

HEADFORD **LACE** Project

“The women at Headford make lace...”
Headford Lace: A History

by Ella Hassett
and Norma Owens



“The women at Headford make lace...”

Headford Lace: A History

Introduction

In recent years the history and tradition of lacemaking in the town of Headford, Co. Galway, one of the oldest bobbin lace types in Ireland, has been rediscovered and revived by the Headford Lace Project. The skill of lacemaking is being reimagined for a modern audience and acts as a tribute to the women lacemakers of the past. The story of Headford lace brings together the stories of women from the poorest classes right up to the wealthiest echelons of Irish society. From its origins in the mid-1700s, through the dark Famine years and on into the twentieth century, the following article will tell the story of Headford lace, its patrons and producers.

“...a delicate fabric made of yarn or thread...”

To begin, we must briefly consider the history and development of lace. Dr. Matthew Potter describes lace as “a delicate fabric made of yarn or thread, in an open weblike pattern”.¹ Lace has its origins in ancient times, with parallels to be found in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia. There are different styles of lace, such as needle lace, tape lace, crochet lace, etc. but evidence shows that there was bobbin lace made in the Headford area. Bobbin lace, sometimes called pillow lace or bone lace, is created by weaving threads, which are attached to weighted bobbins or pins, over and under each other in sequence. This is done on a



Figure 1 Original piece of Headford lace dating to 1904. Image courtesy of Norma Owens.

¹ Potter, M. (2014) *Amazing Lace: A History of the Limerick Lace Industry*, Limerick County Council, p.4

a table or in the lacemaker's lap. Only one known piece of Headford lace has been discovered to date, this is a typonomic term which will be discussed further below (See Figure 1).



Figure 2 Unknown painter, Portrait of woman, XVIIth century, National Gallery of Armenia. Image in the public domain.

Lacemaking is a time-consuming process and it was mainly produced by poorer women, as a way to earn extra income. As Catherine Amoroso Leslie succinctly states, it was “made by the poorest women to adorn the rich”,² but the end product was a sought-after material across Europe from the sixteenth century onwards. Lace was used to decorate the clothing of the upper classes, in the form of cuffs, ruffs, veils, trims, etc (See Figure 2). Sharpe estimates that a ruff, similar to the one worn in Figure 2, would require 25 yards of bobbin lace to make.³ Renowned lacemaking industries grew across Italy and Flanders (Belgium) from the fifteenth century

onwards, while English handmade lace began in the sixteenth century. Irish handmade lace began in the 1730s.⁴

“... One of the ladies of the St. George family...”

The history of lacemaking in Headford, and indeed more widely, is a history of women, many of whose stories have otherwise been lost to the passage of time. Poor girls and women in the home, or in schools or convents, were employed in the creation of lace in many places throughout Ireland and in Headford they were supported by wealthy female patrons from the St. George family. The St. George family of Headford were descended from the Hatley St. George Estate in Cambridgeshire, England. Two members of the family moved to Ireland in the

² Amoroso Leslie, C. (2007) *Needlework Through History: An Encyclopedia*, Greenwood, p.107

³ Sharpe, P. (2010) “Lace and Place: women’s business in occupational communities in England 1550-1910”, *Women’s History Review*, 19(2), April 2010, pp.287

⁴ Ibid, p.12

17th century and were granted significant lands, assuming a high status in the Anglo-Irish society of the time.⁵ Three generations of St. Georges were involved with the Headford lacemaking industry and it appears to have been chiefly supported by female members of the family.

Headford in the 18th century was a small market town surrounded by fertile lands, with links to Galway City, Ballinrobe and Tuam. The St. George family owned the town and 7,400 additional acres around it.⁶ Our first reference to Mrs. St. George in Headford appears in the Illustrated Record and Descriptive Catalogue of the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865, which states that in around 1765 “one of the ladies of the St. George family” introduced the manufacture of pillow, or bobbin, lace to Headford.⁷ Similarly, a piece written by E.H. Wadge in 1866 also mentions the introduction of pillow lace to Headford in the form of a lacemaking school by a lady of the St. George family, in which she is unflatteringly described as “not an imaginative woman”.⁸ Her reason for introducing lacemaking to the area was to stimulate economic growth and provide a revenue stream for both the locals and landlords. What follows will examine the evidence we have for the establishment of the lacemaking industry in Headford.

We have found evidence of the establishment of a textile industry in Headford in the mid-1700s. Olivia St. George Ussher, the daughter of Captain John Ussher and the Hon. Mary St. George, and granddaughter of Lord George St. George, 1st Baron St. George of Hatley St. George, who married Arthur French of Tyrone House in 1736.⁹ In the 1740s, while Olivia was resident in Headford Castle, her nephew Arthur Murphy visited her. In a letter to his mother, he mentions that Olivia set up a linen and spinning school in Headford in 1749.¹⁰ Linen and thread are key materials in the lacemaking process. It is not a direct link to lacemaking, but a

⁵ Melvin, P. (2012) *Estates and Landed Society in Galway*, De Búrca, p.40

⁶ Candon, G. (2003) *Headford, Co. Galway 1775-1901*, Four Courts Press, p.10

⁷ Parkinson, H., Simmons, P.L. (1865) *The Illustrated Record and Descriptive Catalogue of the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865*, E. & F.N. Spon, p.273

⁸ Wadge, E. H.[Ed.] (1866) *The Irish Industrial Magazine*. Dublin: McGlashan & Gill, p. 203

⁹ The Peerage, “Person Page 33843”, found at: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p33483.htm#i334828> (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

¹⁰ Foote, J. Coombe, W. (1811) *The Life of Arthur Murphy*, J. Faulder, p.48

tantalising hint that Olivia was the woman who at the very least set the groundwork for the lacemaking industry in Headford.

