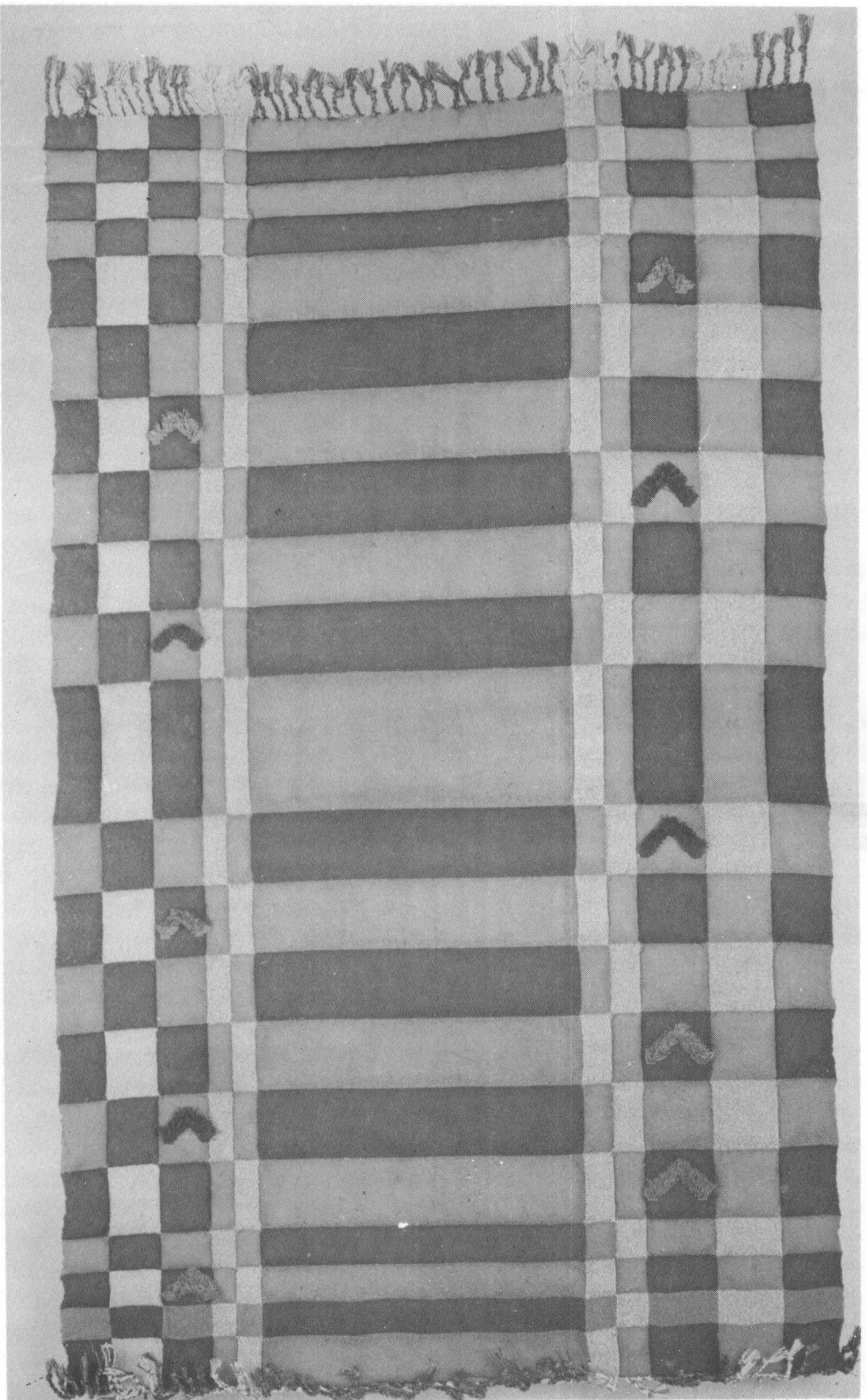


GRAFTS COUNCIL OF IRELAND



ANNUAL REPORT
1981

Crafts Council of Ireland

Chairman's Statement

There have been many positive aspects to the year under review, not least the manner in which the staff of the Secretariat undertook unaccustomed roles and responsibilities during the lengthy illness of the Executive Officer. Their dedication to the Council, to the concerns and hopes of craftsmen, augurs well for that essential liaison between all the various elements which make up the Crafts Council. The Member Organisations and their representatives, the Management Committee, the craftsmen and the State bodies, all make the total entity which is the Crafts Council of Ireland.

