

Connecting with the Irish Flax Industry



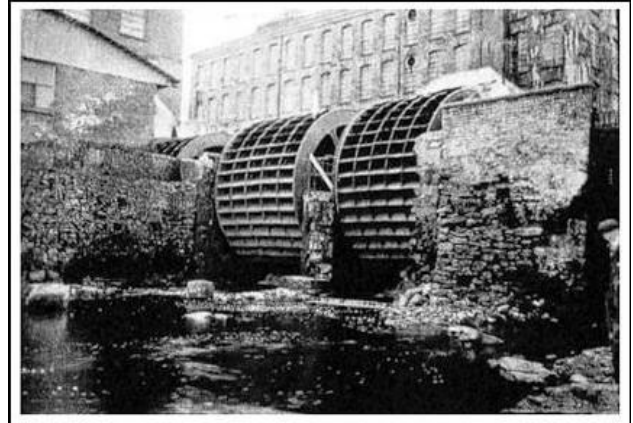
Have you seen where almost all of your linen tea towels in daily use were made? Either the location given is Ireland or Ulster; and did you know that until as recently as just six years ago, Ireland was a leader in flax textile production?

In the Victorian era the Herdman family gave employment to many hundreds of workers when they created a huge complex of buildings which now come under the guardianship of the Sion Mills Buildings Preservation Trust who have saved them from destruction and revitalised them for posterity as a museum with some parts used as an arts centre. World Heritage Status is now being sought for this historic mills complex.

Flax was initially grown in Ireland but as popularity grew, so demand outstripped the ability to supply enough home grown raw material and vast quantities of flax were imported.

Two ladies in the life of artist Eamon O'Doherty inspired a sculpture which stands in a quiet open space within the Sion Mills complex. His mother had been a Herdmans Mill worker and a girl friend had worked in Sion Mills. This beautiful sculpture, titled *The Flax Spinner* and donated to Sion Mills by HEART, a cross-border project covering Heritage Environment Arts & Rural Tourism, and depicts a young woman elegantly posed with her hands reaching out to the threads, one bare foot on the floor whilst the other is poised on the brake.

The websites covering the Herdman family, the history of the mills, detailing the machinery and the buildings of Sion Mills make fascinating reading – just search using the names – and describes a must-be-visited museum mill site when in Northern Ireland.



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