

## 'Linen is meaningful in Belfast': how an old industry is weaving the city a new identity

### Level 2: Intermediate

#### 1 Warmer

a. Discuss the following questions in pairs.

1. What fabrics are the clothes you are wearing made from?
2. Do you prefer to wear natural fabrics, such as cotton, or manmade fabrics, such as polyester and Lycra?
3. What does the phrase sustainable fashion mean to you?

#### 2 Key words

a. Find these words in bold in the article. Then match them to the following definitions.

<b>crease</b>	<b>fibre</b>	<b>associated with</b>	<b>reviving</b>	<b>restored</b>
<b>fabric</b>	<b>inspiration</b>	<b>preserve</b>	<b>shine</b>	<b>tools</b>
<b>weaving</b>	<b>pop-up</b>		<b>the Troubles</b>	

1. \_\_\_\_\_ : bringing something back to popularity or use again
2. \_\_\_\_\_ : cloth or material used to make clothes or other items
3. \_\_\_\_\_ : objects or equipment used to help you do a job
4. \_\_\_\_\_ : connected to or related to something
5. \_\_\_\_\_ : to give off light, or to be bright and clean
6. \_\_\_\_\_ : a period of political problems in Northern Ireland in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century
7. \_\_\_\_\_ : unwanted lines or marks made when material is folded
8. \_\_\_\_\_ : to keep something in good condition or protect it from damage
9. \_\_\_\_\_ : a natural or artificial thread used to make fabric
10. \_\_\_\_\_ : returned to its original condition or repaired
11. \_\_\_\_\_ : a business or restaurant that appears suddenly or for a short time

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12. \_\_\_\_\_: making fabrics such as linen and cotton on special machines
13. \_\_\_\_\_: a feeling or idea that makes you want to create or do something

**b. Complete the sentences with words from the previous activity in the correct form.**

1. The Greek islands are often \_\_\_\_\_ summer holidays and hot sunny days.
2. We \_\_\_\_\_ an old chair that belonged to my grandparents, by covering it in a new material.
3. You need to make sure that you use the correct \_\_\_\_\_ for the correct job.
4. Linen is a beautiful natural material, but it \_\_\_\_\_ very easily and can look untidy.
5. The documentary explored the effect of \_\_\_\_\_ on people across Northern Ireland.
6. There is a new \_\_\_\_\_ on the corner that serves the most delicious Mexican food.
7. Use shoe cream and a clean cloth to give your shoes a professional \_\_\_\_\_.
8. These trousers are made from a strong \_\_\_\_\_ that doesn't tear easily.
9. It's important to \_\_\_\_\_ historic buildings for future generations.
10. Belfast is known for \_\_\_\_\_ some of the highest quality linen in the world.
11. Cotton \_\_\_\_\_ is often picked by hand in Egypt so that it remains soft.
12. Some modern artists are \_\_\_\_\_ traditional methods of painting.
13. Ian is an architect and gets his \_\_\_\_\_ from the things he sees in nature.

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*Fabric that once defined Northern Ireland's capital is at the heart of its stylish revival, embraced by designers, royalty and heritage farmers alike*

