

PART II

the borris lace
collection

The Borris Lace Collection is arguably one of the most complete collections of a lace industry to have survived in Ireland.

✧ **When lace schools** in Ireland closed, many of the records and patterns were lost or sold off to eager international buyers. The Borris Lace Collection includes family lace collected from travels abroad, which most probably provided the inspiration for Borris lace itself, and a number of items of old household linen, much of which is trimmed with Borris lace. When the Borris Lace Industry folded in the 1960s all the unsold stock and records were packed away into cardboard boxes, stored under beds and forgotten but preserved. Some of the unsold items reveal an amateurish quality. It is understandable that the best work sold quickly. Other loose items probably belonged to the family, as many show signs of wear. They include insertions, edgings, centrepieces and d'oyleys.

When we arrived to start our cataloguing, we found all the items wrapped in tissue paper. Everything was stored together – lace, thread, patterns, tapes, account books and other paper work.

We catalogued the entire collection of seventy-two individual items, as well as the family lace. Starting with the small d'oyleys we measured and photographed, identified new or unusual characteristics, sometimes under magnification, and recorded the details into a purpose built database using Microsoft Access. High-definition digital images provide a visual record of all items including

ephemera. All items are now safely stored in archival mounts or in acid-free tissue, which was used to roll and wrap some of the larger items. The smaller items were inserted into sleeves of inert conservation-grade clear plastic. Mrs Kavanagh was very pleased with the plastic sleeve arrangement as it allows the lace to be viewed and handled without damage or soiling. It also expedites the processes of displaying and packing away.

HOUSEHOLD LINEN

✧ **Linen items decorated** with Borris lace were collected from the household to be included in the catalogue. A heavy linen twill tape often used in the lace for household linen produced a hard-wearing lace which



Catalogue item no. 69. A set of pillow covers of linen fabric with lace of linen twill braid. Lace edged on all sides 7.5 cm wide, gathered on corners. Opening is closed with handmade linen buttons and hand-stitched buttonholes.

has survived well. Linen thread to match the weight of the linen tape was used to work the large net ground. Despite the heaviness, the lace is still very attractive. A K4 laundry mark, embroidered in red, appears on several items. The household linen is as grand as the house itself and includes a bedspread with lace panels, a bed sheet, pillow covers, tablecloths, table centres, placemats and d'oyleys.

A large and unusual linen tablecloth, for which the family is unable to ascribe a purpose, is made up of squares of variations of the no. 1 design with alternate hemstitched linen inserts. It has a large hole in the centre which is edged in Borris lace and appears to have been designed to stand up around some object. It is catalogued as item no. 70. Variations of tapes, interpretations and workmanship between the various squares indicate that they were worked by different lacemakers. Chequerboard tablecloths of alternating squares of lace and linen were mentioned in *The Times* in 1909 as a 'novelty'.

CLOTHING

✧ **Items of clothing** include two Edwardian-style blouses with lace insertions, collars, cuffs and a dress-front. The account books record many orders for blouses in three designs. We were able to identify the two in the collection as designs 1 and 2. We also discovered many patterns for the lace edgings, collar and cuff insertions for these blouses, which both feature a wide foldback collar and a wide jabot falling from the neckline. The sleeves are fitted and gathered at the wrist with a frill extending



Edwardian blouse no. 1 bears the laundry mark 'STOCK'. The wide lace edging the collar and jabot, and the lace for the cuffs and frills at the wrist, is all of the same design. (See catalogue entry no. 64.)



Edwardian blouse no. 2; all insertions are of crag lace. (See catalogue entry no. 65.)



Pattern for lace insert for blouse no. 2

over the hand. The blouses are made of fine muslin, which shows off the lace to great effect, with a gathering at the waist centre back. Design 3 was more expensive, and presumably more elaborate, but unfortunately we found neither pattern nor lace samples. The blouses are accurately described in an article on Irish lace in *The Times* of 18 March 1909.

A 1912 order for blouse no. 1 reads: 'March 29, 1912 the Hon. Mrs Cahert, Adderley, Market Drayton, Salop. 1 no. 1 blouse 1.15.6p [£1 15s 6d]'.

FAMILY LACE

✧ Items of family lace in a variety of techniques are believed to have provided the inspiration and designs for the early Borris laces. A fabulous bobbin-made flounce of point de Milan was most likely the main

influence. Two pieces of Flemish bobbin lace possibly provided the inspiration for the crag design. Other items of family lace include a magnificent point de Gaze full-length wedding veil, a large flounce of Brussels appliqué lace, Irish crochet and black Maltese bobbin lace.