To date, two potential candidates have been uncovered in the search for Mrs. St. George who introduced lacemaking to Headford. Firstly, we must consider Mary St. George née Blaydwin from Boston, Lincolnshire, the wife of Richard St. George of Kilrush, Co. Waterford. She was a wealthy heiress from England, who eloped with St. George when she was around 16 or 17, in around 1746 or 1747.¹¹ This Richard St. George inherited Headford Castle from his father Lieutenant General Richard St. George in 1753.¹² Her daughter-in-law remarks about Mary St. George “she was an only child, and educated with the most unbounded indulgence; married very young to one whom she immediately accompanied to the bosom of his family in another kingdom”, implying that she went to Ireland with him.¹³ He died of consumption in 1757 and in 1758, she remarried John Cradock, who would eventually become the Protestant Archbishop of Dublin.¹⁴ It is noted that she spent her later years in Bath dedicating to helping the poor,¹⁵ and this could indicate that she adopted this charitable approach during her short time at Headford Castle by introducing the skill of lacemaking to the town.

Secondly, there is Mary (Molly) St. George, born in Headford around 1710, the illegitimate daughter of Richard St. George of Carrick on Shannon, Co. Leitrim.¹⁶ Her dates align roughly with the date of the introduction of the skill to the area in the mid-1700s, and she also inherited Headford Castle and St. George lands in 1774 through her son (despite a court case taken against her inheriting by her cousins¹⁷). She has been immortalised in one of the oldest pieces of harp music with lyrics, written by Thomas Connellan in the 1720s.¹⁸ Her son Richard (born

¹¹ Waters, R.E.C. (1878) *Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct Family of Chester of Chicheley their Ancestors and Descendents*, Robson & Sons, p.674

¹² Register of Deeds, Ireland (1739-1810). “Headford/Hedford & Fairs & Markets: St. George Esq. his Revocation”. *Townlands Book 160*, p. 69, No. 106363, found at: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSJM-Q9GW-D?i=40&cat=185720>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Hartshorne, A. [Ed.] (1905) *Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain, 1729-1763. The Correspondence of Edmund Pyle, D.D. Chaplain in Ordinary to George II, with Samuel Kerrich D.D., Vicar of Dersingham, Rector of Wolferton, and Rector of West Newton*, John Lane, p.317

¹⁵ Waters, R.E.C. (1878), p.675

¹⁶ Wikitree, *Mary St. George*, found at: https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/St._George-42 (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

¹⁷ National Archives, “Short title: Usher St George v St George. Document type: Bill only. Plaintiffs: Usher St...” found at: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C10407538> (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

¹⁸ O'Byrne, R. (2017) *Tyrone House and the St. George Family: The Story of an Anglo-Irish Family* Xlibris, p.38.

c.1750), together with her husband James Mansergh of Macrony Co. Cork, would eventually become a key figure in the history of Headford town and its industries.¹⁹ However, there is no explicit evidence to link Mary St. George to the introduction of lacemaking, except that she may have lived at Headford Castle around the time of its introduction. It is hoped that further research will one day uncover our Mrs. St. George for certain, but for now she remains elusive.

“The women at Headford make lace.”

The next generation of the St. George family were instrumental in many social and industrial changes in the town of Headford before the Great Famine (1845-49). In the previous section, Richard St. George Mansergh St. George (son of Mary St. George) was mentioned as the inheritor of Headford Castle in the 1770s. While his life and distinguished military career are recorded in great detail, far less is known about his wife Anne Stepney. What we do know of her life has been gleaned from a portrait of her, swathed in fashionable Turkish robes, painted by the noted English portraitist George Romney, which now hangs in the Heckscher Museum in Huntington, New York (See Figure 3). The provenance notes from the Heckscher catalogue (kindly provided to us by staff at the museum) give some insight into her life.²⁰



Figure 3 - Anne St. George (née Stepney) by George Romney (1781). Image courtesy of the Heckscher Museum, New York

Anne had two sons, Richard James and Stepney (named for her surname), the former featured in the painting with her, standing with his head resting on her lap. The portrait was painted in Neev's Hotel, St. James' Square, London and required ten sittings with Richard James. The advance sum paid to the artist was 200 guineas,²¹ a considerable amount at the time and

¹⁹ Burke, B. (1912) *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Ireland*, Harrison & Sons

²⁰ Heckscher Museum (1979) *Catalogue of the Collection: Painting and Sculpture*, Heckscher Museum, p.135

²¹ Ibid.