I know from my own experience as Chairman, and through attendance at international meetings of crafts organisations both in Vienna in 1980 and Denmark in 1981, that the Crafts Council of Ireland is held in very high esteem abroad and that we are, in many respects, envied. Not, indeed, because we have such a huge organisation and vast resources, but because we have a unique structure in which the various strands relative to the progression of the craft industry all come together. The Crafts Council Management Committee, for instance, is the only forum where craftsmen, together with representatives from relevant State bodies and other craft orientated bodies, regularly come together to discuss and promote initiatives for the benefit of crafts. At this level these representatives are essential partners and it would be foolish to think that they can do without each other. The balance has been maintained down through the years and the fact that it now favours the craftsmen is a healthy and helpful one. Much can be done with this partnership in the years ahead.

There still remains the other partner—the general public. Last year I mentioned that I would like to see a greater public awareness and appreciation of the work of our craftsmen and much greater promotion of craft from all sections of the media, with special emphasis on standards. I would like to reiterate this. In an open economy such as ours we are vulnerable to every type of import. Many of our own products of which we can be justly proud are often lost in the sheer weight of words and exhortation by advertisers to the public which we in the craft industry cannot match. Only by hard work and constant effort can we hope to get through to our own people what a wealth of fine products our craftsmen can offer. Many of our excellent craft shops throughout the country are proving that, given the opportunity with good products in the right locations, craft products sell not only to the tourists but also in many cases on a year-round basis.

We will in 1983 be hosts to European craftsmen as we were hosts in 1970 to the craftsmen of the world. I believe that the most positive note on which this Annual General Meeting can take place is to look back on the developments which have taken place since then. To those young enough not to remember, they have been quite dramatic. Let us look forward to the equally dramatic developments for which the 1983 European Conference can act as a springboard.

Such achievements can only happen if we all make them happen and I would, in thanking everyone who has helped in any way in the development of crafts in 1981, say this: the partnership is there, let us make it work to the benefit of all our craftsmen and to the economy of our country.

Blanaid Reddin
Chairman

Management Committee Members 31.12.81

Blanaid Reddin, Chairman;
Bord Failte Eireann
Gerald Tyler, Vice Chairman;
Kilkenny Design Workshops
Mary Coleman, Honorary Treasurer;
Country Markets and Guild of Irish Lace Makers
Betty Searson, Honorary Secretary;
Royal Dublin Society

Helena Brennan, Craft Potters Society of Ireland
Tom Broderick, County Development Officers Association
Alison Erridge, Clare Craftworkers Association
Michael Jackson, "Hands" Cooperative
Shane McAuley, Industrial Development Authority
John Murphy, National College of Art and Design
Angela O'Brien, Irish Society for Design and Craftwork
Dermot Stokes, County Wicklow Craftworkers Association
John Verling, Cork Craftsmans Guild
James Warwick, Northern Ireland

General Purposes Committee

Gerald Tyler (Chairman)
Mary Coleman
Alison Erridge
Blanaid Reddin
Betty Searson

Annual Report for 1981

Trade Fair

The Council's major activity each year, the National Crafts Trade Fair, was again a signal success. This Fifth Fair was opened by the Minister for Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Mr Desmond O'Malley TD. With 163 stands and 166 exhibitors, the Fair for the first time filled the RDS Industries Hall's 25,000 square feet.

Direct orders taken at the Fair, which was as usual confined to trade buyers, amounted to IR£905,000, touching IR£1 million within the following week. For the first time an important exercise in co-operation between the Crafts Council and Córas Tráchtála was undertaken to coordinate the visit of buyers (75 in all) from overseas. These were from the USA and Canada, the UK and continental Europe, and resulted in direct export orders placed during the three day Fair of IR£300,000. The experiment which was carefully monitored both prior to the Fair and in an aftercare situation was regarded as being successful enough to be safely established as an annual feature.

