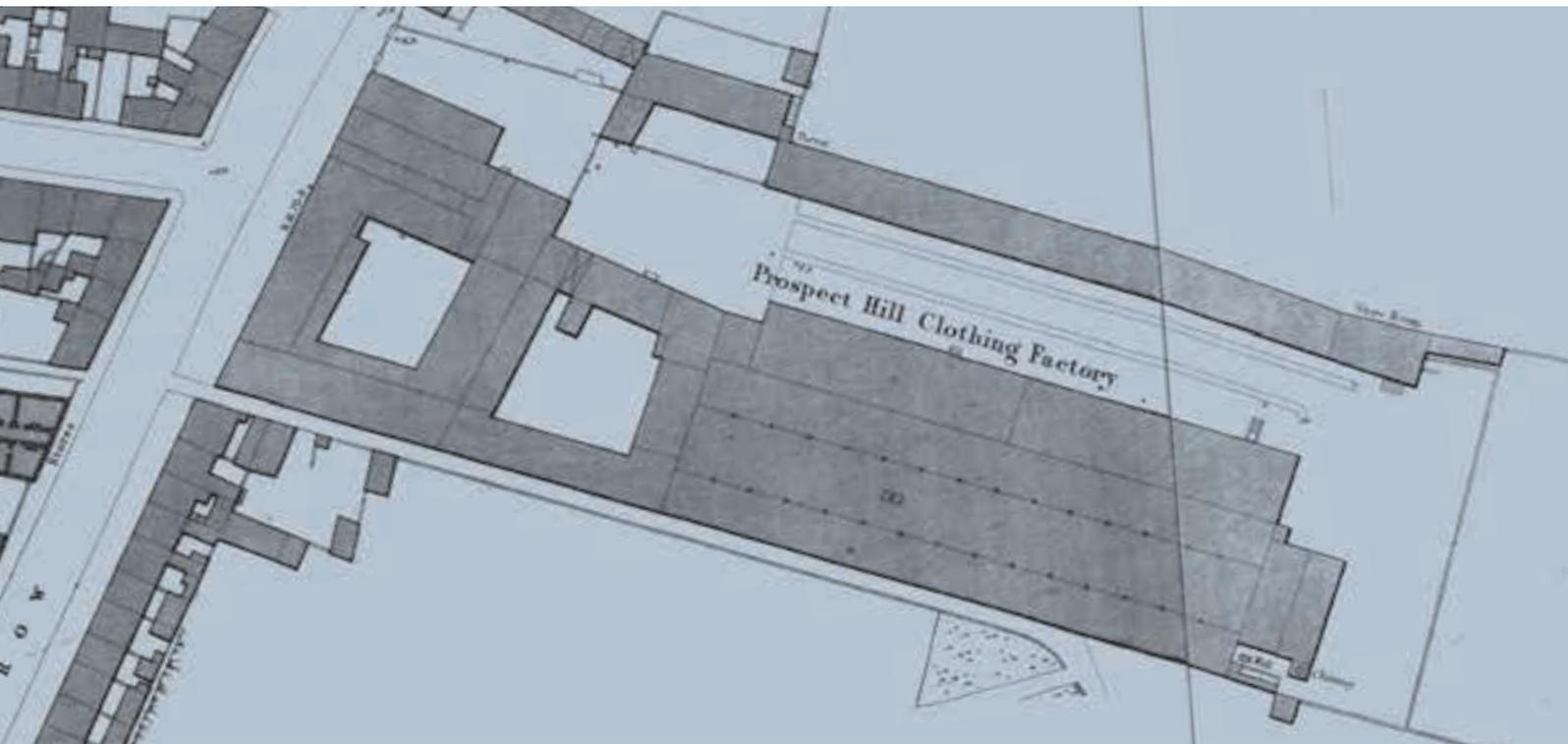
The flames having spread with rapidity through the buildings in the rere (sic), two spacious wings of the establishment were soon burned to the ground, with their contents, consisting of bedding, wearing apparel.

In total the fire caused £200 worth of damage.²²

In 1851, while under the control of the Board, the fire damage was repaired and three new stone buildings were added to the site. These were two single storey buildings directly to the rear of the Westropp warehouse and one two-storey dormitory building connected to the northerly external wall. This created the footprint of the site that lasted over a hundred years. The work cost a total of £3,561 and was carried out under the supervision of Limerick architect Joseph Fogerty (1806-1887).²³ The average number of men employed for the construction per week was near 100.²⁴ That same year a tender was issued for a 'steam apparatus at Boherbuoy Auxiliary Workhouse, sufficient to cook food for 3,000 people'.²⁵

In 1855, the building was no longer required as a workhouse so the Board of Guardians subleased it to the British military for three years at £400 per year.²⁶ On the expiration of this lease, the Board placed advertisements in the Irish, English and Scottish newspapers, but as no prospective tenants could be found, they decided to return the property to Westropp.²⁷ The Board commissioned William Wallace, architect, to value the property and repair the boundary wall before handing it back to Westropp.²⁸ The final six months of rent was paid in April 1858 and Westropp regained possession of the site.²⁹

Westropp benefited greatly from leasing out his buildings to the military and to the Board of Guardians. Not only were their rents paid in full, but rates were deferred for the period of the Board's use. In total from 1848 to 1855, the Board spent over £6,000 in improving the site.³⁰ Also both the army and Board of Guardians carried out extensive repairs and building works on the site, thus greatly increasing its value.



