

DONAGHMORE LIVING HISTORY – AUDIO RECORDINGS

1. ALEX CALDWELL

Office Worker in a Castlecaulfield Linen Factory

When I started in the factory office I was looking after the documentation of goods for export and also general work regarding shipment and transport. In the early days of 1940's most of the production was sold in England. The factory had contracts for Government work caused by the shortages during the war. A lot of the production was pillowcases and sheets which were bought in from outside and made up, in the factory stitching room and ordinary household goods such as Tea Towels, Table Clothes and Hand Towels were made.

Most of the yarn came into the factory already bleached, and it was used to make Tea Towels and to make patterns in the Tea Towels they used dyed yarn. This yarn came in on Hanks, just like wool was sold in at that time. It was then brought into the Winding Room and some of it was for Warp Winding. This was wound on Beams that went in at the back of the looms and the weft was wound on bobbins which went into the shuttle which acted as weft. By varying the shuttles the pattern could be made in the different borders and some of the tea towels that had the letters on them had Jacquard machines mounted on top of the looms which by a system of Cards with holes punched in them controlled the threads in the looms and made the different letters and patterns on the cloth.

When the cloth was taken off the loom it was brought into the Cloth Room and examined by the Cloth passer and if he found any faults in it there were Darners and people who could repair the faults before the cloth went into the Finishing Shed to be finished, it was laundered and polished to make it look well. If the Weaver made careless mistakes, then they were fined by the Cloth passer for damaging the cloth.

When the cloth was finished it was taken from there and lapped in the lapping room and drawn up to whatever size it would have to be cut: If it was tea towels or table cloths they were stitched in the stitching room and finally they were made up into packets of one dozen or five dozen and parcelled and labelled, then baled and sent out to the customer.

When I started in the factory the Power was provided by a large steam engine, which was housed in the tall building at one end of the factory adjacent to the boiler. This boiler was coal fed and the boiler man wheeled the coal in on a barrow and dumped at the mouth of the boiler, then he had to shovel it into the boiler and spread it with a long iron fork, so that it would be evenly distributed over the bars inside the boiler. This was a very warm and dirty job and about every three months, at Christmas and Easter and July holiday time the boiler was extinguished and four or five men would volunteer to go into the boiler when it had cooled down and scale it, they had to go right up a tunnel into the factory Chimney and clean it also so that there would be a good draught in the chimney and the fire would burn properly. These were the only times that the boiler would be let die out. At night it was banked up with coal to keep it burning until morning.

2. ALICE BROWN

The Good Old Days

When I was a young girl and I wanted a new pair of shoes or boots, you had to buy a piece of leather and bring it to the shoemaker. If you wanted the right kind of leather you brought the shoemaker with you to pick what you wanted. He picked a nice piece of leather and he would take it home to measure your feet and proceed to make you a nice pair of boots or shoes as the case may be. There was something thought of a pair of boots in those days, as most people went barefoot, in fact, most people went barefoot to save their boots for special occasions or very cold weather.

There was no such thing as shops that sold ready made clothes, you had to bring the tailor with you to the shop that sold the cloth and pick the material and then he would take the cloth home and measure you and make your suit or whatever garment you required. Those boots and clothes lasted a lot longer than they would today and they were passed down from one member of the family to another.

3. BETTY MC VEIGH

An Upstairs Maid at the Big House

I was usually upstairs and looked after the lady's clothes, the linen and the usual things like that. There were two other girls upstairs plus myself. I was more or less over them. In the kitchen there was the cook with two other girls and there was a butler and a footman.

I lived in, and we all had our own bedrooms and we all got on well. There were different parties, you know shooting parties, especially before Christmas. Of course during the war they didn't have any parties. The army took over part of the house during the war and the Major he was away at the war too and only came home on special occasions.

We used to go out and gather blackberries at the time of the fruit we had a lorry and all the girls would go out, sure it was an evening out. So here this evening this girl got into difficulties in the moss and she started shouting "Save Me, Save Me" I couldn't keep from laughing for the can she had the blackberries went down too.

The chauffeur he used to take us out in his lorry and it was a lovely and nice sunny day, and then there was this another time, we were out picking blackberries too and the Minister came along and there was this man called Mick Comac and he knew this girl was a lovely singer, she was from the South, and we used to get her to sing, and he wanted her to sing and here the Rev. Laverty from Clonanssee he came along too and he wanted her to sing. Sure I can't remember whether she sang or not. She was a lovely singer, for often we used to get her to sing upstairs, and at Christmas at the parties we used to get her to sing and one some of them did Irish dancing. It was lovely the big Christmas tree was up and they all gave us all our presents and this particular year they had a big sing-song.

4.FRANK HAGAN

A Farm Labourer at the “Big House”

I was in the yard sawing and all sorts of jobs and cutting bushes, ah it was a good enough job. At that time money wasn't big anyway, I had 35 bob a week from eight on the morning to six in the evening and one hour for dinner. Then the boss done alright till two men bought a bundle of cows, and started up a dairy and when he got the dairying started surely but the boss didn't understand, sure the man knew nothing, he left that all to the land steward.

