

Dealing Men and Livestock Marts

BY THOMAS McVEIGH



Poyntzpass Fair Day 1905

Many towns and villages in Northern Ireland had links to the linen industry and developed because of the prosperity and employment that it provided. Poyntzpass, however, was an exception, for while local farmers grew flax from time to time, it was the livestock trade from which many families derived employment and income. The origin of this involvement in buying and selling livestock was undoubtedly the big monthly fair which was held on the village streets for over 150 years. At a traditional monthly fair in Poyntzpass, say around 1905, often well over a thousand cattle, and many sheep too, would have been bought and sold on the village streets on the first Saturday of the month. These traditional fairs were the setting for contests between farmers and dealers, where the farmer was hoping to get as much as he could for his livestock and the dealer was determined to pay as little as possible. It was a fascinating encounter with only one winner, usually the dealer. This ancient way of doing business only came to an end in the 1950's with the advent of the livestock 'marts'.

I hope to explain the importance of these livestock marts, particularly to Poyntzpass and the surrounding areas. With the advent of the marts the auctioneer became the middle man and claimed to win a fairer price for the farmer, because the farmer now had his animals weighed. During WWII rationing was introduced in January 1940 and didn't end till July 1954. This coincided with a promise from the government to be self-sufficient in food and therefore subsidies were introduced to supplement the farmer's income. In selected livestock marts, officials from the Ministry of Agriculture graded stock to ensure they were of a certain standard and when the animals were shown in the ring their ears were punched and farmers received their subsidy in due course. There were many marts in each area, such as Poyntzpass, Keady, Armagh where only store cattle - animals that go on for further fattening - were sold

To give you an idea of the high concentration of dealers in livestock, of one kind or another, in

THE MARKET DEALERS



Lewis Smart



John Trainor



Paddy Lennon



Seamus Magill



Frank Magill



*"Houl out your hand..."
Johnny Carson sealing a deal at Hilltown Fair*



*Harold Jenkins and
Norman Whitten*



Art Magennis



Paddy McDonnell



Tom Loughlin



Pat Loughlin



Frank Murphy



Tommy McVeigh



Joe McVeigh



Ronnie Hall



Jim Pat McSherry



Five dealing men: Johnny Carson, Frank Lennon, Jimmy Magill, Dessie Canavan and Dan Magill

Poyntzpass, there were approximately twenty-five within a few streets: namely, John Trainor, Seamus and Frank Magill; John McComb and sons, Jim, Jack and Tommy; Tom Loughlin; Johnny Carson, Frank Murphy; Tommy McVeigh and his brother Joe; Ronnie Hall; Jim Pat McSherry; Joe Monaghan; Joe Lennon and his three sons Frank, Paddy and Joe; James Magill and his sons Eamon, Jimmy and Dan; Joe (Joby) Canavan based largely in England and one of the leading cattle dealers in the country, his brother Mick and his two sons, Dessie and Tom; Pat and Art Magennis; Charlie Loughlin and his sons Pat and Kevin. Other dealers on the outskirts of the village were Sam Foster, Geordie Woods and George Porter from Jerretzpass and Paddy McDonnell from Tandragee.



'The Likely Lads:' Tommy McVeigh, Tommy John McSherry, Jim Lennon, Terry Murray, Mick Gribben, Tom Burns and Pat Campbell.

Johnny Carson was a famous sheep dealer. He dealt far and wide, from Kilkeel and Hilltown to Donegal. He would have brought sheep home from there. Incidentally, a man called John McAloon was reported to have driven two hundred sheep at a time the whole way from Donegal to Poyntzpass. Johnny, a character on the street, never called me by my first name - it was always "Bully man!" What that meant I never knew. He would give you the odd clip in the ear going past as well. Frank Lennon was a calf dealer and a dealer in smaller stock. Jimmy and Dan Magill, along with Eamon

Magill attended fairs all over Ireland and shipped a lot of cattle to England. Dessie Canavan started with sheep dealing but really was a cattle dealer, along with his brother Tom.