Site Map 1870.

Courtesy Ordnance Survey Ireland

Tait's Buildings

While the building was being used as an auxiliary workhouse a number of the female inmates were employed by Tait to produce clothes. In early 1858 Westropp allowed Tait to continue this enterprise for a number of months before leasing the premises to him on an official bases on 13 December 1858. This 999-year lease entitled Tait to occupy and augment the site of the old auxiliary workhouse at Boherbuoy at a fixed rent of £160 per annum.³¹ This was a £30 decrease on the rent paid by the Board of Guardians.

The site was very advantageously located situated near to both the railway line and Limerick docks which facilitated the easy export of its products. It was also close to the sprawling network of lanes in the Carey's Road area, which provided a pool of cheap labour. Several other factories, mostly related to the bacon industry, were also located in the area. They complemented the LCF as they provided employment for men while the LCF provided employment for females in the area.

Tait continued to use a number of the existing structures as part of his factory. Westropp's original warehouse remained intact, as did a long two-storey former dormitory building. In the 1860s, Tait gave the site his own imprint with the demolition of three buildings to the rear of the main warehouse and the erection of what was then the largest single spanned roofed building in Ireland.³² This roof of three pitches incorporated large glazed sections. He also erected a new purpose built boiler house with ornate water tank to facilitate the running of the building.

The cap and helmet department which was housed in the two-storey former dormitory building was served by its own steam engine, boiler and chimney. In 1892, under the management of Edward Taylor a canteen and social club was established in this building.

In 1895, fifteen minutes after closing, a fire broke in the helmet department. The manufacture of helmets involved the use of a highly flammable glue. Within ten minutes of the alarm being raised the fire 'seemed to increase in fury till at last fully a hundred feet of the building was enveloped in flames'.³³ The damage was estimated at £2,000.³⁴ Though the building was covered by insurance the helmet department was closed down following this fire as it occurred only three years after a fatal accident by fire in the same department.³⁵ The rooms which housed the canteen and social club escaped extensive damage and these continued to be housed in the two storey building for forty years.³⁶ In 1935 the social club relocated to Westropp's and the canteen remained in its original location until the closure of the factory.



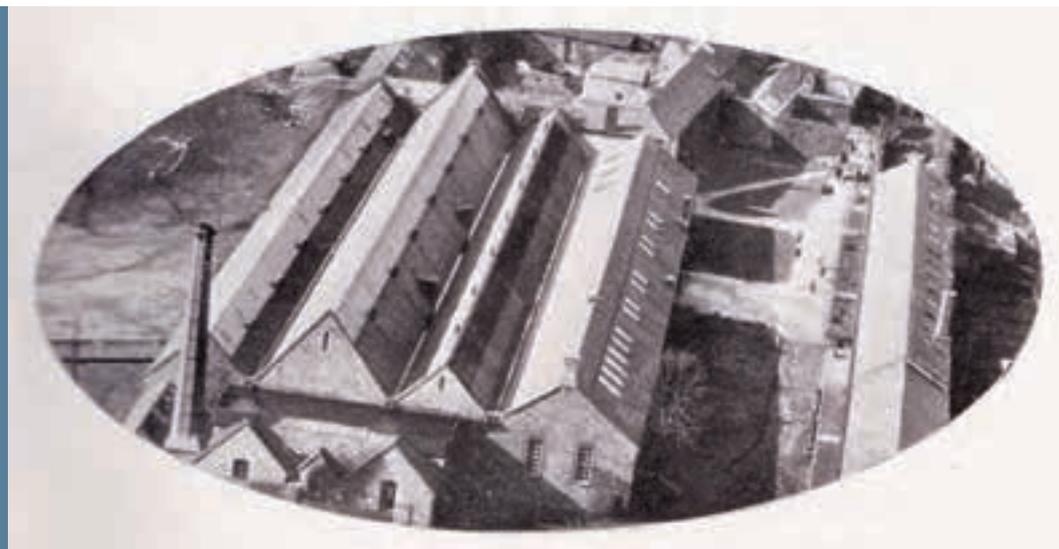
Former RIC station.
Courtesy Limerick City Council 2012

Sublease of Westropp's warehouse

By the early 1860s, the factory site consisted of the road-fronting Westropp warehouse, the two-storey former dormitory building and Tait's new purpose built factory. With the erection of the new factory Westropp's warehouse became obsolete for Tait's purposes. Tait vacated the warehouse along the street frontage and subleased it as stores to various tenants. The first tenant was John Seymour, 'provision merchants, soap boilers and chandlers'.³⁷

Seymour was required to vacate the property in 1863 as the building was taken over by the Peruvian Government and converted into guano(fertiliser) stores. It was used for this purpose until at least 1880.³⁸ Later, it was occupied by the Limerick Co-Operative Society (1893-1916), the Irish Agricultural Wholesale Society (1916-24) and Shannon Printing Works (1924-35). In 1935 it was taken back into the use of the LCF who converted it into the staff social club.