testament to the wealth of the family. Sadly, Anne passed away shortly after the portrait was completed in 1791, in what was suspected to be a complication of childbirth. Anne did not live at Headford Castle for long, so it is unlikely that she was involved to a great extent with the lacemaking industry, but it is a possibility. Regardless, it is remarkable to have a portrait of a lady of the St. George family, particularly as it made the long journey from Headford, Co. Galway to Huntingdon, New York. We know that it was housed in London for several years (owned by a relative of Anne's, Mrs. Winn) in a house on Cadogan Square, as well as being exhibited at a display entitled Fair Children at Grafton Galleries in 1895.²²

Returning to Richard St. George Mansergh St. George (See Figure 4), we see that he was dedicated to fostering industriousness among his tenants in the Headford area. In a piece he wrote called 'An account of Galway', he says "My great object is to establish at Headford a Linen Manufacture - I can give the Manufacturers Tenements which I am willing to do at any rent, or rent free - I wish to promote Industry, Civilization and good order - and the administration of justice".²³ He was so serious about this endeavor, that he waived market tolls and re-established the barracks to maintain order.²⁴ This particular document also contains a precious piece of evidence about the lacemaking industry in Headford, stating that "The women at Headford make lace".²⁵ This reference is interesting for several reasons, most importantly for being the earliest contemporary record of Headford lace, establishing it as one of the oldest laces in Ireland, predating Carrickmacross lace by several decades. Secondly, it acknowledges the lacemakers themselves, who are so often silent in the historical record. Finally, it demonstrates a wealthy landlord acknowledging the women on



Figure 4 Richard St. George Mansergh St. George by Hugh Douglas Hamilton (1791). Image in public domain.

²² Grafton Galleries (1895) *Fair Children*, Grafton Galleries Catalogue 1895-1899, Grafton Galleries p.34

²³ Mansergh St George, R. (1790) "An account of Galway by Richard St. George Mansergh St. George" IE TCD MS 1749/2, Trinity College Dublin.

²⁴ Candon, G. (2003), p.14

²⁵ Ibid.

his estate, rather than focusing on his own involvement or patronage. This support of the local area was to be a feature of the St. George relationship with Headford locals. However, as an Anglo-Irish landlord, Richard was not universally popular. In 1798, angry rebels murdered Richard and his agent Jasper Uniacke in Co. Cork. It is said that an assailant wielding a rusty scythe killed Richard.²⁶ The Headford estate passed to his eldest son, Richard James.

“... many of the women employed in making lace...”

Evidence for the production of Headford lace in the nineteenth century is more plentiful than for the previous century. Headford was under the control of Richard James Mansergh St. George, who married Elizabeth Sophie Shaw in 1812.²⁷ He rebuilt Headford Castle in the Elizabethan style in 1836, designed by architect George Papworth (**See. Figure 5**).²⁸ A series of letters written in 1817, on a walk from Co. Clare to Co. Mayo, comments that “we were very glad to observe, in the cabins skirting Headfort [sic], many of the women employed in making lace”.²⁹ In 1824, a statistical survey of Co. Galway says of Headford that “the streets are kept very clean and free from swine... Mr. St. George gives premiums for the encouragement of the linen and flannel manufactures”.³⁰ In 1830, Samuel Lewis listed bobbin lace making, coarse linen and flannel as principal items of manufacture in the town, indicating that the money invested in the 1820s had helped to develop a growing industry.³¹

²⁶ O’Byrne, R. (2017), p. 40

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ National University of Ireland, Galway (2011) “Landed Estates Database. House: Headford Castle” found at: <http://landedestates.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=770> (Accessed: 14-9-2019)

²⁹ Trotter, J.B. (1819) *Walks through Ireland in the years 1812, 1814, and 1817: described in a series of letters to an English Gentleman*, Sir. R. Philips & Co, London

³⁰ Dutton, H. (1824) *Statistical and Agricultural Survey of the County of Galway*, Graisberry, p.350

³¹ Lewis, S. (1849) *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, S. Lewis & Co., p.666



Figure 5 View of Headford Castle, Co. Galway, c.1828 by Richard St. George Esq. Image courtesy of James Adam and Sons Ltd.

In 1835, in a parliamentary paper from the House of Commons sessions into the state of the poorer classes in Ireland, we find that there are thirty-five widows in Headford town. Seventeen of these women lived in houses owned by the St. Georges, for which they paid no rent and “received a good deal of assistance from Mrs. St. George,” demonstrating Elizabeth

Sophie’s involvement in the lacemaking industry.³² Headford estate appears to have been in a celebratory mood in 1838, when Richard James hosted a fireworks display for his family, friends, tenants and peasants from the local area, to celebrate the birth of his brother Stepney’s second son.³³ A journalist from the Waterford Mail newspaper describes the scene:

“Several thousand of the tenants and neighbouring peasantry covered the entire of the lawn [...], and laughed, and jumped, and danced alternately, they were so excessively overjoyed [...] The rockets went off amazingly well; ever [sic] color we could imagine dazzled the eye in quick succession [...] We have frequently seen fire works in the Dublin Rotundo Gardens, but we have never been more highly gratified than on Tuesday – Mr. St. George, for four hours, must have undergone an immensity of fatigue [...] his whole study seemed to be to delight and entertain the multitude, who were enraptured...”³⁴

In 1842, Richard James became resident in Malta and, leaving no heir, his brother Stepney had to take over Headford Castle and its estate. Stepney was a Lieutenant who married Fanny L’Estrange in 1833.³⁵ Stepney would see Headford through the devastating Great Famine (1845-1849), which will be discussed later. According to the descriptive catalogue referred to earlier, in 1845 the lace industry in Headford appeared to be in good health:

³² House of Commons (1835) *‘Inquiries into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland’, Appendix (A) and Supplement*. London: House of Commons, HMSO, p. 115.