John McComb was a big cattle-dealer as were his sons Jim, Jack and Tommy, They dealt all over the South of Ireland. We lived next door to Jack who was a sharp operator, a great judge of livestock and a quick, quick wit. Tommy lived in Meeting Street at the end of the Back Lane. Dealing men had what was like a uniform with their canes in their hands, their overcoats and their yellow dealing boots, that was the great trademark of all them men.

Another pair of dealing brothers were Pat and Art Magennis. Pat lived down the Canal Bank and Art in the Far Pass.

Seamus Magill and his brother Frank Magill were two very well-known pig dealers. John Trainor was a fowl dealer - I distinctly remember John taking the last hens my mother had, in his wee van to McConvilles in Banbridge. Lewis Smart - did a bit of calf dealing.

Let us not forget the larger than life characters who were the drovers. These men were entirely responsible for the movement of the stock within the marts. They differed entirely from the drovers in the fair days of earlier times who worked for the cattle dealers and would have 'walked' to or from various fairs or have taken cattle to the train stations.

Mick Gribben was a larger-than-life character and many locals tell great stories about him that could go on for hours. He worked behind the weigh-bridge in Armagh Mart. Here are a couple of stories I was told about Mick: One particularly wet day, dreadful bad day with a huge show of cattle in Armagh. Things weren't going Mick's way, every way but the right way, and this big bullock, near the end of the sale was giving him a lot of trouble. Well Mick finally got the bullock on to the weighbridge and the gate closed. When he turned round to get another bullock and a reverend gentleman leaned over and said, "My dear man, you should be thinking about your life in the next world!" Mick said, "Your Reverence, do you not think I have enough trouble in this world at the minute without thinking about the next one.?" Another day, another huge sale in Armagh, Mick in full regalia, big long blue coat, the cap half over his eyes, the boots and the cigarette, the cigarette was never out of his mouth and the stick in the hand. He was pressured by a man who needed or wanted to jump the queue. This farmer lobbied Mick very hard. Was there any chance he could get home a bit quicker and could he advance his cattle down the queue a wee bit? Mick eventually gave in and the man pressed something into Mick's pocket. The animals were duly sold, the farmer went off and Mick was very busy for the next couple of hours. Finally he got round to seeing what he'd got in his pocket - out came two apples. I leave you to imagine Mick's words on seeing this - enough to say they were short and colourful.

THE MARKET DEALERS



Joe Monaghan



Frank Lennon



James and sons Dan, Eamonn and Jimmy Magill



Sam Foster



Geordie Woods



John and sons Jim, Tommy and Jack McComb



George Porter



Pat Magennis



Mick and sons Tom and Dessie Canavan

THE DROVERS



Henry Ruddy



Mick Gribbon



Coleman Murphy



Malachy Lennon



Dominic Trainor



Brendan Trainor



Dee Allen



Tommy Lennon

FAT STOCK GUARANTEE MARKETING SCHEME
Opening Fat Stock Sale in Armagh
FOR CATTLE FIRST SALE
FRIDAY, 2nd JULY, 1954
 and each Friday Following
FOR SHEEP FIRST SALE
SATURDAY, 3rd JULY, 1954
 and each Saturday Following

Producers Please Note :
 Grading Commences at 8 o'clock a.m. Sale Commences at 9.30 a.m.
 All entries must be received at least 10 days prior to date of sale. Late entries cannot be accepted. (Ministry Decision).
 We arrange all shipping of Cattle for Cross-Channel Buyers and have our Agents at the ports of Belfast and Londonderry.
 Personal Contact has been made with Cross-Channel Buyers and Cattle Buying is Assured.
 Farmers and Graziers are offered the Company's best attention.
 Entry forms can be obtained from the following :

