

# ACTON AND POYNTZPASS FAIRS

BY FRANK WATTERS



*Poyntzpass Fair c.1930*

Poyntzpass fair, at which chiefly cattle and sheep were bought and sold, was often described locally, with considerable pride, as being *'one of the biggest and best fairs in the north of Ireland.'* However, it is certain that Poyntzpass fair was in being for some years before Poyntzpass as a village existed and, indeed, the village, as we know it, probably came into existence because of the fair.

The name Poyntzpass, or originally more precisely *'Poyntz's pass'*, referring to the area, dates from around 1598. The *'pass'* here, through the swampy ground between counties Armagh and Down existed long before that date of course, as an important route. It was of some strategic importance in times of unrest and at one time a 'castle' or fort of some kind was built at the top of what is now William Street. Around the end of the sixteenth century it was guarded by an English army garrison and to the 'pass' at that time was affixed the name of the officer in command from time to time. At an earlier date, the officer commanding was called *'Fenwick'* and so the *'pass'* was referred to as *'Fenwick's pass'*. However, by 1598 the garrison was under the command of Lieutenant Charles Poyntz and so it became known as *'Poyntz's pass'* and as he was still in command when hostilities ended and later settled here, the name stuck. It is worth noting that it appears that in earlier times the name Poyntzpass referred to the area and was regarded as an alias for Acton and the reverse.

Apart from this strategic significance, the pass was also of some considerable importance at other times. It represented one of only three or four safe crossing places

across the marshlands between counties Down and Armagh and, as such, must have attracted quite a volume of traffic and travellers of one kind or another.

An unpublished manuscript by John Quin of Acton, written some time in the first half of the nineteenth century, records - what was probably information handed down orally - that the path across the swampy ground had been improved in early times by building *'a causeway marked by standing stones, that foot people might pass over dry from one county to another'*. Later on, a wooden bridge was erected.

According to a petition submitted to the government in 1662 by Charles Poyntz's son, Sir Toby Poyntz, on his own behalf and that of his tenants, this wooden bridge was regularly damaged by herds of cattle being driven over it. The petition stated that the *'... pass is a madeway of a causeway and timber bridge and every year out of repair by reason of several droves of cattle which every summer are driven over there to the great prejudice of the petitioner and the said tenants both in destroying their pastures and breaking down the said bridge and causeway...'* The petitioners requested that they be allowed, *'... to demand and receive moderate customs for every herd of cattle passing that way towards the repair of the said bridge and causeway...'* In other words they wished to charge a toll. The outcome of the petition is not known but, as there is no record written or otherwise of there ever being a toll charged here, it would seem probable that the petition failed to gain approval. The fact that *'droves of cattle'* were regularly driven through the pass would surely have indicated that here was an ideal location for a livestock fair.

The 1853 *Report of the Commissioners inquiry into the state of Fairs and Markets in Ireland*, states that the patent to hold three three-day fairs annually here was granted to “*Sir Toby Poyntz Knt. on February 4<sup>th</sup> 1685 (37Chas II).*” In the patent, dates for the three fairs are specified as “*April 23<sup>rd</sup> (St George’s Day), August 24<sup>th</sup> (St Bartholomew’s Day) and November 30<sup>th</sup> (St Andrew’s Day) and the two days following each date*”. The location of the fair is given as, “*Pointzpass alias Edernagh alias Netternagh alias Nedderine*”. The ‘Edernagh’ or ‘Netternagh’ surely refer to the townland known today as ‘Federnagh’, in which part of Poyntzpass village is situated. There is no explanation for ‘Nedderine’. Several possible meanings for ‘(F)Edernagh’ have been suggested but I believe that the most logical is that it means ‘*the in-between place*’ as it describes exactly the townland’s situation. However, at the time the patent was granted to Sir Toby Poyntz, the village of Poyntzpass did not exist, as it dates only from the last decade of the eighteenth century. Prior to that there was only a house or two and possibly an inn, in what is now Meeting Street, but no streets or village as such. Despite the location given in the patent it appears that this fair was held in Acton for, if the fair was then held in ‘Edernagh’, it would have been held at what was then a just country crossroads.