As co-operation between the Council and the other State bodies is enabled to increase, not merely by initiatives, but by adequate funding and staffing to undertake such initiatives, the true value of the Council to the craftsmen and of the craftsmen to the whole community can begin to be achieved.

Sligo Pottery won the Crafts Council award for the best stand and Pat Flood the IDA Trophy for the best product in trade fair terms.

V.A.T.

The thorny problem of VAT on craft products as discriminating against the craftsman vis-a-vis their industrial competitors and forcing them to reduce their already slim margins in order to keep prices at some realistic level in a 25 per cent and upwards situation continued to be struggled on with during the year. The Council consulted with its accountants' tax expert and the advice given was that the approach made officially to the then Minister of State, and reported on at the 1980 AGM, was quite comprehensive but that new strategies might be examined. The change to a Coalition Government made no fundamental difference, the attitude to craft products remaining the same: that they somehow cannot be differentiated from similar machine manufactured products despite the Council's willingness to act as a registering agency for

genuine handcraft products. The increase in VAT registration levels was of some help; it did not help across the board. Efforts will continue. It had been hoped that the Minister for Finance would meet with a Council delegation late in the year or early in 1982 but the fall of the Government has changed that. A meeting will however be sought with the new Minister.

Kilworth Craft Training Workshops

The Kilworth Craft Training Workshops were officially opened on 4 November by Senator Sean O'Leary, acting for the Minister of State, Mr E. Collins, who had had to cry off. The opening was a fitting culmination to the work that the Council and AnCO had put into it as, for many reasons beyond the Council's control, the opening was later than intended but it meant that the work of the participating young craftsmen was at a more advanced stage and thus more impressive. A special presentation was made to the Senator, being a composite work of three of the craftsmen, the fourth providing on her own a small token gift for each of the many who attended the function.

The shop, for which the Crafts Council had taken responsibility, was open and, though small, added a further dimension of quality to the village of Kilworth. What was impressive was the manner in which the Kilworth Community Council and, indeed, the whole local population, had taken the young craftsmen into their community, and the degree to which the Workshops were proudly 'theirs'.

Miss Lynne Glasscoe was added to the staff during the year on a special contract basis to act in a supervisory capacity at the Kilworth Craft Training Workshops and also to help with the shop. Miss Glasscoe's background in marketing added a very useful dimension to the training milieu available at Kilworth.

To the craftsmen who co-operated as visiting lecturers or who took the participants into their workshops as part of the training exercise, the thanks of the Council is due, as to the whole AnCO team both in Dublin and Cork who provided the special business training which is such an essential part of the project.

Conference

The Annual Conference was a new format conference arising from the change of formula generally accepted as a necessary progressive step

to avoid the danger of being locked into a rigid and conservative pattern which might not be related to craftsmen's wishes and needs, especially those younger ones. Mr Gerald Tyler, Vice-Chairman of the Council, with a sub-Committee of Kilkenny craftsmen, undertook the main organisational function on the ground—a fortunate thing in the event of the Executive Officer's illness.

The Conference, held in Kilkenny in October, was an undoubted success. This success was as much due to the work of the local organisers and craftsmen themselves as to the almost ideal location of Kilkenny itself, with the Kilkenny Design Workshops as a base and so many craft studios close by the City which could be visited as part of the Conference activities. The "Handmade in Ireland" exhibition was opened coincidentally in the Castle and the four young craftsmen in Kilworth had an exhibition of their work at the Conference. The overseas speakers, weaver Jette Nevers, potter Colin Pearson and goldsmith Peter Hassenpflug were exactly right for the workshop oriented, essentially informal Conference.

Initiatives

It was unfortunate that, due to the severe staff problem during the year, two interesting initiatives had to be abandoned. One was the basketry seminar which had been the brainchild of the Clare Craftworkers Association and for the organisation of which the Council had accepted responsibility; the other the service to architects and interior designers to increase the use of the craftsman's work in their commissions. It is intended that the latter will be instituted during 1982 and that the former will be integrated into the traditional workshops in the 1983 meeting of European craftsmen in Ireland.