In 1890 a section of the Westropp warehouse was demolished and a purpose built three-storey red brick police barracks was erected. This building replaced an older police barracks in the Prospect Hill area and was occupied by the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) until 1922.³⁹ It was transferred to the Gardai on 21 September 1922 with Sergeant Andrew Eustace as the first Garda sergeant.⁴⁰ Later Sergeant Stephen Davis was in charge from 1938 until 1964.⁴¹ In 1962 the first Ban Gardaí arrived in Limerick and were stationed at the Edward Street Station.⁴² The last Garda in charge of this station was Superintendent John Murphy who later became the Chief Superintendent of Donegal.⁴³ Edward Street Garda Station was closed in 1987 and replaced by a new station at Roxboro.⁴⁴ Subsequently Edward Street Station fell into disuse and the site remained in the hands of the Office of Public Works (OPW).⁴⁵



Aerial Drawing c. 1900
Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book

Largest single spanned roof in Ireland

Tait continued to occupy the rear buildings of the factory site, which are described in the valuation books as a 'sewing factory' with a rateable valuation of £83. 'Small improvements' are recorded in the valuation entry for 1864-65. These changes included building of the new four-bay factory; which increased the value of the plot to £310 in 1865-66.⁴⁶

The main section of Tait's new factory building is still extant. It is aligned east-west and comprises four bays with overall dimensions of 320ft by 128ft.⁴⁷ At the east end of these bays is a smaller two-roomed building aligned north south and measuring 60ft by 41ft containing the boiler and engine rooms.

Although the valuations suggest that this expansion took place in 1865 or 1866, the entries may have lagged several years behind the actual changes being recorded. An article in the *Limerick Chronicle* of 7 April 1863 noted:

This large and extensive manufactory is now in full working operation, nearly 2000 females being at present daily employed. ... The various departments ... are conducted in a highly creditable manner – systematically arranged and judiciously apportioned. For the next fortnight the factory will be open for inspection of all respectable visits, with permission of Mr Tait, and the treat will, no doubt, be gladly availed of.⁴⁸

This report implies that whilst the premises had been revalued in 1865-66, the new factory had actually been operational since 1863.⁴⁹ In 1864 the building was whitewashed twice a year; the workrooms were kept airy and light, and warmed by stoves; and the windows were often open.⁵⁰ It was noted that Tait's factory was not like the sweatshops of England during that period.

During 1864, a number of reporters from local and national newspapers visited the new building, giving details of its appearance and the numbers employed. It was noted that the 'concerns of Mr Tait consisted of two long rows of buildings in which various processes connected with the production of clothing are conducted'. There were two large storehouses 'one of which is 60 by 20 feet, and the other of which is 40 by 20 feet'. There are 'two making-up rooms on different floors in each of which there are on average about 200 girls'.⁵¹

William E. Corbett's 1865 map of Limerick confirms that by this date considerable development had taken place to the rear of the former Auxiliary Workhouse. However, detailed analysis of this map shows that Corbett who was the City Surveyor, underreported the size and configuration of its constituent buildings of 'Tait's Army Clothing Factory'.⁵²

In 1892, Messrs Strattens' commercial directory of Limerick gave a detailed description of the factory:

The entrance, beneath a noble archway, introduces us to the court containing the offices, a spacious and convenient building. A second archway leads to the premises of the factory proper. The first factory building we enter is over 300 feet long and about 40 feet wide, and is devoted- first to the reception of the raw material; secondly, rooms for packing (by hydraulic power) and trimming the garments; and, finally, the cutting room. This room contains seven powerful steam cutting knives, each capable of cutting 672 pairs of trousers in a day. The facility with a pile of cloth, from 20 to 80 layers in thickness, can be dissected with absolute precision can only be appreciated after seeing the operation. The pattern, or diagram, is marked on the top layer, and the endless band knives follow the lines and divide the block without the slightest difficulty.

From this building we pass into the machine room, of which our illustration (reproduced from a photograph) gives a very inadequate representation, as it has been impossible to give a correct idea of the immense size of the room, which is upwards of 300 feet in length and nearly 100 feet in width, roofed in three bays, and lighted by a continuous skylight in each bay. The floor is occupied by five long tables, extending the whole length of the building, with wide gangways between. Upwards of 200 sewing machines are at work, requiring a small army of several hundreds of attendants as basters, machinists, button-hole makers, finishers, and pressers. Over 700 operatives are engaged in this one room in production of military garments only. All the machinery is driven by steam power, and, to minimise the risk of accident, the main shafting is all carried in tunnels beneath the floor. Full attention has been given to ventilation, and notwithstanding the large number of persons in the room, the air is never offensive.