The ‘*John Quin papers*’ contain the following information claiming that the fair had its origin in Acton.

*“At that time there was two or three fairs in Acton and it was customary at these times at the first opening of a fair that drink was encouraged. The country people came crowding in to see the new fair. But some malicious person, to encourage strife, caused the country people and the village people to disagree and it rose to a contest. However in the quarrel there was a man killed.”*

There is still an oral tradition in Acton that the man, referred to by John Quin, was killed in a fight at the Ballyargan end of Acton where the street dips down to the bridge over the Connawarry River. This part of the street is still known as the ‘*Kill Brae*’. The name ‘*Kill Brae*’ is said to derive from that tragic event more than 200 years ago.

This is supported by a memoir written by James Bennett around 1880. It contains the following entry relating to Acton, *“A fair used to be held in Acton but people used to fight and kill one another being only half civilised at the time. It was then taken to Poyntzpass”*.

This suggests that there may have been more than one such fight at fairs in Acton and indeed these kinds of confrontations between two groups were very typical of disturbances that occurred at fairs and other gatherings all over Ireland in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Fighting at fairs then was commonplace and an accepted part of the fair day.

In the case of the Acton ‘*contest*’ referred to by John Quin, the factions were the ‘*village people*’ and the ‘*country people*’. Whether the victim was from the ‘*country people*’ faction or a villager is not known for there is no record of individuals involved. Quin gives dates for Acton fair as ‘*4<sup>th</sup> May and 11<sup>th</sup> December*’ but does not give a year.



**In Meeting Street c.1930**

His account continues, ‘*Then, bloodshed and murder was held a great crime in the eyes of the people and is no less at the present time in the sight of God. Then the fair was removed to Poyntzpass. When the new fair was taken to the ‘pass there was not the least appearance of a village but only a few scattered houses for a long period of years’*

The decision to move the fair to Poyntzpass was taken, it seems, by Alexander Stewart of Acton House. Quin states, ‘*When the late Alexander Stewart became master of Acton estate to encourage and form a village in the ‘pass he gave tenements and long leases to the inhabitants which enabled them to build and improve.*

*“The first fair that was held in Poyntzpass was on Saturday February 7<sup>th</sup> 1784. A weekly linen market was advertised which was to be held in Poyntzpass on Saturdays and premiums were offered for that market to encourage the linen trade. That market stood for some time and the Quakers frequently came to it for they were still in favour of the linen trade. Mr Stewart offered to give tenements to form a village in the ‘pass and the Quakers wanted to hold tenements in it. And that would enlarge and improve the village. But an intimate acquaintance of Alexander Stewart, and a malicious friend to trade, said to him that if he gave them possessions in it that no other merchants would be able to buy a web. So Mr Stewart took the advice and would not grant that request to them or give them any places to improve in it. So he and the Quakers had some disagreement concerning the voting, exactly what I cannot say in these lines how it was. But Tanderagee was near it for both to hold a weekly market. So as the Quakers found no encouragement they withdrew from it and the (Poyntzpass linen) market fell away.”*

An entry in the ‘*Belfast Newsletter*’ of January 27, 1784 which states that “*the monthly linen yarn market will be held at Pointzpass and Acton in Co Armagh.*” agrees exactly with Quin’s date and an entry in ‘*Lewis*’

*Topographical Dictionary* of 1847 about Poyntzpass states that it was "... Mr Stewart who procured a grant of a market and fairs; the former never established but the latter, held on the first Saturday in every month, are large and well attended great numbers of cattle and sheep being sold"

So it seems likely that, at some stage, the three three-day fairs as established by Sir Toby Poyntz must have ceased to be held and that, perhaps, after a lapse of some years, a new monthly fair was reorganised by Alexander Stewart. Then, following the faction fight, the new fair was moved from Acton and relocated in Poyntzpass. This move would have had great significance for the future of both Poyntzpass and Acton. The establishment of a fair would have given the fledgling village of Poyntzpass a major boost and its success would have encouraged all sorts of entrepreneurs to set up in business profiting out of the monthly gatherings and providing services for those attending the fair. Poyntzpass quickly became a thriving little town while Acton, on the other hand, remained a quiet hamlet. With the construction of the new 'low road' around 1836 Acton became a quiet backwater.