World Crafts Council

The Chairman and the Crafts Officer of the Council were the official Irish delegates at the first European Regional Crafts Conference of the World Crafts Council in Denmark. Miss Searson of the RDS, and also Honorary Secretary of the Crafts Council, also attended. The Conference was primarily a workshop type gathering in that all craftsmen joined workshops of their discipline for periods of up to six days, working with other craftsmen from European countries.

The seven Irish craftsmen who went to Denmark applied through the Crafts Council and were recommended for and given upgrading of skills grants by the IDA and Udarás na Gaeltachta to

enable their attendance. The Council was able to help by paying in advance for travel and other cost factors saving the craftsmen the cost of seeking bank bridging finance until IDA and Udarás na Gaeltachta paid the grant aid when the Conference was over.

The General Assembly, or official business session, was presented with a draft invitation from the Crafts Council of Ireland delegation to host the 1983 European Conference in Ireland. The offer was accepted in principle, details to be worked out from the draft proposals presented. The European Regional Board of the World Crafts Council agreed to take the matter to a more final stage when holding their first 1982 meeting in Ireland in early January.

Those who were involved in the early development of the Crafts Council, arising directly from the World Crafts Council World General Assembly in Ireland in 1970, will be aware of the enormous impetus which it gave to the crafts in Ireland in so many ways and it is to be hoped that the Euro-Conference and workshops in 1983 will give an equally dramatic boost based as it will be on a craft community which is much more numerous and sophisticated and on developed services and a greater State awareness of the importance of the craft community.

State Support

In terms of State awareness, the Council's grant for 1981 was raised from the 1980 level, an indication of confidence in the Council, especially at IDA level, the grant source. The close co-operation between the Council and the IDA led to a number of useful procedural advantages for craftsmen being introduced during the year. IDA grant procedures were sped up and the method and timing of payments simplified which was of particular importance to craftsmen who, often in developing studios, were out of pocket for lengthy periods at high interest rates. Another instance in which Crafts Council intervention aided craftsmen was that related to travel abroad on, for instance, an upgrading of skills course. Hitherto, payment of travel and subsistence expenses was not payable until vouched for after return so that bank borrowing had to be resorted to. Now those payments such as fares and accommodation which can be prepaid, can also be claimed at once, a saving often of as much as 80 per cent.

The upgrading of skills grants, which can be of considerable importance to a craftsman's skill development, and which can be with the top

master craftsmen abroad, are not being availed of to the extent it had been hoped when this initiative was worked out. It is to be hoped that this is not symptomatic of a false feeling of superiority of skill among our craftsmen.

Aid to Craft Organisations

It may be said that there is an element of the commercial in what the Council is doing, the Trade Fair being a typical example. One of the prime policy platforms of the Council, however, is that of improving the well-being of the craftsman. It is realised that there are craftsmen to whom the Trade Fair or that type of approach is not the correct one and that the Council is in the disadvantageous position in relation to those craftsmen of not having gallery space for exhibitions. However, in 1981, the Council aided craftsmen in a number of ways other than trade fairs. Certain ex gratia payments were made to member organisations to cover exhibition expenses—either as guarantees against loss, or for photographic coverage, for catalogue printing costs or the travel costs of speakers. Member Organisations aided were: the Craft Potters Society of Ireland, the Handweavers Guild of Cork, Clare Craftworkers Association, the Irish Patchwork Society, "Hands" Cooperative, Country Markets, Alex Meldrum, postage for aid in patchwork research, and the organisers of the exhibition "Handmade in Ireland."

Purchase of Craft Work

A start was also made towards the occasional purchase of work from exhibitions to help artist craftsmen and to begin at the same time the building of a small Crafts Council collection of work from leading craftsmen.

In the preparation of the budget for 1982 a positive decision was made to include a budgetary provision for the purchase of works of merit and to devise a policy for the administration of this. Budgetary provisions will, as previously, cover the ex gratia payment of small amounts to help member organisations with exhibitions and special projects of merit.

Member Organisations

The Council was instrumental in bringing about the amalgamation of a small group of young weavers with the Irish Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers, thus preventing needless duplication and saving an old and valued society from possible extinction. Other new

member organisations formed during the year and accepted for Council membership were:

Handweavers Guild of Cork

"Hands" Cooperative

Marlay Craft Cooperative

Roscommon, Longford, Leitrim Craftworkers Guild.