R. F. FORBES, ENGLISH STREET, ARMAGH	Phone Armagh 40
H. BELLA, Loughgall.	C. AVENEILL, Killylea.
A. J. ROBINSON, Caledon.	F. W. H. MENARCY, Keady.
H. W. STARR & SON, Newtownhamilton	J. McNALLY, Richhill.
R. GILMOUR, Market Hill.	JOHN WEST, Tynan.
JOSHUA WHITE, Moy.	J. BROWN, Benbulbin.
SCOTT BROS., Hamiltonshawn.	E. HUGHES, Middletown.
F. ROLSTON, Benbulbin.	

also from our Head Office :
 54 BRIDGE STREET, PORTADOWN. Phone Portadown 3236

ULSTER FARMERS' MART. CO. LTD.

This is the advertisement for the opening at Armagh Livestock Sales from July 1954. That was about the time when a lot of the marts started, some began a bit earlier. You can see the name of the auctioneers. They made big play of the fact that they used the port in Newry and had good contact with the South Down Auctions. The port of Newry would have played a big part in those days. Armagh was one of the biggest beef sales in Northern Ireland and continued for many years.

There were dealing men and there were drovers. Another very important component of the mart scene were auctioneers and Poyntzpass had some very important auctioneers who played a major role in the mart scene as well as moving a lot of stuff themselves. Auctioneers could make or break a sale yard; they were the men who had to keep the sale going. George Bryson, along with a few other men, started up some local marts. In the case of Newry he joined up with Eamon Magill, Trevor Gibney, William Baird and Mick Cunningham.

The Newry Mart started in the early '50s on Patrick Street. Known as South Down Auctions it was a very successful sale with two rings going on one day; lambs in one, beef in the other. The Port of Newry was used very successfully at that time. Edwin Bryson remembers that after the sale cattle would have been driven through the streets of Newry to the boat to England for various destinations there. Again a lot of local men were involved in Newry mart; Malachy and Tommy Lennon and their brother Aidan— they were there as drovers. A regular drover at local marts was Newry-man Henry Ruddy. For years he was at the local pig sale every Saturday.

George Bryson, as well as being involved in Newry mart, was involved in Banbridge too. Shooter and Boyce started it off and George became involved as a Director. Later he took it on, on his own. That mart

was where the Iveagh Cinema is today and later on it moved to the Lurgan Road. On Tuesdays there was a very successful sheep sale and a beef sale was on Thursday. Pigs were sold as well but, because of the Brysons involvement with horses, they had the unique feature of a horse sale, reasonably frequently, more so when they moved out to the Lurgan Road.

The Byrne brothers were born in Church Street Poyntzpass in the house that is now the Credit Union



Eamon Magill at Edenderry Mart, Co. Offaly with three Byrne brothers.

office and they all became very successful dealers. Eamon Magill played a major role in Newry Mart and along with George Bryson and Mick Cunningham shared auctioneering duties. Each of these men had his own distinct style: if you didn't sell a bullock in the ring Don Best would have said "N.S." (No Sale) but Mick Cunningham would have said "Get it Out" – get it out of here. He didn't want to know and there were no second chances with Mick.

Eamon Magill and his two brothers would have shipped cattle, a trade begun by their father James Magill. Jack Best and John McComb would have as well, predominantly to the north of England and to Hexham especially.



William Whitelaw

This is a picture of William Whitelaw, the former Home Secretary and later Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, looking at cattle from Northern Ireland and predominantly from this area, in the pens. Eamon Magill would have been at most of the Hexham

THE MARKET FOUNDERS AND AUCTIONEERS



Billy Corbett -



Wilfie McFadden -



Jimmy Johnson



George Bryson



George Clegg



Henry Clarke -



Cecil Allen



Johnny Clarke



Don Best

THE DRIVERS



Pat Turley



Norman Emerson with Rue Bickerstaff's Lorry



Ernie Troughton



Donal Trainor



Billy Thomas



Colman Trainor



Raymond Cowan



James Convery



Eamonn McKee



Artie O'Hare

sales. In the early days he went by boat but latterly by plane. Hexham Mart is still going strong; the most recent sale is advertised as having 1,100 cattle going through. Joby Canavan who was in partnership with Jack Best, was based in Northallerton in Yorkshire, a major centre of the livestock trade, and for many years represented the interests of several other local shippers there.