The effect of this development is well illustrated by an entry in the Valuation papers of July 8<sup>th</sup> 1836. It states, *'In consequence of the new line of road now being made from Tandragee to Newry, which leaves this village (Acton) in a remote situation, it is of very little value, there being neither fair nor market held in it.'*

However the 1853 Commissioners' Report, referred to above, states that fairs were then held twice a year in Acton, on May 4 and December 11. There is no mention in any other document of a fair actually being held in Acton at that time although the dates are the same as those in the Quin manuscript. The commissioners reported that *'Fairs are held in 1,297 different towns and places in Ireland.'* 23 of them were in Co. Armagh. and 44 in Co. Down.

Poyntzpass village and the fair had received a further boost when the main Dublin to Belfast railway was constructed in 1840's. So it was that by the middle of the century, Poyntzpass had, a railway station, three churches, two schools, a medical dispensary, a constabulary barracks, a post office, monthly petty sessions, several public houses and small hotels, blacksmiths, grocers, butchers, bakers, merchants and tradesmen offering a wide range of services, as well as a very successful monthly fair.

While some towns or villages charged the farmers or dealers a toll to bring livestock in to the fair, there is no record of a toll being charged at Poyntzpass fair, and it appears that, after it was established, there was no individual or committee in charge of the fair's organisation. Yet everything appears to have gone quite smoothly, for business was transacted in a time-

honoured traditional way. Dealing in some fairs, particularly in the west of Ireland, got underway as early as one o'clock in the morning with the dealers using lanterns and torches to inspect the cattle. However, Poyntzpass fair would not usually have started before seven or 8 o'clock in the summer and 9 o'clock during the winter months.

A newspaper article about Poyntzpass written in 1925 stated that the monthly fair was "*attended by all the principal home and cross-channel buyers and there is always a good show of stock – cattle and sheep.*"

Many of these dealers would arrive by train the evening before the fair and stay in one of the several small hotels in the village. Sometimes sheep-dealers, who had brought large flocks of sheep from as far away as Donegal, penned their sheep overnight in a yard and lodged in the village. The night before the fair the village residents would prepare by placing a wooden hoarding or planks on barrels along the fronts of their homes to protect the walls from the livestock that would throng the streets next day.

Cattle were 'walked' to the fair from considerable distances. Farmers and their children or hired men would look after their own cattle but dealers usually employed drovers. From very early in the morning farmers with their cattle would start arriving in the village, anxious to get a good stand to show their stock to the best advantage. Some places were thought to make the cattle look small and were to be avoided.



**The Village Street c.1910**

Every road leading to the village would be thronged with cattle and sheep. In their *'Memories of Poyntzpass Fair'* which appeared in an earlier edition of *'Before I forget..'*, Sara and Minnie Savage recalled that from very early in the morning of the fair day farmers and drovers would be passing their house in Cullentragh with cattle en-route to the fair. They remembered that their father and his farm hands would sometimes have to wait for a break in 'the traffic' to get their cattle out onto the road. Farmers might pass with a single animal or a couple or three or four or more as

the case might be. There was much shouting and great difficulty in keeping the various lots apart and from breaking through the hedges into adjoining fields.

Dealers moved about through the fair, bidding for the cattle that suited their particular needs. Sometimes they would buy only one or two from a farmer's stock, sometimes buy all. When a deal was agreed and sealed with the traditional slap of the hands, the cattle bought were marked with the shipper's distinctive scissors mark which, in the case of the bigger dealers, was registered as a trademark and their property. Other dealers would mark cattle with keel. Sometimes payment was made in cash but more often the larger dealers and shippers agreed to meet the farmer at the bank at a certain time for payment. The cattle purchased were taken to one of several yards in the village, which were available at a small fee per head, for holding cattle till the end of the fair. If farmer and dealer couldn't finalise a deal, there would be a role for an intermediary known as a *'tangler'* to try to bridge the gap between the two. He had to be quick-witted and a bit of an actor. If the deal was agreed as a result of his help, then he would get paid for his efforts.