Anyway the cows was tested and they all had TB (Tuberculosis), there wasn't three cows left, that broke the man, they put him out after buying the milking machine and built a new byre and a stand down at the road, he Burges told one of the men to get his coat on and get out, but sure it was too late. Them boys were drinking the whole money when they left, sure we carted hundreds of whiskey bottles, pints and half pints and stout bottles.

That's what put the man out, that's as sure as I'm telling you. He was a bad imp, he bought them cows cheap and the boss had to pay big money that's as sure as the book. All they had was the milk down at the creamery stand nearly two cans sitting on the style and the inspector came around and he tested the cows nearly all was rotten with T.B. It put him clean out he hadn't that big a money anyway owing to the mother she hid the money, then he married, I think she was O'Shea they had a son, Michael, I don't mind the girls names, the man himself was all right, he was a pleasant big man.

5. JOHN McGEARY

The Railway Line

I remember the excitement of the prospect of a journey by train, especially on a Sunday excursion to the seaside, usually to Bundoran or Warrenpoint, or sometimes Portrush. The platform would be crowded with people, all waiting eagerly for the arrival of the train. When at last it would come puffing into the station, there would be a big rush to get in and get a seat. By the time it reached Donaghmore the train was usually full and sometimes wee children would have to stand the whole length of the journey, but they did not mind as the delights of the passing countryside more than compensated for any discomfort experienced.

6.PADDY McVEIGH

My work as a weaver in Castlecaulfield Factory

I started working in the factory in 1932, I was fourteen years old and started work the following Monday as a trainee Weaver. Weaving was a tradition in our family, my grandfather was a weaver and my father followed in his footsteps, my brothers and sisters were weavers and when it came my turn to earn a living it was taken for granted that I would learn the weaving, this was a very common occurrence with families in our area, different generations but the same work.

There was very little work other than the factory and we all had to earn a living and we thanked God for having the factory. Some people moved to other parts and some went to England, but if you wanted to stay at home there was not much choice and in 1932 the wages were a lot better than what you would get with a farmer or learning a trade in the building industry. When I started work I got five shillings a week for four weeks, that was the time allowed for training and then I was given a loom of my own, and I had to make my own pay which was not very much, at the beginning and after a while I got two looms and then three when I was fit to manage them. I started work at 8am and worked until 12.30 when we had a break for lunch, we resumed work at

1.45 and worked until 6.15pm. The extra quarter of an hour at lunch time was to enable the people who lived a good distance away to go home for their lunch. We worked on Saturday to 11am and then you had to clean your looms and leave them ready for the Monday morning. You did not get paid for the time it took to clean the looms so as we were making our own wages we had to do the cleaning after working hours. The harder you worked the more you earned.

The first week that I was in the factory when it came to payday, which was Friday, I was standing watching the pay clerk coming around with a big tray and I thought he was bringing us something to eat and I was very hungry, but I found to my dismay that there was no food on the tray, just the workers wages.

I was learning with my father and I dare not make a mistake as he would be very cross, he was making his wages and he could not afford to lose any time over my mistakes and if you made a big mistake and the cloth could not be used you would be fined or rather in my case at the beginning my father would be fined for my mistakes, so I had to sit up and pay attention. Sometimes the yarn was very bad, or the beams as we called them and you could destroy yards of cloth before you could get the loom stopped, if the weft broke, you could be fined for this and the money taken out of your pay at the end of the week. You could make a fair wage if the beams were good but if they were bad you were working for very little.

There were four rows of small houses there, belonging to the factory owners and all the tenants worked in the factory. There was one particular house in the row and the woman there kept all the workers children that lived in the factory row. All the women that were able to work went out to earn a living and this lady kept the children, the workers got out at 8am for their breakfast and they had an hour to collect the children and give them their breakfast and send the older ones to school, and the younger ones stayed with the woman. She always had around fifteen to twenty children to look after. I often wonder how she managed with them all in such a small house.

The rents for the houses in the factory row varied according to the size of the house and how long a family was in them. The houses in the front row were one shilling and sixpence a week and some of the others were one shilling and three pence, the house where I was reared was nine pence a week. The rent was taken out of the workers wages each week.

When you needed coal for the fire you ordered it through the factory. There were two horses and carts drawing coal all the time from Donaghmore Station and if you needed coal they would leave a load at your coal house door and the price would be taken out of your wages at the end of the week. You would not have a lot of wages left when you needed coal, by the time you paid for it and your rent and about eight pence per week for insurance and maybe a couple of fines there was not much left for food or to run a house, so you just had to do without a lot of things and scrape through as well as you could. If you got sick you didn't have any money and you had to be very sick to get off at all. The Factory Horn blew at 7.30am and again at 7.45am in my time in the factory and you had to be at your looms before 8am. If you came five minutes late the gates would be locked and you would not get in until 9am. The fireman always had to close the gates at eight o' clock in the morning and open them again at nine. This was done to discourage latecomers and encourage the workers to come early.