³³ No Author (1838) *Waterford Mail*, Vol. XV, No.1621, 24 November 1838

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ No Author (1843) *Connaught Telegraph*, 29 November 1843, p.3

“like a hive of bees in summer, full of joy and activity and the hum of noise and industry. At some of the cottage doors were groups of neatly-dressed young girls, seated on low stools, their lace pillows on their laps ; and while their fingers moved rapidly through the maze of bobbins, their voices filled the air, if not with melody, at least with heart music. Further on might be seen a couple of elderly women, whose hands had not yet forgotten their cunning, working out intricate, if not graceful patterns ; or perhaps a young mother seated within the doorway, her foot gently moving a cradle, while her fingers plied their busy task”.³⁶

This excerpt provides a romanticised view of the task of lacemaking from an outsider’s perspective. Despite plentiful evidence of the Headford lace industry and its patrons, we have yet to uncover the voices of eighteenth and nineteenth century Headford lacemakers themselves. It is known from testimonies of lacemakers elsewhere that conditions were challenging. Sharpe details cold, damp fireless houses with poor light, as smoke and light were deemed damaging to lace.³⁷ The posture and fine manual work of a lacemaker could often lead to neck, back and shoulder pain, as well as conditions such as dyspepsia, arthritis and sight loss. However, conditions for making lace also had to be clean and hygienic in order to ensure spotless work and the above excerpt seems to imply the women spent some time working outside (this is evidenced from lacemaking in other countries as well) when the West of Ireland climate permitted it.

“...young lacemakers fled away from disease and destitution...”

Wadge states that although the industry was doing well in 1845, a year later it was in serious decline. He claims that “the young lacemakers fled away from disease and destitution which followed on the failure of the potato crop in 1846”³⁸ to America and Australia. Bobbin lacemaking generally was also in decline due to its inflexibility. Patterns chosen by the customer were followed absolutely and many were even taken back after the piece was completed. There was little creativity or innovation, and this meant that the industry struggled

³⁶ Parkinson, H., Simmons, P.L. (1865), p.273

³⁷ Sharpe, P. (2010), p.289

³⁸ Wadge, E.H.[Ed.] (1866), p.204

to adapt to changing fashions. The failure of the potato crop had a devastating impact on Headford at this time. In a letter to officials at Dublin Castle dated 1847, Stepney petitioned them to "Send us immediate relief. [...] Otherwise nothing can save thousands from dying; even this very day I have seen several persons actually die in the streets of this small village and fever is commencing its attack on us".³⁹ He wrote often to Dublin Castle to ask for help in setting up a soup kitchen for his tenants (See Figure 6). Sadly, both Fanny and Stepney died of fever, in 1843 and 1847 respectively, indicating that they interacted with their tenants and were not locked away in Headford Castle.

While one might have expected the Great Famine to sound the death knell of Headford lace, the historical record indicates it continued to be produced during this period. A parliamentary paper from 1847 describes those involved in the industry at the time:

*"a good deal of lace is manufactured in this country in the small town of Headford there are several hundred persons engaged in it; from want of a market it is bought by pedlars at a very low rate, and carried to other parts of the country at a very low price, that one would scarcely think paid for the material it was made of".*⁴⁰

Most of this lace, according to the report, was sent to England.⁴¹ In 1865, Susanna Meredith supports this claim when writing about Irish lacemakers and the efforts to re-establish the industry during the famine:

*"When famine ravaged Ireland in 1847, women were found inspired with an energy to work that was truly inspiring. Wherever there was a female hand, it was set in motion, and, generally, it seized a needle and wielded it vigorously for bread. [...] Ladies burst the bonds of conventionalisms, and went regularly into business, to procure remunerative occupation for the destitute of their own sex. [...] the women of Ireland united in a grand bond against a common foe."*⁶⁴

³⁹ McDonald Legg, C. (2005) "History-laden canoe comes down from its lofty perch" *Tribune Life*, 11 November 2005

⁴⁰ House of Commons (1847) *Correspondence from January to March 1847 relating to the measures adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland; Board of Works Series*, HMSO, p.210

⁴¹ Ibid.

This industry was also supported by another woman, unrelated to the St. Georges, during the Famine. In the winter of 1836-37, the Reverend William Jackson was appointed vicar of Headford, and he married Julia de Villiers in Headford in 1847. An address in the Tuam Herald paper of 1849 recognises Julia for her work with the lace industry in Headford after the Famine, when she and her husband are moving to a new parish. Twenty-one people, including Richard James, sign it. It says:

*“In Mrs. Jackson, the poor of Headford and the surrounding district will have lost a most humane and active friend, and her untiring exertions in the cause of general charity, and in particular, her successful efforts to revive our hitherto neglected lace manufacture, have, we trust, by giving wholesome stimulus to industry, and opening a future and remunerative market for the production of our poor and well-conducted female population engaged in this trade, laid the foundation of a continual demand upon their labours, which will long survive her regretted removal from among us.”*⁴²