The number of cattle on any particular fair day obviously fluctuated from month to month and from season to season. Fairs in the autumn were generally the biggest. Some idea of the scale of the fair can be gathered from a short note in the *'Newry Reporter'* of the June fair in 1916, which stated "*The monthly fair was held on Saturday. There were a large number of buyers and prices ruled high in all classes. Sixty-four wagons were dispatched by rail.*" A wagon of cattle contained 14 cattle and more, if the animals were small.



*An artist's impression of the Fair Day*

This means that after that particular fair around 900 cattle were sent by rail for shipping to England from Poyntzpass fair. When cattle bought for purposes other than shipping and unsold animals are taken into account it leads to the conclusion that there would have been perhaps as many as 1,800 to 2000 cattle on the streets of the village that day. Add to that the large numbers of sheep on sale in the fair - The report of the next fair, in July 1916, states that "*...very large*

*consignments of lambs were shipped to Liverpool and Birkenhead.*"- and you begin to appreciate the size of this monthly gathering on the village streets. Also pigs brought to the fair in carts were often on sale in Allen's yard.

Sometimes dealers set out from the village and met the farmers on their way in. These dealers would sometimes hope to buy the cattle and bring them into the fair to re-sell at a profit. Sometimes the farmer would be happy to sell on the road but, more often than not, such dealers' attentions were unwanted and a nuisance. If such a dealer persisted he was known as a *'blocker'* and often deterred other interested dealers from bidding for a farmer's cattle.

An example of this occurred at the November 1906 fair in Poyntzpass and it led to a court action. At Ballybot Quarter Sessions of January 1907 a cattle dealer named O'Sullivan sued a farmer named James Qua of Bolton, Loughgilly for £25 for assault at Poyntzpass fair on November 3, 1906. However when the events of the day were outlined, O'Sullivan lost his case. The court was told that O'Sullivan had approached James Qua early in the day and bid him for a cow. The bid was well below what Qua had hoped for and he refused it. However O'Sullivan persisted and refused to go away, thus keeping other potential buyers away. Eventually O'Sullivan went to mark the cow with scissors to show he had bought it, despite Qua's demands that he stop. O'Sullivan claimed that he had bought the cow for £15-10s and that when he was marking it, James Qua struck him with an ash plant. The magistrate summing up said that O'Sullivan had acted in *'a most unjustifiable way for he was trying to get the cow at his own price and keep other buyers away'*. He had acted as a *'blocker'*. On the other hand there were times when a farmer having turned down a bid on the road in the expectation of a higher bid, had to settle for less when selling later on in the fair.

In the early 1930's the Department of Agriculture for Northern Ireland commissioned D.A.E. Harkness to carry out a survey into the operation of fairs and markets. His report entitled *'The Marketing of Northern Ireland Agricultural Produce'* was published in 1932. Harkness stressed the importance of the livestock trade to the economy, both as a source of employment and of income. While no exact figure was available, he stated that at least 1,303 men and 6 women were employed fully dealing in cattle or other livestock. 245,087 cattle were exported from Northern Ireland in 1931.

The success of the fair led to many local families becoming involved in different capacities in the livestock trade and the importance of livestock dealing, to the well-being of the village, can not be overestimated. Many families became well-known dealers. The Magills were leading shippers and had a member of the family or representative

permanently based in the north of England. John McComb became buyer for a Mr Barker from the north of England. His son Jack went to England to act as agent. In 1937 John McComb shipped 2,200 cattle to Mr Barker. Joby Canavan was stationed at Northallerton where he acted as agent for Jack Best.



**A typical scene**

There was no industry as such in this area other than farming and dealing and this dealing in livestock was the mainstay of the community. As well as those already mentioned others involved included members of the Magennis, Monaghan, Lennon, Murphy, Little, Gribben, Hudson, Kavanagh, McSherry, Canavan, Rafferty, Gavin, Woods, Griffith, Carson, Allen and Loughlin families. My father, Paddy Watters, was in his youth a drover for the Magill family and often 'walked' cattle and sheep to and from Kilkeel, Dundalk, Keady, Camlough, and Newtownhamilton etc. This method of moving stock became impossible as the volume of transport on the roads increased.