The LCF site also included a house occupied by a succession of tenants, these were primarily the caretakers and engineers, who remained on site in the evening and weekends, maintaining the building and warding off trespassers. Among those known to have lived on the site were the Defferary family, the McCormack family and Hartigan family who were its last occupants.⁵³ There were no major developments to the structure of the LCF site during the first three decades of the 20th century.⁵⁴



Conserved water tank 2017

Courtesy Fred Hamond

Engine and Boiler Houses

The engine house, which supplied the steam power, was built during Tait's large expansion of the 1860s. It is situated to the rear of the main factory building and has a large iron water tank on its roof. Unlike the flat roof of the engine room the roof of the boiler room is pitched (pointed) aligned north south with three eaves gables to its east elevation.⁵⁵

As the factory machinery was converted from steam to electric power, the engine room became obsolete. All vestiges of the steam engine were removed, and the space converted into toilets. Unsurprisingly, considering that the staff was overwhelmingly female, the ladies toilets were much larger and had far more cubicles than the male ones. The ground floor of the toilet block was at a lower level than the ground floor of the factory due to the drop in external ground level from west to east across the site. These toilets were accessed by means of a stairwell down from the main factory building. A former employee Pat McKeon recalled that the male 'toilets were a long tube with three holes in it and it would only be flushed occasionally'.⁵⁶ The female toilets were to a higher standard which is not surprising as the female staff outnumbered the male staff ten to one.



The general machine
room photographed
at night, c.1949

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book



The gates of the Limerick Clothing Factory through which thousands of Limerick workers passed since they first opened in 1850.

Courtesy Limerick, A Stroll Down Memory Lane



Far right: Drinking fountain erected by Peter Tait in 1866

Courtesy LCF Anniversary Book



Ironwork

The factory incorporated a number of significant ironwork features, including an elaborate decorative fan shaped feature below the arch of the entrance gate. By 1971, this piece, which was of a filigree design and incorporated the letters LCF was removed and its present location is unknown. Underneath was a set of iron gates, which remained in place until the factory closed in 1974. Subsequently they were moved to the Curragower Boat Club 'by horse and cart and the horse lifted off the ground when the gates were moved to the ground'.⁵⁷ These gates incorporated an arched ironwork section to match the stone arched entrance way.

There was also a large elaborate iron drinking fountain within the grounds of the factory. It bore the arms of Peter Tait, so it can be assumed that it was erected during his period with the company. This ornate fountain had the practical function of allowing the staff access to clean drinking water. In 1948, this fountain was relocated to the newly built O'Brien's Park in Clare Street.

Damage to the factory

In 1957, a major storm inflicted serious damage on the glazed roof of the main factory building which caused the glass to shatter.⁵⁸ In 1963, a fire broke out during night in the carpenters' store which was situated in the middle of the factory. It took an hour to bring the fire under control but the damage caused was minimal.⁵⁹ A few months later, another fire broke out in the storeroom, which also caused only slight damage.⁶⁰ Following the closure of the factory one final fire engulfed the main factory building in 2003.⁶¹ In contrast to the two fires of 1963, this conflagration caused immense damage. The interior was gutted and the roof collapsed. The building remained in a ruinous state until redevelopment began in 2016.

Factory Field and Social Housing 1939

In 1939, a section of the site to the rear of the LCF consisting of 3 acres, 2 roods, 4 perches was acquired by Limerick Corporation for social housing. The Corporation acquired this land by compulsory purchase at a cost of £1000 as determined by the courts. This included a figure for 'goodwill' as the LCF lost potential property onto which it could have expanded.⁶² Part of the Hyde Road housing development, which opened in 1943 was erected on this land. As the new purpose of the LCF site is as social housing this reunited these two sections in commonality.



The Limerick Clothing
Factory drinking fountain
now in O'Brien's Park
Clare Street.

Courtesy Sharon Slater

The giant boilers of the Limerick Clothing Factory

Courtesy Alan Place





The Physical Evidence of Tait in Limerick City

In 1865, Limerick Chamber of Commerce announced its intention to open a public subscription to erect a clock in Limerick to recognise Tait's contribution to the city. Tait was a member of the Chamber but not of the Board of Management when the clock was commissioned. A total of £750 was raised by the public of which £500 was spent building the clock and the remaining £250 was given to Tait personally. The clock tower now known as Tait's Clock in Baker Place was designed by William Corbett the city architect and completed in 1867.⁶³

Many of Tait's exploits were extolled by the local poet Michael Hogan (1832-99), who was in his pay, and therefore far from unbiased. Hogan wrote the following poem to mark the erection of the clock:

That splendid pile of noble stone,
With its grand clock of graceful cone,
Was founded to commemorate
The matchless worth of generous Tait,
A public testimonial made
To honour Limerick's Prince of Trade
The fine perfection of its plan
Is like the grandeur of the man;
And while it charms the public view,
It does a public service too;
The rich-toned bells that grace its tower
Hymn the advance of every hour,
And in their sweet alternate chime
We hear the warning voice of time.⁶⁴

In 1942 proposals were made to call a street on Prospect Hill after Tait, but the proposed Tait Avenue never materialised. By contrast, in the 1980s, Tait's name was commemorated in the Tait Business centre on Dominick Street. Ironically this building was situated on the site of Danus Clothing Factory a rival of Tait's LCF and in view of Tait's Clock.⁶⁵

The historic buildings and the history of the LCF site on Lord Edward Street provides a lasting reminder of the rich industrial heritage associated with this site. For over two centuries it has been a place of work and residence for thousands of people. The site is closely linked to the city's identity and its story is an important thread in the fabric of Limerick's culture. From its early days as a warehouse and nursery providing fruit and vegetables to the city, it became a workhouse providing sanctuary for thousands of destitute families during the Famine. Throughout, it was always a place of work from gardeners to machinists to engineers and in its heyday as the Limerick Clothing Factory it was also a home away from home. The public interest and affection for the site was demonstrated at open days and oral history interviews, reflecting its importance within Limerick's industrial heritage. In its latest role it is the site of housing in the heart of the city, once again creating stories within the walls for future generations.

Endnotes

¹ Rachel Byrne nee Carey, 27 June 2015.

² Ordnance Survey Ireland (OSI) maps 1840-1900.

³ Interview Sarah Lee Kiely by Sharon Slater 27 June 2015. *Freeman's Journal*, 30 September 1839. Thomas Welsh suffered a fractured leg working in this quarry.

⁴ In 1769, Edmund Sexton Pery commissioned the Irish engineer Christopher Colles to design a town plan on his estate to the east of the old the older walled city which has since become known as Newtown Pery.

⁵ Boherbuoy which translates from Irish to yellow road, was a name derived from the yellow clay under the road. The original road would have been bare, exposing this soil, so the road would have had a yellow appearance. Another theory states that the name comes from the yellow gorse which grew alongside the road. The name Lord Edward Street was given for the Commander-in-Chief of the Army of the United Irishmen, Lord Edward Fitzgerald (1763-1798)'Gerry Joyce, *'Limerick City Street Names'* (Limerick City Council; Limerick, 1997).

⁶ Map of Limerick from Fitzgerald and McGregor's *History of Limerick*, 1827, published by George McKern; OSI, 1840. *Limerick Reporter*, 20 November 1840: That year Westropp's sold the contents of his nursery 'The splendid collection of Fine Fruit and Forest Trees, Rare Exotics; Green House and Hot- House Plants, Vinery, &c., &c.' After this sale, Westropp redeveloped the area into land for buildings.

⁷ Lease agreement between Westropp and Tait 1858.

⁸ OSI, 1840.

⁹ *Limerick Chronicle* 26 August 1857; *Dublin Evening Post*, 12 November 1829.

¹⁰ Samuel Lewis, *'A Topographical Dictionary of Ireland'*, (London; 1837): 'the Castle Barracks in the English town for infantry, capable of accommodating 17 officers and 270 non-commissioned officers and privates, with an hospital for 29 patients; the New Barracks, on the outside of Newtown Pery, adapted for 37 officers, 714 infantry and cavalry, and 54 horses, with an hospital for 60 patients; the Artillery Barracks, in the Irish town, for 6 officers, 194 men, and 104 horses, with an hospital for 35 patients; and an Infantry barrack, in St. John's-square, for 4 officers and 107 men: a military prison, lately built in the new barrack, has 6 cells; Strand Barracks in the former Union Workhouse on North Strand was established in 1841.'

¹¹ *Limerick Reporter*, 14 November 1843. Captain Bligh was no relation to the infamous Captain William Bligh of the Munity of the Bounty.

¹² *Limerick Reporter*, 25 May 1855.

¹³ 'To Be Let. The Large Concerns (situated at Prospect-row) lately occupied by the military, as a Barrack, with a commodious and secure Yard', *Limerick Reporter*, 29 October 1847.

¹⁴ *Limerick Reporter*, 26 October 1847. For most of the famine period, the two main auxiliary workhouses were at Boherbuoy and Mount Kennett. In January 1848, the Board leased a large store beside the Boherbuoy Auxiliary (the property of John Abraham). Other buildings in William Street (March 1849) and Clare Street (December 1849) were rented out for short periods but soon closed, probably because of their unsuitability.

¹⁵ Board of Guardian Minutes December 22, 1847. Limerick Archives. In 1850 Abraham's (Edward Street) Auxiliary Workhouse and yard had a net annual value of £26.