Bury Palliser, in her famed textbook on the history of lace, also refers to the revival of the Headford lace industry in the Famine period “under the energetic care of Mrs. Dawson.”⁴³ This was Letitia Josephine Dawson, most closely linked with the Cong lace industry in nearby Co. Mayo. It is clear, then, that the Famine did not halt the creation of lace in Headford, and it continued to be promoted by women outside the St. George family. It also continued to act as a revenue stream to poor women and their families, albeit a meagre one. This brings to mind the obituary of Charles Walker, founder of the Limerick lace industry, which proclaims “what myriads of young, innocent, feeble, friendless females have been, by this means, rescued from ruins and wretchedness”.⁴⁴ This quote (rather



Figure 6 Farm buildings on the Headford Estate (off Bridge Street) in which Stepney St. George established a soup kitchen during the Great Famine. Image courtesy of Norma Owens.

⁴² Mansergh St. George, R.J. et al (1849) “Address to the Rev. William Jackson, Vicar of the Union of Templemore, and Late Curate of Headford” *Tuam Herald*, 25 August 1849, p.3

⁴³ Bury Palliser, F. Jourdain, M. Dryden, A. [Eds.] (1902) *History of Lace*, Sampson, Low, Son, & Marston, p.446

⁴⁴ No Author (1843) *The Limerick Chronicle*, 4 November 1843

patronisingly) refers to the lace apprentices of the Limerick industry, but its sentiment applies just as readily to lacemaking during the famine period.

“...the very pretty cushion lace...”

After the Famine period, in 1852, the Ladies' Irish Industrial Society opened a branch of the Normal Lace School in Headford. The Normal Lace School had been founded in 1850 in Dublin and the Headford branch was organized by Mrs. Hunt.⁴⁵ This was Catherine Elizabeth Hunt née Powell, the wife of the St. George's land agent Edmund Lombard Hunt. Although Meredith indicated that this lace school venture had failed,⁴⁶ a travelling writer in 1861 refers to Headford as an orderly town where he comes upon “neat peasant girls that sat at the doors lacemaking... we were very glad to be allowed to make purchases from their after hour's manufacture of the very pretty cushion lace”,⁴⁷ cushion lace being another term for pillow or bobbin lace. It might be the case that the industry had petered out, but clearly lace was still being made. In 1859, Richard James St. George (Stepney's eldest son) inherited Headford Castle and estate.⁴⁸ Again, Bury Palliser notes that there is still a lace school in Headford under the care of the St. George family in 1860, but does not provide further detail.⁴⁹

Two pieces of evidence exist for the survival of Headford lace outside of Headford. The price of a piece of Headford lace is recorded in the clothing account book of the Dillon family of Clonbrock House, East Galway, in 1870. Lady Augusta Caroline Dillon née Crofton (**See Figure 7**), wife of the 4th Baron Clonbrock, was known for promoting women's industries and as such a purchase of “8 yds Headford Lace” is recorded at a cost of two shillings.⁵⁰ This price seems low for such a length of lace and may be indicative of merchants taking a percentage for themselves. This record also lists items such as elastic, buttons and stay lace being purchased,

⁴⁵ Meredith, S. (1865) *The Lacemakers: Sketches of Irish Character with some account of the Effort to Establish Lacemaking in Ireland*. London: Jackson, Walford, and Hodder, pp. 372-373

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ No Author (1861) *Ierne: Or, Anecdotes and Incidents During a Life Chiefly in Ireland. With Notice of People and Places*, Partridge & Co, p.222

⁴⁸ O'Byrne, R. (2017), pp. 40-41.

⁴⁹ Bury Palliser, F. (1865) *A History of Lace*. London: Sampson, Low, Son, and Marston, p. 416. The same entry appears on p. 385 in the *1869 edition* and on p. 394 in the *1875 republication*.

⁵⁰ Clonbrock Estate, *Clonbrock Estate Papers: Ms 35,733 (9). Clothing account book, June 1868-Dec 1872*, National Library of Ireland

indicating that the 8 yards of Headford lace may have been destined to trim an undergarment. As bobbin lace is washable, resilient and light, it is a sensible material choice for underwear. The fact that Headford lace was chosen indicates that it was of good quality.

Headford lace was not only the preserve of undergarments; it was also displayed at the Manchester Jubilee Exhibition of 1887 in an exhibition of 'Women's Industries'.⁵¹ A piece was displayed alongside other renowned Irish laces, such as Carrickmacross, Limerick and Youghal, suggesting it was of a very high quality. It is listed as being made by Mrs. Burke of Omer (believed to be a misspelling of the Headford townland Ower). Mrs. Burke could have been Mary Burke, listed in the 1911 census as a widowed lacemaker living in New Street, Headford.⁵² This raises the point that the fact that the lace made in Headford was referred to in several sources as "Headford Lace" indicates it was a typonomic term, meaning a specimen type distinguished by its own set of characteristics, like Carrickmacross lace, or Limerick lace. As only one piece of original Headford lace has been found to date, the specific characteristics have not yet been identified. "A piece of Headford prize lace" was given also by a Mrs Ellinor. Fahy as a prize in the Annual Bazaar in aid of The Sisters of Mercy in Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo, again indicating its quality as a lace type.⁵³



Figure 7 Photographer Augusta Caroline Dillon of Clonbrock House, Ahascragh, Co. Galway on the other side of the lens. Image courtesy of the National Library of Ireland.