Jimmy Johnson was a founding owner of the Ulster Farmer's Mart (UFM) and opened his first mart in Enniskillen in 1951. Over time these became the largest group of marts in Northern Ireland and indeed he was very forward thinking. When he set up a mart he used local men to manage it and/or to be the auctioneers, e.g. Jim Lennon in Portadown. Don Best played a major role in the UFM. He began auctioneering with them in 1955 and they opened a lot more marts. In the early 1960s Jimmy Johnson became ill and died in 1963 and Don became Director. For the next two decades he played a major role in the UFM. The headquarters was in Enniskillen and they had marts in Armagh, Lurgan, Portadown, Limavady, Robson's in Stewart St. Belfast and R.J. Allam's in Oxford St on the site where the Waterfront Hall now is.

George Bryson, Don Best, Eamon Magill were at the top of their game and were among the top auctioneers in Northern Ireland. Don Best would auction at Armagh, a huge mart sale. Cattle would arrive, be penned up, marked and labelled. Mick Gribben was behind the weighbridge and put the cattle on the 'bridge while Colman Murphy did the actual weighing. These two had to please the farmers, the dealers and Don Best the auctioneer who didn't want to take much time weighing the animals. You couldn't please the farmer, the dealer and the auctioneer all at the same time – a difficult position.

Don Best didn't take too long selling an animal. Two minutes would have been easy selling for him. If trade was good he could sometimes sell three cattle in a minute. Dominic Trainor played a vital role in Armagh mart. He had a very tough job as clipper, probably the top clipper in Northern Ireland. When the hammer went down and the cattle sold each one had to have its unique clipping and some dealers had two, three or four accounts. Dominic held all this information in his head; there were no charts, you couldn't go back and say, "Don, what was that bullock you sold two minutes ago?" You'd have known the answer you'd have got.

Think of that scene, full of Poyntzpass men and indeed the clerks in the box could have been Frank Watters and Gabriel McDonnell. Poyntzpass men controlled most of Armagh mart and several other marts as well. It wouldn't have been unknown for 1000 to 1200 cattle with 1500 at the height of autumn, selling in Armagh. It had a sheep sale on Saturdays.

Robsons and Allams were in Belfast. Robsons were Monday for lambs and Tuesdays for cattle. I went as a youngster in the 1950s to the big city of Belfast, to this strange place and you walked in and there were half your neighbours from Poyntzpass. You wondered was

Telephone—POYNTZPASS 254.

POYNTZPASS LIVESTOCK SALES LTD.

Cattle Sold Alive by Auction

..... 25-9-1968

NAME: Mr. *James Loy*

ADDRESS: *Aughanloughan, Poyntzpass*

TERMS ARE STRICTLY CASH.

Original bill head from sales

there anybody at all there from Belfast? Allams had its own direct tunnel down to the port in Belfast so when cattle were sold you walked them through it. However, Robsons was the main mart at the time. Portadown and Lurgan were smaller marts. Limavady had a very important mart with a huge sheep sale and they did cattle as well.

As a small boy you noticed that cattle were sold singly but sheep in multiples. Twelve was what a weighbridge held around here but once you went to Omagh, Strabane, Limavady the bridges were bigger and held 45 -50 lambs so a lorry load would be three weighbridges. Here it would have taken ten weighbridges with 100 – 120 sheep to fill a lorry.

