



•Staff of the Springfield Dyeing and Finishing Co. pictured in 1940. At the centre of the front row is owner, Mr Archibald

The Black Mountain, and indeed the rest of the hills surrounding Belfast played an important role in the developing linen industry throughout the 18th and until late in the 19th Century in the Belfast area. On the outskirts of the West of the city at that time, many bleaching greens and linen mills stretched from Colin mountain as far as Ligoniel and the Cavehill. On the Colin mountain, one of the most prominent of these, was the bleaching green and linen mill owned by Luke Teeling. Luke Teeling was one of the leaders of the united Irishmen and the bleaching green was situated on the site of what is now Poleglass housing estate. Both bleaching green and mill were destroyed by yeomanry as a reprisal after the '98 rebellion.

Another linen mill stood close to where Colin Glen now is and belonged originally to the McCance family who lived at Suffolk house and were one of the most influential linen merchants in Belfast at that time. The old building at the bottom of the Suffolk Road, which was better known by locals as 'the pig factory' and which now houses several community groups was once part of that linen mill. This linen mill was sold by McCance to a man named Roberts in 1820 who continued linen production for many years after.

Further study of ordnance survey maps at that time, particularly 1832 and 1837, show various other bleaching greens and beetling mills, stretching right across the foot of Black Mountain.

The 1857 Ordnance Survey map shows a large bleaching green and beetling mill which occupied the land, where Belfast city cemetery is now. The map shows two large mill ponds, where part of Turf Lodge estate and Whiterock Leisure Centre now stand. The rivers which runs through the cemetery and Falls Park, down into Milltown (which was also a mill, bleach and dye works) and the Bog Meadows were the culmination of a series of arteries of Spring water

running down the mountain.

Above and to the right on the same map, is shown the site of Whiterock Beetling Mill and Bleaching green. This site occupied land above and where Moyard, and part of New Barnsley now are.

The mill dam, shown on the map, and known locally as 'The Green' or 'Rock Dam' was only filled in with rubble in the early 1970's. An old building which still stands on the site, and known by generations of West Belfast children as 'the Old Castle', once housed a water wheel used to power the beetling machinery in the mill.

Both bleaching greens, Whiterock and that on the site of Belfast City Cemetery were situated on a slight incline facing east in order to get the full benefit of the sun throughout most of the day. The wind and rain also played a part, and the webs of linen were laid out in long strips while still brown in colour, to be bleached by the elements.

In October 1927 the Black Mountain site was bought over by Walter Archibald and the new factory was now called, 'The Springfield Dyeing and Finishing Co. Ltd.'

Maureen Brady was born in 1920 and has lived all her life at the top of the Whiterock Road. Her maiden name was Jones and her father was chief dyer in the factory. Her mother who was called Walsh was born and reared in a little house halfway up the mountain loney, just above where the Lutheran Church once was. (Neither house nor the Church still exist). At one stage, her father and brother, sister and sister-in-law, uncle and her cousin all worked in the factory which was the major employees in the area. She was educated in St Katherine's School on the Falls Road, next to Cavendish Street, and her and her family lived at Carnmore Terrace, the red brick houses at the top right hand side of the Whiterock Road. At that time, the trams, turned down at the Flush on the Springfield and at the bottom of the Whiterock. There were no shops at the top of the Whiterock, only a

bar owned by Mallons, which later became Kelly's. Mallons eventually built the house and shop where the 'Arcades' is now, while Charlie Curry had a small farm house at the back of Mallons pub, where he kept poultry, and sold eggs and milk. Travelling on down the Whiterock at this time, the next house was Mortons just below where the reservoir now is, followed by O'Hares farm at Corrigan Park and then the newly built Whiterock estate. The only other shop was at the corner of Rockdale Street.



•Black Mountain campaigner, Terry Enright, recalls the hey-day of the linen industry

After leaving school, Maureen worked for a short time in a debtors office, before getting her new job up at 'The Green'. Maureen recalls the war years, and remembers standing at the house where the 'Arcadia' now is, watching the German planes flying over the Black Mountain to bomb Belfast. On one occasion it seemed to her as though all of Belfast was in flames from the heavy bombs and incendiaries.