¹⁶ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 24 January 1848.

¹⁷ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 24 July 1850.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 26 October 1850.

¹⁹ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 26 February 1848.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 19 April 1848.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 16 February 1848.

²² The building was insured by the Board for £4000 under the West of England insurance company and there was £200 of damage caused by the fire. The 'fire engines of the West of England, St. Michael's Parish, 74th Regt. and Royal Horse Artillery, were on the ground in quick time, but could not work for nearly an hour owing to want of water. Lieut. Col. Doyle, Colonel Cox, Lieut. Col. Fordyce, with fatigue parties of the 74th, 3d. Buffs, and Royal Horse Artillery, rendered essential service. John Crips, Esq., J.P. and Pierce G. Barron, Esq., R.M., and City Police, under Head Constable Daly, were also in attendance.' - *Ballina Chronicle* 3 October 1849. The West of England Fire and Life was the insurance agent for LCF, they operated a private fire brigade.

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- ²³ Fogerty was responsible not just for the building works on the Westropp warehouse but also for the construction of other Limerick structures such as Trinity Church on Catherine Street and Theatre Royal on Henry Street.
- ²⁴ *Limerick and Clare Examiner*, 31 May 1851.
- ²⁵ *Limerick Reporter* 13 May 1851.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 04 May 1855 and 18 May 1855.
- ²⁷ *Ibid.*, 26 March 1858. Six months' notice was necessary to surrender the premises.
- ²⁸ 'at a cost of two guineas for his services' - Board of Union Minutes, 21 April 1858. Limerick Archives
- ²⁹ *Limerick Reporter*, 9 April 1858.
- ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 25 May 1855.
- ³¹ Lease between John Westropp and Peter Tait.
- ³² Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House*.
- ³³ *Freeman's Journal*, 01 November 1895. The situation was made worse by the north-easterly breeze. Luckily, a fireproof wall that divided the helmet section for the tailoring department prevented the fire from spreading yet further. By eleven o'clock the helmet section was completely gutted and the roof caved in.
- ³⁴ *Evening Herald*, 2 November 1895.
- ³⁵ See Chapter 2.
- ³⁶ Stratten 1892
- ³⁷ *Freeman's Journal* 21 September 1863.
- ³⁸ *Freeman's Journal* 21 September 1863; Leasers during the Guano operation included R.F. Gladstone in 1865-66 and Richardson Brothers and Sons in 1875-80. Guano, or bird droppings, had been accumulating on the coastal islands of Peru for hundreds of years and was discovered in the mid-1840s to have great value as a fertilizer. In 1860 433 ships took away a total of almost 350,000 tonnes of guano from Peru. The industry crashed in the 1870s.
- ³⁹ Slater's Directory 1856, p.313. The first record of a police barrack on Prospect Hill was in 1856 when the masters was a master Major Mackintosh. Valuation revision map of 1890 showing new police station on site of previous buildings at SW corner of premises.
- ⁴⁰ *Irish Examiner*, 10 August 1954.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 29 December 1964.
- ⁴² *Nenagh Guardian*, 8 September 1962.
- ⁴³ *Donegal News*, 27 September 1986.
- ⁴⁴ *Irish Examiner*, 20 October 1987. Gardaí at the new station were Sergeant. Michael Wall, Thomas Jordon, Thomas Moran, Donie Collins, Tony Chearnley, Con McCarthy and Kieran Foley.
- ⁴⁵ OPW Garda Station Disposals, 2014. www.opw.ie/en/media/Garda%20Station%20Disposals%202014.pdf
- ⁴⁶ Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House*.
- ⁴⁷ Stratten 1892: 'At the time of its erection, it was said to be the largest single-span roof in these islands'. Strictly speaking, however, the building has four spans aligned parallel with one another. The spans of sections 2.1 to 2.4 are c.38ft, 28ft, 36ft and 26ft respectively and total c.128ft; the combined spans of bays 2.2-2.4 are c.90ft.
- ⁴⁸ *Limerick Chronicle* 7 April 1863.
- ⁴⁹ The 1863 report stated that the premises the 'now in full working order'.
- ⁵⁰ *Children's Employment Commission (1862)*. 4 February - 29 July 1864.
- ⁵¹ *Irish Examiner*, 3 October 1864.
- ⁵² William Corbett Map of Limerick for Maurice Lenihan's History of Limerick (Forsters & Co. Dublin); 1865.
- ⁵³ *Limerick Leader*, 1 September 1990.
- ⁵⁴ Neither the OSI 1919 or 1938 maps show any significant differences to the factory as depicted in the 1900 edition.

⁵⁵ Hamond, *Survey of Engine and Boiler House*.

⁵⁶ Interview Pat McKeon by Sharon Slater, 27 July 2015.

⁵⁷ Interview with Andrew Duhig, 23 January 2017.

⁵⁸ *Irish Independent* 6 February 1957.