In 1932 there were 88 centres in Northern Ireland where fairs were still in existence, ten of them were in Co Armagh, (there were 23 in 1853). Harkness identified a sort of pyramid which began with the farmer and sometimes saw livestock pass through the hands of small dealers to larger dealers and eventually to the big shippers.

While the fair brought many benefits to local traders, there were negative aspects of it too. Certainly the fair was the occasion of much drinking and many of the cases of drunkenness and anti-social behaviour tried at the monthly Petty Sessions in Poyntzpass, had occurred on the previous fair day. There is no specific mention of Poyntzpass fair in the *Ordnance Survey Memoirs* of 1834, but a general statement regarding fairs in Ballymore Parish notes that, "They lead to much immorality."

From 1914 local Petty Sessions were held on the fair day and this must have added to the sense of occasion and the 'stir' in the village on the first Saturday of the month.

Excessive drinking, which, according to John Quin, was responsible for the transfer of the fair from Acton to Poyntzpass in the first instance, continued to be a feature of the fair day in its new location. Being in the village and with money in his pocket having sold his stock, a farmer was often disposed to

'treat himself' and would readily adjourn to one of the village's numerous public houses. It's said that "When the drink's in, the wit's out!" and it often resulted in a case at the following Petty Sessions when many a shame-faced respectable farmer pleaded guilty to being drunk on the village' street or drunk in charge (of a horse and cart!). There were at least seven licensed public houses in the village at the end of the nineteenth century as well as the occasional 'shibeen'.

The fair was a Mecca for all kinds of others. Hawkers selling all sorts of goods such as buckets, ropes, tools etc. Many set up stalls along the street or sold goods from carts. Three-card-trick men and trick-o-the-loop men and thimble-men as well as street performers - fiddlers or ballad singers - were a regular feature of the fair day. At the September fair in 1909, Thomas Horton, a hawker from Belfast who specialised in 'military stores' was charged with causing an obstruction on the street. It was stated in evidence that the defendant had spread out a tarpaulin on the street and that that the carts had to go a round about to get past it. The defence stated that he was in the process of selling the tarpaulin to Joseph McKnight of Millvale and had only spread it out briefly to see its size. Horton was fined 2s-6d, but he appears to have been a very determined fiery individual and said he would appeal. However he could not do so because the fine was so small so, through his solicitor, he demanded that the fine be increased! This is surely a very rare occurrence. However he was refused.

Musicians often played on the streets during the fair and ballad singers sang and sold the words of the latest ballads to those interested. Sara Savage's poem 'The Fairy Tune', which was published in Volume III of 'Before I forget..', was based on an incident which happened in Lissummon more than 100 years ago and which had its origins in Poyntzpass fair. It tells how two local men heard music as they walked home from a 'ceili house' through the fields late one night and ran, presuming it to be music played by the fairies. When they recounted their experience years later, a neighbour explained what really happened and that it was he who played an air he had heard a gypsy sing at the fair that day. As Sara Savage put it,

*"Now listen while I tell the tale,  
That day when I was in the fair'  
I heard a gypsy sing a song  
That had a sweet and plaintive air.  
At dusk I went behind the forth  
An' fiddled lone beneath the moon,  
No fairy ever did I see  
But by the dawn, I had the tune."*



**The Friday Market**

The fair also attracted a large number of ‘travellers’ or tramps, many of them benign but others less so, occasionally appeared at special sittings of the local petty sessions because of their activities.

Three banks had agencies in the village on the fair day - the Northern Bank, the Munster and Leinster Bank and the Belfast Banking Company. The Northern had their office in what is now the kitchen of Jim O’Loughlin’s house. This agency was the scene of what was described as ‘A daring bank raid’ on the fair day, Saturday, May 6<sup>th</sup> 1922.