Jimmy Johnson's sons both followed their father's footsteps. Today Terry is still auctioneering in Enniskillen and Stewart gives the Mart Report on early morning Radio Ulster. Sam Foster was a tremendous character; he was an auctioneer who sold for most of the marts and for the Brysons as well. Unlike the other auctioneers mentioned here, Sam took things slowly when selling. He talked with his arms and fingers and explained everything in a long slow way, indeed you could have put the kettle on and he'd still be selling the same animal. Sam was a great all-rounder; he threshed corn, sold, bought and clipped sheep, was a great sheepdog trials man.



Railway St. Poyntzpass sale yard in the 1960s

Here is a picture of Railway St. Poyntzpass sale yard in the 1960s. Billy Corbett and Wilfie McFadden from Loughbrickland opened it in 1961/62. Wilfie did the auctioneering. The cattle sale was on Wednesday and pigs on Saturday which built up to be a very large pig sale but by 1967 it had run into trouble and closed. Don Best, Henry and Johnny Clarke and Cecil Allan took it on as Directors and the sale yard reopened again in February 1968. It was such a big success that they had to build an extension to the pig house. We need to remember that at the time, most farmers kept a variety of livestock: hens, a few sheep, some amount of pigs with two or three litters per year as well as cattle. Saturdays suited them to show. The pig sale took in a wide, wide area from Markethill to Rathfriland to Crossmaglen and Forkhill and beyond. It caused gridlock in the streets of Poyntzpass on Saturdays (hard to believe) and the queues were down to the outskirts of each street. In a famous incident one Saturday total gridlock happened so Mickey Waddell came out of the chemist's shop to direct traffic. Inevitably a few men were going the wrong road wanting to jump the queue. Mickey soon sorted them out. In the 1990s Poyntzpass also had night-time sheep sales.



**Jean Clarke
and Lottie McComb**

Jean Clarke and Lottie McComb were the clerks at Poyntzpass mart for many years. Clerks had no calculators and the figures had to be right at the end of each day with farmers going home with the right documentation as well. All hell would have broken out had any of that been wrong. These ladies did tremendous work.

Unlike fair days, marts needed lorries to move the stock. Many private lorry men started up and as youngsters instead of being train spotters we became 'lorry spotters'. Artie O'Hare, Pat Turley and James Convery were among the first. Tom Wait had a large group of lorries. Ernie

Troughton, Rue Bickerstaff, Dinny Murtagh and Raymond Cowan from Dromantine, each had a lorry. Two others were Billy Thomas from Drumbanagher and Eamon McKee who drove for Billy in the early days. It was tough being a lorry driver in the 1950s and 60s. The roads were narrow, rough and twisty. Trips to Dublin could have taken many hours what with customs and every small village with one winding main street. Large lorries held 120 sheep, smaller would take 100. Today triple deckers take 150 and a trip to Dublin takes 1½ hours; cattle likewise Billy Thomas had a Thames lorry and drew for Eamon Magill. My father Thomas McVeigh along with Artie and James O'Hare

had two lorries. With a box over the cab a lorry could hold 10 – 12 extra lambs. No power steering made that hard work. They moved decks out to transport cattle. Not many lorry drivers liked pigs; they were severe on wooden bodies and a harder animal to draw.

Some transporters were Robbie John Lutton, Jackie



Ringside viewers at the Poyntzpass pig market

Grant who lived in last house in Potstick Row and drew many sheep, Alan Davidson who had the first aluminium trailer in Ireland and became a very successful transport businessman, Donal Trainor (brother Colman too), who was on the mart scene from the late 1960s, built up a large haulage business and his son Declan today is still drawing livestock to the Continent, to Spain and to Italy with a modern fleet of lorries.

The last sale in Poyntzpass was in 2005; it was the last pig sale in Northern Ireland. Frank Magill and Dinny Lennon were there at the beginning and were there at the end 43 years later.



Poyntzpass pig sale, which was the last pig sale in Northern Ireland, closed in 2005