

Cutlery manufacturer a top drawer success

By Scott Millar

NEWBRIDGE Silverware is the only cutlery manufacturer in Ireland, and only one of two that remain in Ireland and Britain.

The company was set up in 1934 with the help of Labour Party leader

and local TD, William Norton, as part of a scheme to provide employment for the Newbridge area after the foundation of the Irish Free State.

One of the Kildare town's main sources of employment until then had been supplying the local British army barracks.

Production manager, Cliff Eng-

lish, told *Liberty*: "Norton and a local committee brought craftsmen from Sheffield to Newbridge to teach people the skill of cutlery manufacture. There were already forges in the town, many of which had been used previously for making horseshoes for the British cavalry."

The original factory was based in the old British army barracks and at its height the industry employed several hundred local people.

Some of the machines still used in the manufacturing process even predate the company, being brought in from the UK in the 1930s. Since the 1970s the factory has supported a workforce of approximately 70 people and has moved to a more compact site.

However, the type and range of items produced has continued to expand. As well as jewelry and ornaments, the number of cutlery patterns has expanded from two to 18 with Newbridge supplying several British hotels with their own styles. The industry has now come

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full circle with Newbridge now supplying blanks (the basic material for making spoons, knives and other pieces of cutlery) to Sheffield.

Cliff, who has worked at the factory for more than 30 years, said: "I learned on the job. We call it 'sitting beside Nelly', watching the guy sitting beside you."

The workforce at Newbridge was responsible for the company's most important innovation – the diversification into the manufacture of jewelry and other silverware.

Mick Dempsey, who has worked in the company for 34 years, recalled: "A load of us came in and had a look at the surplus that remained from the making of the blanks and I think it was one of the girls said this would make a nice napkin ring. Then another piece would make a bracelet."

Originally using the offcuts from the cutlery manufacturing process, Newbridge Silverware fashioned a unique jewellery range, combining its expertise in the cutlery manufacturing industry with jewellery mak-



Mick Dempsey, from Newbridge who has worked in the factory for 34 years. Mick is working at a 'blank' making machine that is over 80 years old



Larry Freeman from Naas has worked in Newbridge Silverware for 17 years. Pictured in front of some 'blanks' and cutlery in various stages of production



SIPTU Organiser, Jim McVeigh, and John O'Connor, who has worked at Newbridge for 14 years. John operates the flow jet machines which use pressured water and sand to cut jewelry patterns



Newbridge Silverware Communications Manager, Marie Brennan, pictured wearing a necklace from the new Cascade collection



Stock room managers Claire Clarke, Monica McNally and Heather Costello

ing techniques. Today, Newbridge Silverware's jewellery collections are fashioned separately from the cutlery process and involve a great deal of skill and innovation.

To celebrate 80 years in operation, Newbridge Silverware has launched a new jewelry collection – the Cascade collection, comprising agate mosaic stones, each encased by clear stone settings.

Communications Manager, Marie Brennan, points out that the new collection is one of several initiatives to mark the 80th anniversary. "May is our big month of celebration," she said, "with an open week at our Visitor Centre in Newbridge including guided tours of The Museum of Style Icons and instore

prizes to be won." The Visitor Centre at Newbridge Silverware is already one of the top five tourist attractions in Ireland attracting 350,000 visitors each year.

Marie added: "The museum has one of the rarest collections of items associated with style icons, including the largest collections of garments worn by Audrey Hepburn in the world, some pieces from Marilyn Monroe and also pieces from Princess Grace of Monaco, the Beatles and many others."

For more information on Newbridge Silverware and its product range, visit: www.newbridgesilverware.com