⁵⁹ *Irish Examiner* 30 November 1963.

⁶⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 24 June 1964.

⁶¹ *Evening Echo*, 26 May 2003.

⁶² *Limerick Leader*, 17 April 1939. *Limerick Leader*, 22 March 1939 : Messrs F. M. Fitt and Co. solicitors represented the factory. 'Fredrick Ormston also gave evidence regarding the field adjoining the Clothing Factory, on which he placed a value of £140 an acre. It was the only land available to the factory if extensions were proposed. The factory had let the land for grazing for some years but h would not accept as a criterion the grazing prices received. In replay to Mr Healy, witness agreed that the market value to anyone other than the Clothing Factory would not be £140 an acre. This field was due to go up for lease by auction for grazing on 25 March 1939.

Limerick Reporter, 04 June 1869.

Michael Hogan, *The Story of Shawn-a-Scoob* (Limerick: privately published 1871).

Limerick Leader, 30 November 1942.





A New Life for an Old Site

The Future of the Site

Between its demise as a clothing factory in 1974 and its purchase by Limerick Corporation in 2001, the LCF site had passed through a number of owners and occupiers. On 27 July 1976, the site was initially sold to Pavilion Stores Limited, a grocery distribution warehouse company who later leased the site to Bord Telecom as an engineering depot until 1991, when Telecom moved their facility to Crossagalla.¹ Telecom continued to use the site as a parking facility for a number of years until 1999, when they vacated the site leaving it idle for the first time.²

In 2003 a major fire gutted the main factory building causing the roof to cave in destroying all the internal fixtures and fitting of this historic building.

The process of transformation from a historic industrial site to one suitable for social housing was a complex process.³ The first hurdle involved acquiring the ground lease. When Limerick Corporation acquired the site from Pavilion Stores the ground lease was still held by Peter Tait's heirs.⁴ Acquiring the lease was a lengthy process. The lease had been bought and sold multiple times by the Tait family in the nineteenth century. In 2010, the ground lease was purchased from John Waite, great grandson of Peter Tait and author of *Peter Tait, A Remarkable Story*.

In 2010, Limerick City Council submitted a planning application for a Social Housing Scheme on the site. The plan included 79 (later increased to 83) housing units, 58 of which would be houses and apartments for the elderly; a retail commercial unit; and a community facility with a function room, exhibition area, meeting areas and other facilities.⁵ The scheme was designed by Newenham Mulligan and Associates, an architectural practice which originated in Limerick in 1902 when Clifford Smith won an international competition for Shannon Rowing Club.

The role of Limerick Council in Social Housing

The biggest social problem in Limerick city in the nineteenth century was the large numbers of people living in filthy and disease-ridden slums, without adequate sanitation or even the basic requirements of life. The first series of legislative enactments dealing with housing was passed in the 1850s, but little was accomplished under these acts. Between 1887 and 1895, Limerick Corporation borrowed a total of £5,100 and took the first steps in providing social housing by constructing 44 units of social housing. The Housing of the Working Classes Act, 1890 was a more comprehensive measure, which repealed practically all of the preceding acts and authorised local authorities to build houses for workers and their families living and working in urban areas. In 1922 under the scheme, Limerick Corporation built 18 houses in Church Street, Kings Island, 28 houses on Cassidy's Lane (now Garryowen Road), and 18 houses in Mulgrave Street, St. Lelia's Street, and Clare Street.⁶

Over the next fifty years, Limerick Corporation became the largest social housing provider of all Irish local authorities. In the early 1930s, a major programme of slum clearance and construction of social housing commenced due to the Housing Acts of 1931 and 1932. The 1926 census reveals that 36.8 per cent of Limerick's citizens occupied dwellings at a rate of two persons or more per room. By 1932, one third of the city still consisted of lanes and courts, without proper water supply or sanitary facilities. To combat this over 940 new homes were provided in the eight years from 1932 to 1940. Almost half of these were in St Mary's Park while an infill scheme took place in King John's Castle. This ushered in a new era of social housing provision in Limerick, which lasted until the late 1980s.

The notorious Limerick slums were finally eradicated in the 1960s, as 2,044 units were completed in the 1970s and 1980s while another 2235 units were constructed, mostly in Southill and Moyross. By 1981, 262 of the 272 houses in the Janesboro scheme were bought by their tenants under the Housing Act of 1966.⁷

The local authorities in Limerick County also made a major contribution to social housing. Firstly, the Boards of Guardians had hundreds of labourers' cottages constructed throughout the county. After 1922, the County Board of Health and the County Council continued to provide social housing on a large scale.