Richard James St. George died in 1891, after surrendering much of the Headford estate to pay his debts, and in 1892, Headford Castle was sold by his wife Mary Agatha (Née Henely).⁵⁴ This

⁵¹ Royal Jubilee Exhibition (1887), *Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester 1887: Official Catalogue*, John Heywood, p.221

⁵² Census of Ireland 1911, "Residents of a house 1 in New Street (Headford, Galway)" found at: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/New_Street/546931/ (Accessed: 15-9-2019)

⁵³ No Author (1894) "Convent of Mercy, Ballinrobe, Annual Bazaar". *Ballinrobe Chronicle*, 14 July 1894, p.1

⁵⁴ Galway County Heritage Office (2017) "The History of Headford" found at: <https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/places/headford/topics-headford/the-history-of-headford> (Accessed: 15-9-2019)

ended the St. George involvement with the local area and the lacemaking industry, a relationship that has created a lasting legacy. Headford Castle itself burnt to the ground in an accidental fire in 1906.⁵⁵ The only piece of known Headford lace came directly from Headford Castle in around 1904 and was kindly loaned to the Headford Lace Project by a member of the last family to live there (See Figure 1).

“... No less than three yards of Headford lace...”

Despite the growth of machine lace as a result of the industrial revolution, there is evidence that the production of handmade Headford lace continued into the 20th century. The main sources of information for this time are census records from 1901 and 1910 and Headford Agricultural Show listings from 1911 to 1917, where Headford lace was a competition category. A further link with Clonbrock House is also found at the 1911 Headford Show, where Lady Clonbrock was in attendance to award prizes.⁵⁶ Examined together, these two sources have provided a list of named Headford lacemakers for the first time. Some examples are discussed below.

One lacemaker found easily in the 1911 census is Ellen Keane, aged 90, living in Bridge Street.⁵⁷ Because she was a widow and head of household, her occupation was listed as lacemaker, but for married women this was rare. We firmly believe that many other women in Headford made lace, but they were primarily listed in census records under their husbands' occupations. There were also examples of women who must have made lace in addition to their primary occupation. For example, a domestic servant called Mary O'Shaughnessy is listed in 1911 as living in Gortnamona, Headford, and in 1910 a Miss M. O'Shaughnessy won first prize in the Headford lace category at the 1910 show.⁵⁸ In the 1911 census, we also find another lace maker, a 74-year old widow named Ann Hogan living on the Bog Road.⁵⁹ She has a female

⁵⁵ No Author (1906) “Headford Castle” *Western People*, 30 June 1906, p.7

⁵⁶ No Author (1911) “Headford Show”. *Connacht Tribune*, Saturday September 16 1911, p.8

⁵⁷ Census of Ireland 1911, “Residents of a house 15.2 in Bridge Street (Headford, Galway)”, from: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/Bridge_Street/546877/ (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

⁵⁸ No Author (1910) “Two Successful Shows” *The Connacht Tribune*, 24 September 1910

⁵⁹ Census of Ireland 1911, “Residents of a house 4 in Bog Road (Headford, Galway)” found at: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/Bog_Road/546859/ (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

lodger also listed at the same address, Mary Connell, aged 80; intriguingly, at the Headford Agricultural show of 15th September 1910 a Mary Connell won second prize in the Headford Lace category.⁶⁰ Most likely she is the same woman who lodged with Anne Hogan - demonstrating the value of using these two historical sources together.

Headford Lace Project has also kindly been provided with information by the living relatives of



Figure 8 Honor Maile, a Headford lacemaker.
Image courtesy of relative, Nora Gildea.

two Headford lacemakers from the early 20th century. One was Honor “Nan” Maile (also known as O’Malley and Melia), who lived on New Street in 1911 with the Higgins family, and who was the aunt of Mrs. Higgins (**See Figure 8**).⁶¹ Evidence from the 1910 Headford Agricultural show records a Headford lace entry by a Miss Melia. Honor’s death certificate dated 1931 names her as Honor Melia, indicating that she used different versions of her surname and implying that she is most likely the Miss Melia listed as a participant in the Headford Agricultural Show.⁶² Honor Maile passed away in

1931 at the age of 108 and was listed as having no occupation. The other lacemaker was Catherine

Parker of High Street, Headford, who was identified by a relative, as her census record again lists her as having no occupation.

