



Donegal Carpet

Alexander Morton & Co

Not on display

Title/Description: Donegal Carpet

Artist/Maker: Alexander Morton & Co (Designer)

Born: 1900 c.

Measurements: h. 3050 x w. 2440 mm

Accession Number: 21009A

Historic Period: 20th century

Credit Line: Donated by Sir Colin and Lady Anderson, 1978

Woven from dyed wool, this 'Donegal carpet' and extension piece feature a design of five turkeys and heraldic lions in shades of blue, green, purple and red. This Donegal carpet is probably the work of Gavin Morton (1867-1954), nephew of Alexander Morton (1844-1923) of Morton & Co. [1] At the turn of the 20th century, designers such as Morton produced woven textiles and carpets for the London retailer, Liberty & Co. [2]

This carpet, designed in the Arts and Crafts style, was wrongly attributed to William Morris when it was first presented to Lord and Lady Anderson and used to furnish their home. [3] This hand-knotted carpet is actually from the west coast of Ireland.

Woven textile and carpet manufacturer, Alexander Morton & Co., opened their first factory in Scotland in 1881. [4] Alexander Morton visited County Donegal in Ireland in 1896 and restored the hand-knotted carpet industry in Killybegs utilising the local people's knowledge of working with wool. Motivated by the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts movement, Morton's aim was to provide work for the destitute while preserving wool weaving skills in the area. [5]

Donegal weavers catered to contemporary tastes by combining traditional Celtic designs with decorative motifs from Feraghan, West Persia (modern day Iran) and the Anatolia highlands, south of Istanbul (modern day Turkey). Imported 'Turkish' carpets were popular in the late 19th century and early 20th century, at a time when Alexander Morton was trying secure a place in the market for his domestically-manufactured 'Donegal' knotted carpets. [6]

Vanessa Tothill, April 2021

[1] Identification by Linda Parry of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

[2] Amanda Geitner and Emma Hazell, ed., *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2003), pp. 63-4.

[3] Geitner, p. 17.

[4] Geitner, p. 64.

[5] Geitner, p. 645.

[6] <https://www.essiecarpets.com/product/irish-donegal-carpet/> [accessed 21 April 2021]

Further Reading

Amaya, Mario, *Art Nouveau* (London: Dutton Vista, 1966)

Geitner, Amanda and Emma Hazell, ed., *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2003)

Greenhalgh, Paul, ed., *Art Nouveau, 1890-1914* (London: V&A Publications, 2000)

Greenhalgh, Paul, ed., *The Nature of Dreams: England and the Formation of Art Nouveau* (Norwich: Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, 2020)

Image in *The Anderson Collection of Art Nouveau* (2003), Cat no. 149, p.153, ill. p.64. *Art Nouveau, The Anderson Collection*, Garner, Philippe, Johnson, Penny, Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, SCVA, 1978, p.32.