Regeneration of Limerick city

The large estates of social housing in Irish cities and towns had represented a great improvement on the substandard dwellings that they had replaced at the time of their construction. By the 1990s however they had rapidly become obsolete and were frequently hit by social problems such as high unemployment and widespread physical dilapidation. One response to these seemingly intractable problems was the implementation of special programmes of urban regeneration.⁸

In Limerick city, the challenges presented by these issues was addressed in 2006 when the Government appointed John Fitzgerald, to investigate Limerick's social problems. The resulting Fitzgerald Report (April 2007), recommended the establishment of two new government agencies, the Limerick Northside and Southside Regeneration Agencies, to oversee the complete regeneration of Moyross/St. Mary's Park and Southill/Ballinacurra Weston respectively.⁹

In 2012, Limerick City Council took over the running of the project, with a new plan for the four areas developed. The Council adopted the Limerick Framework Implementation Plan (LRFIP) in 2014 paving the way for the large-scale redevelopments of Moyross, Southill, St Mary's Park and Ballinacurra Weston.¹⁰





Conclusion

The Limerick Clothing Factory (LCF) site on Lord Edward Street is one of the most historic industrial and commercial locations in Limerick city and county. Throughout its long history, it has been used for a bewildering variety of purposes. Its original incarnation as a place of business was that of a warehouse and nursery. Later, it was used to house both the British military and famine victims before being taken over by Sir Peter Tait for his famous clothing factory. After the departure of the LCF, the site was used as a storehouse and later as an engineering works for Telecom Eireann before finally being taken over of Limerick City and County Council and converted for mixed residential/commercial use.

This publication aims to give a full account of the LCF site over the entire 200 years and not merely the period of Tait involvement with it which accounted to only one eighth of its total lifespan. The site existed for multiple purposes before Tait and the LCF continued under the guidance of five strong managers for almost a hundred years after Tait's departure.

Researching a company such as the LCF which closed over forty years ago was bound to be challenging especially as the company records (Limerick Clothing Company Minutes and Share Registers c. 1885 - 1984) were removed to Britain following its takeover by Aquascutum in 1969. However, this was compounded by their unavailability at the time of this publication. In 2009, after Jaeger bought the Aquascutum group these files were deposited in Westminster Archives, London as part of the Aquascutum Collection. In 2012, Jaeger were taken over by YGM Trading Ltd and in the following year the entire Aquascutum collection, including the LCF records, was withdrawn from Westminster Archives. Despite numerous attempts by the author of this publication to access these files, they remained inaccessible as their current whereabouts are unknown within the company. Consequently, it was necessary to rely on a variety of alternative sources to reconstruct the LCF's history.

Despite this loss, an extensive account of the LCF was constructed through the use of a range of primary source material, many of which were used for the first time. These included, but were not confined to, Tait's original patents in the British National Archives, Kew and the archives of the Shetland Islands in Lerwick. Over forty first-hand accounts by former LCF employees were recorded as part of the project, the affection which they had for the company shone through. It was much more than a place of work but the workers treated each other as family.

The history of the LCF site is not just about the series of institutions that have successively occupied it over the past 200 years. It is also about the people who occupied these institutions: soldiers, famine victims, factory workers and now the residents of the new housing development. One of the principal attractions throughout these transitions is its advantageous location within walking distance of many of the city's principal amenities: the People's Park, Colbert bus and train station, Limerick City Gallery of Art, as well as theatres, shopping and medical facilities. It is hoped that in its latest incarnation the former Limerick Clothing Factory site will continue to play a central role in Limerick's life.

Endnotes

¹ Pavilion Stores Ltd., operated from 1958 until 2003 when it went into liquidation and was the company was dissolved in 2005. They also owned the ground lease for the Guards Station on Edward Street. They used the LCF building as a warehouse. *Irish Examiner*, 30 October 1991.

² *Limerick Leader*, 13 March 1999.

³ Malcolm Doak, *Contaminated land and risk assessment: the basics: Necessary Steps Prior to Remediation and Development*, Irish Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) (2004).
[www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/licensee/IAH%20Tullamore%202004%20NDP%20Paper\(final\).pdf](http://www.epa.ie/pubs/advice/licensee/IAH%20Tullamore%202004%20NDP%20Paper(final).pdf)

⁴ Peter Tait's lease of 1858 covered a period of 999 years.

⁵ 11 February 2015, Alan Hart Construction Services, Co. Clare commenced enabling work

⁶ Limerick Archives, Plans and Drawings for Corporation Housing, (1886-1932), L/HG/HC/1

⁷ Matthew Potter and Lorcan Byrne, 'Social Housing in Limerick City,' in *Limerick Regeneration Framework Implementation Plan* (Limerick: Limerick City Council, 2014), p.471-477.

⁸ See [http:// www.brl.ie](http://www.brl.ie) for Ballymun and [http:// www.sligococo.ie](http://www.sligococo.ie) for Cranmore.

⁹ John Fitzgerald, *Addressing issues of Social Exclusion in Moyross and other disadvantaged areas of Limerick City. Report to the Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion* (April 2007).

¹⁰ *Limerick Leader*, 14 August 2016. Comment from Carmel Kirby, Programme Manager, Regeneration Project, Limerick City and County Council.

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