Exhibitions

The Council sent an edited version of the exhibition "Weaving—The Irish Inheritance" to the Textile Museum in Lowell, Mass., USA, at the invitation of the Department of Foreign Affairs. The Central Bank kindly lent the original six weavings now in their possession. The exhibition was well received and publicised. The Council's small travelling exhibition was mounted in Kinsale during the popular Food and Wine Festival Week.

Other exhibitions in which the Council played a part were those of the Craft Potters Society of Ireland, the Handweavers Guild of Cork and the exhibition "Handmade in Ireland."

The Council's silver medal at the RDS National Crafts Competition was won by Anna Niamh Hurley.

The Management Committee

Miss Reddin was re-elected Chairman at the AGM in May.

Retirements from the Management Committee during the year were Mr Tom Maher of the IDA and Miss Marie Donovan of C oras Tr acht ala, both of whom were valuable contributors to the work of the Council.

Accessions to the Management Committee were Mrs Helena Brennan and Mr Michael Jackson who were elected at the AGM and Mr Shane McAuley of the IDA, co-opted to fill the vacancy caused by Mr Maher's retirement.

In a reorganisation leading towards the more efficient use of Committee Members' time, the various sub-Committees were disbanded and a General Purposes Committee set up to meet monthly enabling matters to be discussed in more detail and action recommended to the Management Committee meetings.

General

The Council was happy to loan its meeting room to the Irish Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers for a number of meetings, and also to the Cork Craftsmans Guild, as well as co-operating with the committee for the Knock awards in collating entries.

The Chairman and members of the Secretariat represented the Council at various exhibitions and other official functions during the year.

The Crafts Officer had a number of meetings with all the Member Organisations of craftsmen and was responsible for the development of new groupings which look like making a very positive contribution to the Council's work. Additionally the Crafts Officer was in a position to handle a considerable quantity of queries posed by craftsmen and also the general public.

A useful meeting of craft organisations' representatives was convened in Jury's Hotel in Dublin in July and they were invited particularly to contribute towards the Council's thinking on forward policy and on the action required relative to VAT.

Five editions of the Newsletter were issued and a policy decision made to replace the existing system, in which the Executive Officer wrote the Newsletter, by an Editor and Editorial Board.

Communication is, of course, a vital element in any organisation, and it is the Council's intention that communication through the Newsletter and the Crafts Officer and its international connection should continue to improve. As with all communication, it is a two-way thing and the Council hopes that craftsmen will play their part.

Member Organisations 1981

Bord Fáilte Eireann
Bunratty Castle and Folk Park
Clare Craftworkers Association
Comeragh Craft Cooperative
Córas Tráchtála
Cork Craftsmans Guild
Country Markets Limited
Country Workers Limited
County Wicklow Craftworkers Association
County Development Officers Association
Craft Potters Society of Ireland
Guild of Irish Lace Makers
Guild of Musical Instrument Makers
"Hands" Cooperative
Industrial Development Authority
Irish Countrywomen's Association
Irish Goods Council
Irish Guild of Weavers, Spinners and Dyers
Irish Society for Design and Craftwork
Kildare Craftworkers Guild
Kilkenny Design Workshops Limited
Marlay Craft Cooperative Limited
Meath Craftworkers Association
Monaghan Crafts Association
National College of Art and Design
North Dublin Craftworkers Association
North Tipperary Craftworkers Association
Open College, Belfast
Patchwork Guild, Belfast
Roscommon, Longford, Leitrim Craftworkers Guild
Royal Dublin Society
St Catherine's College of Home Economics
Shannon Free Airport Development Company Limited
Slieve Bawn Cooperative Handcraft Market Limited
Údarás na Gaeltachta
James Warwick, Northern Ireland
Waterford Crafts Limited
Wexford Craftworkers Association

Crafts Council of Ireland
Thomas Prior House
Merrion Road Dublin 4

Telephone 680764 / 603070

Photograph
Frontispiece—weaving by Cathy MacAleavey