**Jess Cartner-Morley**  
**29 April, 2026**

- 1 On a street in Belfast, the Kindred of Ireland boutique is doing a surprisingly good trade in yellow linen blouses and checked jackets. Half a century after **the Troubles**, Belfast is finding a new identity through the linen that created its wealth and gave it the name Linenopolis. Almost a century after the disappearance of the industry, which at one time employed forty per cent of the working population of Northern Ireland, linen is again being produced.
- 2 "Belfast has been **associated with** trouble and violence," says Amy Anderson, the 32-year-old designer of Kindred of Ireland, an independent company that she runs with her husband, Joel. "But the city has changed over the last two decades."
- 3 Anderson's grandmother Winnie was a "millie", as mill-workers were known. "Most of my generation here have relatives who worked in the linen industry, so the connection still feels real." **Reviving** the linen industry is almost impossible. But there are important people involved in the project, including the designer Sarah Burton and the Prince and Princess of Wales. There is also Charlie Mallon, a farmer, who is using his 150-year-old family farm to grow flax, the **fibre** from which linen is made.
- 4 Mallon has also bought and **restored** original machines and hopes to be able to take flax all the way from his field to the finished product. Linen, known for its beauty and comfort, is "the original performance **fabric**", he says. Mallon's traditional machines **preserve** the structure of linen, so that the end fabric doesn't **crease** as much. Most modern linen is produced in China on machines that shorten the fibres and result in more creases.
- 5 Burton took her design team on a two-day trip to Northern Ireland, which became the **inspiration** for the spring 2020 collection. She was particularly interested to see the 150-year-old machines at William Clark, the last factory where linen is still "beetled": hit with wooden **tools** to make it stronger and to add **shine**.
- 6 Last autumn, Amy and Joel Anderson met the Prince and Princess of Wales, who visited Mallon Farm on a visit to Northern Ireland. The Princess of Wales talked fashion with Mallon and with the Kindred of Ireland owners because of her interest in sustainable fashion. Amy Anderson told the Belfast Telegraph the Princess "asked very good questions".
- 7 There is also the Ashes to Fashion exhibition at the Ulster Museum which remembers the 50th anniversary of a fire in 1976 that destroyed almost the whole of a 10,000-piece fashion collection. A 1712 quilt is displayed with other important pieces such as 18th-century silk ballgowns and more modern pieces by Irish designers, including Philip Treacy, the Dior designer Jonathan Anderson and Kindred of Ireland.
- 8 A Kindred of Ireland boutique in central London is also planned. A six-week **pop-up** in Mayfair in 2024 was hugely successful for the brand, says Joel Anderson. He points out that Northern Irish businesses have access to the UK market as well as European markets. "This is a practical advantage for businesses like ours, and that's what makes this place different."

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#### 3 Comprehension check

a. Read the article and choose the correct answers.

1. Belfast is sometimes called 'Linenopolis' because ...
  - a. it is close to flax farms.
  - b. linen was very important to the city.
  - c. it has a famous linen museum.
2. What does Amy Anderson say about Belfast today?
  - a. It is famous for its linen industry.
  - b. It has changed a lot in the last twenty years.
  - c. It is still connected with trouble and violence in people's minds.
3. What does Charlie Mallon want to do?
  - a. Sell his farm to a linen company.
  - b. Produce linen from start to finish on his farm.
  - c. Import traditional machines from China.
4. Why is linen made in the traditional way better?
  - a. It is cheaper to produce.
  - b. It can be made more quickly.
  - c. It doesn't crease as much.
5. Why was the Princess of Wales interested in visiting the farm?
  - a. She wanted to learn about Irish history.
  - b. She is interested in fashion that is better for the environment.
  - c. She wanted to buy linen for the Royal Family.

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6. What does Joel Anderson say is an advantage of being a Northern Irish business?
- It can sell to both UK and European markets.
  - It gets money from the government.
  - It doesn't need to pay any taxes or fees.

### 4 Key language

a. Read the article again and circle the odd word out. Then write a sentence to explain why.

1. nylon / cotton / linen / silk

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

2. T-shirt / gown / dress / suit

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

3. restored / revived / renovated / decorated

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

4. quilt / blanket / pillow / duvet

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

5. boutique / factory / mill / farm

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

6. creasing / beetling / weaving / growing

Reason: \_\_\_\_\_

### 5 Discussion

a. Discuss these questions.

- Think of a city or region in your country. Has it changed its image in recent years? What is it known for now?
- Traditional and sustainable materials like linen are becoming popular again. Do you think this will last, or is it just a fashion trend?

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#### 6 In your own words

- a. You are going to design an outfit that represents your cultural heritage and present it to the class.

Think about ...

- what fabrics and materials you will use and why you have chosen these
- what patterns, colours or design features you will add
- what the outfit represents about your culture or identity

Your presentation should include ...

- a sketch or description of the outfit
- an explanation of the cultural significance of your choices
- a short 'catwalk commentary' as if you were introducing the outfit at a fashion show

- b. Present your outfit to the class. Be prepared to answer questions from other groups.