It appears that Headford lace faded as the decades passed by and machine-made laces took over in popularity. As Matthew Potter points out, due to the fact Headford lace as an industry ended early, it was omitted from Alan Cole’s work on Irish laces in the late 19th century and was thus unknown by subsequent scholars and authors.⁶³ In terms of the historical record,

⁶⁰ No Author, (1910) p.223

⁶¹ Census of Ireland 1911, “Residents of a house 13 in New Street (Headford, Galway)” from: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/New_Street/546938/ (Accessed: 17-9-2019)

⁶² Civil Records, “Death Returns 1931”, found at: https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1931/04897/4327005.pdf (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

⁶³ Potter, M. (2012), p.16

there is no mention of Headford lace after the last Headford Agricultural Show before the breakout of World War I, held in 1917 until a brief newspaper article in 1985 about the history of Presentation College Headford, which says “Sister Fursey remembers that the girls also did what was known as lace work [...] indeed Headford lace – now no longer to be found was taught by a Miss Lee”.⁶⁴ We have been unable to uncover the identity of Miss Lee. A final mention in the City Tribune of 1986 mentions lace from Headford in the collection of Mrs. Ó Ceallaigh, now believed to be lace historian Nellie Ó Cléirigh, but we have also been unable to confirm the existence of this lace.⁶⁵

“... Research, revive and reimagine Headford’s lacemaking heritage”

In April 2016, a five-day cultural event called *The Nesting Lark* took place in Headford town. Selma Makela, an artist who lives locally, created and curated an art trail of bird-box installations throughout the town, one of which highlighted Headford’s lacemaking heritage.

This piece was made in collaboration with Headford Girls’ National School and the accompanying research has been published on a dedicated website. This initial encounter with Headford lace sparked the curiosity of several people and ultimately led to the



Figure 9 Headford Lace Project committee members on International Lace Day 2017. Image courtesy of Simon Harte.

establishment of the Headford Lace Project (See Figure 9). It is a voluntary community-based project that aims to share the heritage and tradition of lacemaking through workshops, demonstrations, community collaborations and events that inspire.

Headford Lace Project began by focusing on the revival of bobbin lacemaking skills through workshops established with Jackie Magnin of the Traditional Lacemakers of Ireland. The project

⁶⁴ No Author (1985) “Presentation College Headford collects environmental award”. *The Connacht Tribune*, 11 October 1985, p.7

⁶⁵ No Author (1986) “City ICA members enjoy lace talk!” *City Tribune*, 14 February 1986, p.4

quickly gained momentum through initiatives with other groups in the town, including a project with Headford Men's Shed to create wood-turned bobbins and the creation of a Lacemakers Garden in Headford Environment Group's Community Orchard complete with a lace-inspired bench designed by Kilkee Forge. Headford Lace Project is working on contemporary interpretations of lacemaking, for example, our collaboration with fashion designer Niamh Daniels and a forthcoming public art project for Headford town led by renowned glass artist Róisín de Buítléar. A lace-inspired song is in production with local folk group The Whileaways - to be taught to local school children - as well as an orchestral piece composed by Headford Music Works. In 2018, committee member and lace apprentice Norma Owens, became the first person to replicate the original piece of Headford lace based on a pattern created by Jackie.⁶⁶

Conclusion

This article has provided an overview of Headford lace, from its development in the mid-18th century to the present-day activities of the Headford Lace Project, as well as examining the evidence relating to its patrons and producers. Despite lying dormant for many years, it is now clear that Headford lace is among the oldest handmade laces in Ireland, and one that did not die out before the Famine period, as previously thought. Due to the long-standing patronage of the St. George family, the industry generated a revenue stream that might otherwise not have been an option for the poorer people of Headford. The revival and continuation of the craft today stands as a legacy to Irish women, from the poorest to the richest, who patronised and produced Headford lace, and whose lives were intertwined across the centuries like the crossing and twisting of threaded bobbins.

⁶⁶ Owens, N. (2019) *History of Headford lace*, available online at: <http://headfordlaceproject.ie/history/37-history-of-headford-lace> (Accessed: 17-9-2019)

Bibliography

Amoroso Leslie, C. (2007) *Needlework Through History: An Encyclopedia*, Greenwood

Austen-Leigh, R.A. (1945) "The Family of Chenevix", *Proceedings of the Huguenot Society of London*, Vol. XVII, No. 4, Spottiswoode, Ballantyne & Co. Ltd., found at: <https://archive.org/details/proceedingsofhug1719hugu/page/n339?>

Burke, B. (1912) *A Genealogical and Heraldic History of the Landed Gentry of Ireland*, Harrison & Sons

Bury Palliser, F. (1865) *A History of Lace*. London: Sampson, Low, Son, & Marston

Bury Palliser, F. Jourdain, M. Dryden, A. [Eds.] (1902) *History of Lace*, Sampson, Low, Son, & Marston

Candon, G. (2003) *Headford, Co. Galway 1775-1901*, Four Courts Press

Census of Ireland 1911, "Residents of a house 1 in New Street (Headford, Galway)" found at: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/New_Street/546931/ (Accessed: 15-9-2019)

Census of Ireland 1911, "Residents of a house 13 in New Street (Headford, Galway)" from: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/New_Street/546938/ (Accessed: 17-9-2019)

Census of Ireland 1911, "Residents of a house 15.2 in Bridge Street (Headford, Galway)", from: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/Bridge_Street/546877/ (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

Census of Ireland 1911, "Residents of a house 4 in Bog Road (Headford, Galway)" found at: http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Galway/Headford/Bog_Road/546859/ (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

Civil Records, "Death Returns 1931", found at: https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1931/04897/4327005.pdf (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

Clonbrock Estate, *Clonbrock Estate Papers: Ms 35,733 (9). Clothing account book, June 1868-Dec 1872*, National Library of Ireland

Dutton, H. (1824) *Statistical and Agricultural Survey of the County of Galway*, Graisberry