The following account of the robbery appeared in the *Newry Reporter* of Tuesday May 9<sup>th</sup> 1922:

*“On Saturday last the village of Poyntzpass, Co. Armagh was the scene of a daring and successful bank raid.*

*“The day was the monthly fair day and Newry representatives of three banks - the Northern, the Belfast and the Munster and Leinster - attended for the convenience of their customers and dealers generally. The fair was in full swing when, about eleven o’clock, a motor-car drove up to the agency of the Northern Bank and two men, from it, carrying automatic revolvers at once entered the premises. They held up the bank’s representative, Mr W.A. McCready, pro-manager of the Newry branch and five customers at the point of the revolvers and quickly appropriated all the cash on which they could lay hand, amounting to between £1,000 and £1,500.*

*“One customer, Robert Henry of Ballinaleck, who had just received £45, was counting his money when the raiders entered was told to ‘leave it there’. He felt he had no alternative but to obey and the money was immediately*

*seized. The chequebook of another customer, who had just written a cheque for a substantial sum was also lifted.*

*“The raiders required Mr McCready and the customers to turn their faces to the wall, then quitted the office and, taking their seats in the waiting car, drove off before any alarm could be given. So quickly was the raid carried out that no one in the vicinity apprehended that anything was amiss. Mr McCready served in the European War as an officer and was for some time a prisoner of war in Germany. “Since closing down of the R.I.C. barracks at Poyntzpass, no police have been stationed in the village but some were present from Tandragee in connection with the fair.”*

At the Ballybot Quarter Sessions, held the following month, the Northern Bank submitted a claim for £1,545 in connection with the raid “as compensation for loss sustained and consequential damage.” The Munster and Leinster Bank’s office was in Willie Bicker’s on the opposite side of the street and the Belfast Banking Company’s offices were next door in the house now occupied by Mrs Teasie Hudson.

The negative aspects of the fair were highlighted by the Commissioners in 1853. In the introduction to their report they wrote that while a few towns had a fair green ‘...in the great majority of cases the fairs are held on the streets of the town or on the high road. The high road, which is repaired at the public expense, is injured; the thoroughfare is rendered impassable for the day; life and property are in danger; there is no order or regularity; horses, cattle, sheep and pigs are mingled together to the great inconvenience of buyers and sellers and the annoyance of the inhabitants.’

Cleaning up after such a huge number of animals must have presented a major headache. In earlier

times, it was apparently left to individual householders to clean up around their own doors as best they could. They did this, using buckets of water carried from the river or from a pump or well. The water and effluent was washed into the village's notoriously sub-standard drains and probably into the well, which supplied the pump in the square.

The local Dispensary doctor, W.R. MacDermott, was constantly complaining about the inadequacies of the drains and of the unhealthy state of the village water supply. He claimed that the standard of health in the village was worse than in the slums of London! At a public meeting held to protest at lack of an adequate sewage scheme, which was reported in the local press in 1908, he gave the death rate in the village as the equivalent of 30 to 40 per thousand, more than twice that of London. He described the sanitary condition of the village as 'abominably bad'. In his book *'The Green Republic'* (written under the pseudonym *A.P.A. O'Gara*) referring to Poyntzpass, (which he called *'Jigglestreet'*) he wrote that people had to cover the gratings with sacking and tea-chest lids 'to alleviate the stench from the drains'. Around 1900 the need for a Poyntzpass sewage scheme was regularly hotly debated. Later on County Council workmen

assisted residents in the clean-up on the evening after the fair.

As well as the problem of the smell, in summer there were occasional swarms of insects. Rev F. W. Johnson, the Rector of Acton Parish (1895-1921) and a leading entomologist of the time, recorded that two village boys brought him seventy samples of *'Dor Beetles'*, which they had found, near the railway station. He wrote in *'The Irish Naturalist'* in July 1896, "I can only suggest as the cause of their assemblage the quantity of cowdung left in that vicinity after the cattle fair."

The fair, and the volume of cattle and sheep to be loaded into wagons, meant that the fair day was a very busy one for the stationmaster and his staff. Extra hands were employed and, to a large extent, the trade arising from the fair meant that the local station was viable. Poyntzpass station had a long siding, and a loading area known as 'the beach'. Wagons were shunted into this siding and livestock for shipping were herded onto the beach and loaded. Cattle were usually transported to Belfast but some were exported via Greenore. Those sent to Belfast were walked from the railway station to the docks, loaded onto the Liverpool boat and brought to



*The Fair in Church Street c. 1905*

Liverpool. There they were unloaded and, in the case of cattle shipped by Magills, railroaded on to Carlisle. From Carlisle the agent sent them on to various markets and dealers all over the north of England.