STOCK SAMPLERS

✧ The collection includes four large stock samplers (each 54 x 90 cm), of mounted lace specimens, which appear to represent the standard types of lace produced for over one hundred years. Each of the sixty-three stock samples was tagged with a Borris Lace Industry business card which included a pattern number and price, and occasionally the names of the stitches. These details match



*Flemish bobbin lace flounce;
flemish bobbin lace veil*

entries in the account books. The relative ages of the samplers are reflected in the condition and the degree of fading of the fabric of which they are made, in each case mauve satin backed with muslin. Stock Sampler 1 required careful stabilisation. Marie undertook this task and expertly drew the threads together with small running stitches.

Stock Sampler 1 is the oldest, and includes catalogue items nos 19 to 31. Stock Sampler 2 includes catalogue items

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Samples of lace made
by Collagers at
Borris
Co. Carlow
Ireland
undertaken by the manager
Borris Lace Industries

Left: Stock Sampler 1
Above: Label on reverse of Stock
Sampler 2; the front of the
sampler appears on page 44
Below left: Stock Sampler 3
Below right: Stock Sampler 4





nos 32 to 39. It is also very faded but in fair condition. Most samples reflect the Milanese style, with sample no. 36 almost identical to the Milanese family lace. Stock Sampler 3 includes sample nos 40 to 49, which contain a wide variety of tapes and styles. Stock Sampler 4 is dark purple in colour, in good condition and obviously the most recent of the four. It includes sample nos 50 to 63. It is conveniently dated by sample no. 59, 'pattern of edging no. 40 Nov. 1912'. It also displays a newer version of the Borris Lace Industry business card.



Borris Lace Industry business cards and invoices; order book entries

BUSINESS RECORDS AND STATIONERY

Account books, invoices, letters, business cards and Borris Lace Industry letterhead add to the comprehensiveness of the collection.

The date 1846 is printed on the original invoices, some of which remain in the collection. Some more recent stationery bears the year 1857, and this has often been incorrectly taken as the starting date of the industry. We can, however, be sure of the 1846 start date, as it is documented that Frances took over the supervision of the well-established industry from Harriet after her marriage in 1855.

Account books survive from 1912 to 1930, and 1945 to September 1953, when recorded lace sales ceased. The books record the orders, the prices and the payments received. Private sales to friends and family connections in both England and Ireland were also common.

Interesting entries from the Account Books 1912–1930

- **July 12 1912**, 1 D'oyley fish 2/- sent to Mrs Stock, White Hall
- **November 25 1913**, Mrs Stock, 12 large dinner mats @ 6/9, 6 small with crag and net 4/6. (Mrs Stock, who was related to the Kavanagh family, placed regular orders.)
- **Dec 2 1913**, Mrs Maxwell, Hampton Court Palace, Middlesex. Collar 12/6 fine fish for Mrs Bates? (Mrs Bates may have been a favourite laceworker.)
- The Countess of Dudley, Witly Court, Worcester, 2 cushions 2.18.6 p
- **1913**, Marchioness of Winchester, 23

Cavendish Square, London W. 9 no. 37 mats @1/4. NOT PAID. (Goods were often sent on approval to private clients many of whom were often slow to pay despite reminders being sent. NOT PAID was not a rare entry.)

- **1915**, Mrs Kavanagh, Borris House, Borris. 2 cushions no.1 28" by 28". Returned.
- **July 25 1916**, Messrs Haywards, 11 Old Bond Street, London, W. 6 yds no 42 @5/- (Haywards were a regular purchaser until 1919 when Irish Linen Stores took over. In 1922 more orders from Haywards are listed.)
- **1916–1917** Fish pattern and crag edge were the most popular orders.
- **1919** The Irish Linen Stores, 112 New Bond St, London W. (Many orders were received and filled. This seems to be the beginning of the arrangement as the order book listed it in large letters. They remained the main supplier from this time. In one year sales mounted to £200. Monthly sales varied from £3 to £30.)
- **July 8** Fine lace for nightdress sent to Mrs Stock, The White Hall. £4/7/0
- **1926** Cami-knickers 'court' set £3/6/0 p (Cami-knickers were popular orders at this time, and expensive.)
- **1928** Shamrock 'doyles' design no. 34 (A popular order at this time along with nightdress tops)
- 1929 Most orders are from within Ireland and include names and addresses.
It seems that orders are not being sent to London at this stage.
- **1930** Pomegranate design no. 8 (A popular order at this time yet very expensive.)