There was a small air raid shelter built outside Carnmore Terrace, but Maureen laughs as she says, "Our family never got into it, as it was always packed with ones from 'down the road'. The mountain used to be black with people when the sirens went and the bombing started, and one other thing I remember was that the poor wives were left to trail the children along away behind the men, they were always first up on to the hill."

Going to work, Maureen would have just walked down the Springfield Road most times, but in the summer, she would have cut across the fields where New Barnsley and Moyard are now, and this would have brought you out where the 'finishing house' stood beside Betty's farm. Which was

slightly below, where Finlays box factory now is, at the back of the houses at Springfield Road.

Initially, her and her friend Patsy, worked in the 'Frame House' while at the other times, she worked in what she describes as the 'Bleaching Green', examining the linen for any flaws or black thread which they 'picked out'.

Most workers started at 8.30am and worked to 6 o'clock pm and the highest wages she ever received was 24 shillings per week, with an occasional four shillings extra if she worked overtime. There was a tea-break in the morning, with 1 hour for lunch during which time they remained on the site. "Sometimes we used to go up and take our lunch by the dam and paddled our feet while we did so. We never went in for a swim, or anything like that, but the dam would have been packed with people on Summer nights and at the weekends, in swimming, picnicing and fishing. The dam was really popular then with people coming from all over for a swim in the good weather."

In those times during the war, the company did most of the dyeing for the Khaki uniforms and occasionally parachutes. They also dyed the hankies which Maureen and the other girls hated doing, because they were so flimsy and slipped out of the dyeing clips.

The webs were then fed through the bottom roller and then rolled off on to another roller, and out. After being 'shaddled' and dried they were taken to the beetles for finishing. The pounding of the beetles was deafening, and the bang, bang, bang, of the beetles went on all day, but was essential for the shine and finish. Maureen's father was

obviously a very important worker in the factory as making of the various dyes was a very skilled job. He was very secretive about all the ingredients used for specific dyes. In his early years at the factory he had lost two fingers while working at a Jig, for which he received £100 compensation.

At one stage just before he retired, the company employed a new dyer to do a particularly new type of dyeing, and moved Mr Jones. However, after a short period, the new man was unable to do the work, and the firm had to move him back to the dyeing.

Maureen also fondly thinks back on the great atmosphere in the place, where she worked from she was 18 until 26 years of age, finally leaving in 1948.

"It was a great place to work, and Mr Archibald, the owner was a really nice man who always spoke kindly to all the workers." She says, "I remember one particular occasion when we hadn't much work on, with only one frame in 5 working, so we rotated the work, 20 minutes on, and 40 minutes off. We chatted away and did a bit of embroidery while we were 'off'. My friend Agnes Proctor had been in to town to see the latest new picture, just out, 'The Wizard of Oz', and there she was at one stage, showing me some of the steps from the dances in the film, and Mr Archibald was standing behind her, where she couldn't see him,

and I couldn't tell her, because she was dancing away in front of me. But, he never said a word, and just turned and walked out, killing himself laughing. "It's a pity the place ever had to close, and an even greater pity that the Rock dam is no longer there. When I think of all the happy hours spent up at 'the Green' and people in swimming and having picnics. It's a shame that the children nowadays never had that, and probably never will."

Springfield Dyeing and Finishing Co Ltd finally did close in 1967.

"Workers started at 8.30am and finished at 6pm, the highest wage paid was 24 shillings."

As stated earlier, the Rock dam itself which had given so much pleasure to the people of West Belfast was finally filled in with rubble in the early 70's. The reason given, was that the stretch of land from the mountain Loney to the Ballygomartin Road, on part of which, the Rock dam was located, was to be converted into a series of all weather, football and hockey pitches. Thankfully the conversion never took place. The wisdom of the city planners at that time wasn't questioned, but it is hoped that present environmental awareness will never allow this once beautiful patch of green countryside in its urban setting, to be covered with tarmac in the future.

Black Mountain Environmental Group have now submitted a preservation and developmental plan for the area concerned, more in keeping with the beautiful natural setting of the locality.



•Whiterock man Sonny O'Reilly pictured beside the Rock Dam back in 1961