Foote, J. Coombe, W. (1811) *The Life of Arthur Murphy*, J. Faulder

Galway County Heritage Office (2017) "The History of Headford" found at: <https://heritage.galwaycommunityheritage.org/content/places/headford/topics-headford/the-history-of-headford> (Accessed: 15-9-2019)

Grafton Galleries (1895) *Fair Children*, Grafton Galleries Catalogues 1895-1899, Grafton Galleries

Hartshorne, A. [Ed.] (1905) *Memoirs of a Royal Chaplain, 1729-1763. The Correspondence of Edmund Pyle, D.D. Chaplain in Ordinary to George II, with Samuel Kerrich D.D., Vicar of Dersingham, Rector of Wolferton, and Rector of West Newton*, John Lane

Heckscher Museum (1979) *Catalogue of the Collection: Painting and Sculpture*, Heckscher Museum

House of Commons (1835) *Inquiries into the Condition of the Poorer Classes in Ireland', Appendix (A) and Supplement*. HMSO

House of Commons (1847) *Correspondence from January to March 1847 relating to the measures adopted for the Relief of the Distress in Ireland; Board of Works Series*, HMSO

Lewis, S. (1849) *Topographical Dictionary of Ireland*, S. Lewis & Co

Mansergh St George, R. (1790) "An account of Galway by Richard St. George Mansergh St. George" IE TCD MS 1749/2, Trinity College Dublin.

Mansergh St. George, R.J. et al (1849) "Address to the Rev. William Jackson, Vicar of the Union of Templemore, and Late Curate of Headford" *Tuam Herald*, 25 August 1849

McDonald Legg, C. (2005) "History-laden canoe comes down from its lofty perch" *Tribune Life*, 11 November 2005

Melvin, P. (2012) *Estates and Landed Society in Galway*, De Búrca

Meredith, S. (1865) [*The Lacemakers: Sketches of Irish Character with some account of the Effort to Establish Lacemaking in Ireland*](#), Jackson, Walford, and Hodder

National Archives, "Short title: Usher St George v St George. Document type: Bill only. Plaintiffs: Usher St..." found at: <http://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/C10407538> (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

National University of Ireland, Galway (2011) "Landed Estates Database. House: Headford Castle" found at: <http://landedestates.ie/LandedEstates/jsp/property-show.jsp?id=770> (Accessed: 14-9-2019)

No Author (1838) *Waterford Mail*, Vol. XV, No.1621, 24 November 1838

No Author (1843) *Connaught Telegraph*, 29 November 1843

No Author (1843) *The Limerick Chronicle*, 4 November 1843

No Author (1861) *Ierne: Or, Anecdotes and Incidents During a Life Chiefly in Ireland. With Notice of People and Places*, Partridge & Co.

No Author (1894) "Convent of Mercy, Ballinrobe, Annual Bazaar". *Ballinrobe Chronicle*, 14 July 1894

No Author (1906) "Headford Castle" *Western People*, 30 June 1906

No Author (1910) "Two Successful Shows" *The Connacht Tribune*, 24 September 1910

No Author (1911) "Headford Show". *Connacht Tribune*, Saturday September 16 1911

No Author (1985) "Presentation College Headford collects environmental award". *The Connacht Tribune*, 11 October 1985

No Author (1986) "City ICA members enjoy lace talk!" *City Tribune*, 14 February 1986

O'Byrne, R. (2017) *Tyrone House and the St. George Family: The Story of an Anglo-Irish Family*. Xlibris

Owens, N. (2019) *History of Headford lace*, available online at: <http://headfordlaceproject.ie/history/37-history-of-headford-lace> (Accessed: 17-9-2019)

Parkinson, H., Simmons, P.L. (1865) *The Illustrated Record and Descriptive Catalogue of the Dublin International Exhibition of 1865*, E. & F.N. Spon

Potter, M. (2014) *Amazing Lace: A History of the Limerick Lace Industry*, Limerick County Council

Register of Deeds, Ireland (1739-1810) "Headford/Hedford & Fairs & Markets: St. George Esqe. his Revocation". *Townlands Book 160*, No. 106363, p. 69, found at: <https://www.familysearch.org/ark:/61903/3:1:3Q9M-CSJM-Q9GW-D?i=40&cat=185720>

Royal Jubilee Exhibition (1887), *Royal Jubilee Exhibition, Manchester 1887: Official Catalogue*, John Heywood

Sharpe, P. (2010) "Lace and Place: women's business in occupational communities in England 1550-1910", *Women's History Review*, 19(2), April 2010

The Peerage, "Person Page 33843", found at: <http://www.thepeerage.com/p33483.htm#i334828> (Accessed: 8-12-2018)

Trotter, J.B. (1819) *Walks through Ireland in the years 1812, 1814, and 1817: described in a series of letters to an English Gentleman*, Sir. R. Philips & Co, London

Wadge, E. H.[Ed.] (1866) *The Irish Industrial Magazine*. Dublin: McGlashan & Gill

Waters, R.E.C. (1878) *Genealogical Memoirs of the Extinct Family of Chester of Chicheley their Ancestors and Descendents*, Robson & Sons

Wikitree, *Mary St. George*, found at: https://www.wikitree.com/wiki/St._George-42 (Accessed: 8-12-2018)