The dealers, who were at fairs practically every day of the week, were thoroughly professional men. They had to be expert at judging an animal in the midst of a milling throng. Nowadays at cattle sales, all cattle are weighed, but then a dealer had to be a judge of a beast's weight simply by looking at it. Some dealers had built up a good relationship with certain farmers, having bought their livestock before, and a level of trust developed between them.

Harkness obviously admired the shippers. He wrote that they needed, "*... large amounts of skill, judgement and foresight which is only acquired by long experience. It would be hard to visualise a more strenuous life, or one more likely to supply worries and disappointments. Yet, taken as a whole these men are, to all appearances, a care-free lot, having a cheery word and a hearty handshake for everyone whom they meet in the course of their business.*"

But not all dealers were fair and honourable. Literature has many examples of the simple countryman being outwitted by a trickster he meets in the fair. Jack (*'Jack and the Beanstalk'*) or Moses Primrose (*'The Vicar of Wakefield'*) are two examples of simple country-folk who are duped when sent to sell the family's only cow. There were many ploys for duping the unwary. *'The dalin' men from Crossmaglen put whiskey in me tay!*' There are many anecdotes about farmers being tricked by unscrupulous dealers. I was told of one instance of a farmer from Monclone having sold his pig and being treated in the local pub was later that day sold back his own pig at a profit to the dealer.

Following the failure of the market set up by Alexander Stewart another attempt to establish a market in Poyntzpass was made almost exactly one hundred years later. Bassett's *'Book of Armagh'* (1888) notes that, *'...there is a good fair and a market, established over a year, is held every Friday for fowl, butter and eggs'*. This weekly market never grew to any great size but was successful enough in that it continued down to around the end of the Great War.

The local public houses were not the only businesses to benefit from the fair. Many farmers used the occasion to buy provisions and other items while they were in the village and occasionally a farmer's wife accompanied her husband if he came in his horse and cart. More often a farmer was given a shopping list. Although Poyntzpass fair was still sizeable into the 1930's, Harkness in his report noted that since the

Great War the traditional fairs had begun to lose their importance. There were several reasons for this. The auctioning of cattle in sale yards was growing in popularity and more often dealers were buying cattle and sheep directly from farmers on their farms. The farmer was more confident in his farmyard and felt that in the auction situation he was more likely to get a fair price for his stock. In the traditional fair the farmer was at a disadvantage. He was out of his natural environment to some extent in the noisy bustle of the fair and when bargaining with the big dealers he was uneasy and unsure. He was hesitant and often took a long time to decide. Harkness identified this as a major fault in the system. It was much the same situation as a motorist today is in when he goes to change his car every four or five years and meets the slick salesman who spends all day every day buying and selling motorcars.

The outbreak of the World War II dealt a severe blow to the traditional fair. Food rationing was introduced and the government took control of the purchase of all fat cattle. Grading by Ministry of Agriculture vets was introduced and Poyntzpass became a Grading Centre. Cattle and sheep were weighed on the railway company's weighbridge at the station and standard prices were paid for the various grades. Very large numbers of cattle and sheep were brought for grading and while dealing in store cattle continued on the village streets, by the mid-1950's the fair had simply dwindled away. Occasionally too, horses were sold at the fair. James Sinton, the well-known horse dealer from Scarva, recorded in his diary that at the Poyntzpass the May fair in 1953, bought three horses. He bought three more at the June fair that year. The opening of a livestock saleyard in Newry proved to be the final straw. I have not been able to establish a date for the last fair in Poyntzpass. The best estimate is around 1955.

However this did not mean that the involvement of Poyntzpass with the livestock industry ended for, following the phasing out grading, Poyntzpass Livestock Saleyard was established and weekly sales of cattle, sheep and pigs continued for nearly forty years. While the cattle sales never reached the proportions of the fair they continued successfully enough until the outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in 2001 caused all sale yards to close. The cattle sales in Poyntzpass didn't recommence when the emergency was over but the sales of sheep and pigs continued, -the Saturday pig sale being the last in Northern Ireland. Sadly, in June 2004 this remaining link with livestock sales ended when the weekly pig sale was held for the last time.