

# Shuttles flying at full steam ahead



Marion Baur, owner of county Derry's only active linen weaving mill, will stage a demonstration at the May Day Steam Rally.

If Wallace Clark's famous quote "linen is the aristocrat of textiles..." is true, the description of steam engines as the "giants of the industrial revolution" is equally fitting.

In the 21st century with the huge mill engines, drivers of many textile factories, all but gone, linen manufacturers and steam - operators don't often share the same venues.

One exception which will be attracting up to 20,000 (!) people is the "May Day Steam Rally" at Shanes Castle, (Antrim) on May 5th and 6th this year. Alongside an expected 30 + operating (and actually performing tasks such as timber-sawing, threshing etc.) steam engines, textile workers from the Roe Valley will be showing the "complete works" of linen making.

Weaver Marion Baur who owns and runs Flax Mill, County Derry's only active linen-weaving mill, has put a demonstration together which can be safely called the most comprehensive one ever to happen on these shores. Known to stay shy of "outside the mill events", simply because she is too busy with Flax Mill's products in demand the world over, Marion calls the Shanes Castle event the only exception: "We don't go to show weaving anywhere these days. It's a big task to dismantle a loom put it together at the location of the event, thread it and get it ready to weave. Shanes Castle is our only exception. The amazing location of the estate, its history and foremost the large gathering of steam engines - once the driving forces of manufacturing in this part of the world - make for a very pleasant and interesting setting. We are delighted to be part of the event."

Marion and her team are

going to show Flax - scutching (breaking), warping yarn and weaving linen on a very old loom. They will be joined by two of the country's top spinners who are demonstrating linen and wool - spinning.

"Sarah Foster - Jarden and Christine Casey are outstanding master-crafters who do quite a lot of commission - spinning for Flax Mill. Despite their very busy schedule, they

## Local Textile Workers staging large demonstration at Northern Ireland's prime Steam Rally

make time for the Steam Rally - their working presence completes our demonstration and adds great quality to it", says Marion.

The organisers of the Steam

Fair are pleased about the "from Flax to Linen" demonstration. Walter McNeill, one of the main men behind the event: "The making of linen is part of the fabric of Northern

Ireland. The demonstration and stall Marion and her colleagues have put together has become a huge attraction to thousands of our visitors from Northern Ireland. The fact that they draw guests from many other parts of the world to the Rally makes their presence in the Crafts Marquee even more unique.

"It's a very educational exhibit, people can actually see

flax - fibres being processed right through to the final product, linen cloth. They can also purchase some of the finest textiles available in this country, all made here from pure natural raw - materials. As organisers we feel very privileged to host this demonstration."

The man should know what he is talking about. Walter McNeill spent his working life as a sales manager for Mackie's (Belfast), the world's largest textile machinery manufacturer for many years.

The textile demonstration and stall at Shanes Castle have become a hub for designers, other manufacturers and many textile-workers over the last few years, needless to say that photographers and film-makers feel attracted.

Marion Baur added: "When Linen People, the latest documentary film on the industry by John Thompson needed final touches, the makers decided to add them at last year's Steam Rally. Many designers come to visit us, they feel inspired by the sight of a loom actually working outside a factory, the purring of the spinning wheels and cracking of the flax-breaker and so forth, I suppose.

This year we are expecting another very special guest: Lorna Shannon, secretary of the 'Ulster Guild of Spinners, Weavers and Dyers' isn't just going to visit: On Sunday she will actually take the driving seat behind one of the spinning wheels - very honouring to have this very profiled textile - expert at our stall.

"I think the large and growing interest in our working exhibit is part of a very well organised and well-designed gathering. Once the big engines blow their whistles and go full steam ahead we will do our best to have the shuttle flying."



A large collection of steam engines will be on display at the event.