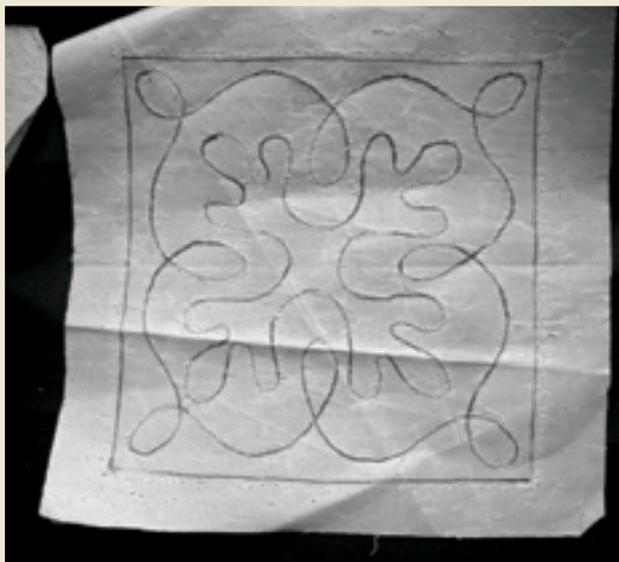
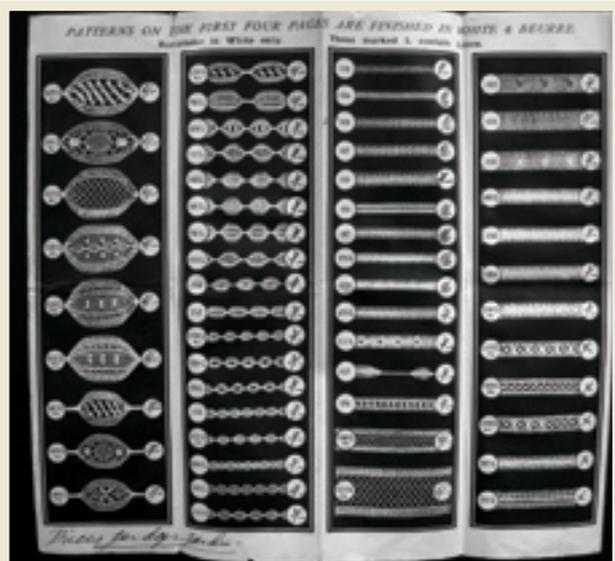
The invoice book covering 1945–1953 shows that business was slowing. The entries are mostly for private sales.



Unused parcel of six slips of unbranded fine gassed cotton thread; unused tape from the collection

UNUSED MATERIALS

✧ **One parcel of** a fine slip thread traditionally used by lacemakers is held in the collection. Slip thread came in long skeins (slips), each one wound separately and bundled into a figure of eight. The size of the thread was indicated by the number of slips in a parcel, held together by red twine or thread. The more slips, the finer the thread. Once the parcel was opened, the size information was lost. The parcel is a little disturbed but seems to contain six slips of fine gassed cotton thread, roughly equivalent to DMC



One of several trade catalogues showing examples of Honiton and point lace braids with prices per dozen cards; design on pink glazed linen; pattern is well used

Broder Machine no. 30 or Madeira Cotona 30. There are also a number of invoices for Barbours no. 60 Irish linen thread, but no unused thread remains.

There are several unused cards of tape, among them linen twill tape, silk tape and a wide variety of commercial tapes and edgings. Some of the older tape is very loosely woven.

All the tapes appear to be machine made.

In the braid catalogues in the collection a number of items are ticked: 564, 503, 3 dozen x 572, 576 (linen), 1730 and 1739. In a catalogue from Sands & Co. are two samples ticked for ordering: No. 486, a very fine braid, and No. 167, not so fine. Many of the cards of tape are labelled 132, but we did not find a catalogue with this reference number.

PATTERNS

✧ The number of patterns in the collection is quite substantial; they form an important aspect of the whole. The presence of many original patterns and working designs allowed us to occasionally match them with completed items. The working designs are very simple, showing only a single solid inked line. The tape was tacked along this line, and the working of the grounds and fillings was left to the individual lacemaker's discretion. Many patterns are heavily pricked from numerous workings.

Occasionally a pattern was marked with stitch names, a number or details of its source, such as this:

Pattern of Toilet Cover of Mrs Morgan sent to copy edging lace with net ground

Size of cover without edging 48 ½" long by 9 ½" wide.

5 Squares let in about 2 ½ inches apart

Could be made with 3 or 4 squares.

Made up on linen lawn rather coarse.

No. 6 price 28/-

The patterns are drawn onto pink glazed linen, blind fabric, white architect's linen