MARKET HOUSES IN CO ARMAGH

BY BRIAN MCELHERRON

The Main Guard, Clonmel

Markets have existed since the Neolithic farmers discovered that they could swap a surplus of edible crops for a surplus of meat or milk. However buildings dedicated to market trade did not arrive until much more recent times.

There are still at least 160 existing market houses in Ireland, but about 50 more which appear on OS maps from the 19th century have since disappeared. The designs of these markets houses were similar in many ways and their high, wide arched-entrances, which allowed the passage of farmers' carts, help us to identify them. However, while similar in function, only 3 of the 160 have identical designs.

There are several market houses known to have had their origins in the seventeenth century. One such is the elaborate building in Clonmel, Co Tipperary known as the 'Main Guard', but it was during the 18th century that many market houses were built, sometimes by town councils but more often by local landlords. Many of them were demolished and replaced by new buildings in the following century.

The Market House, Newtownards

In the latter years of the 18th century some notable market houses were built and several good examples still exist. In 1788 the old market house in Newtownards, Co Down was described as *'a handsome structure with a cupola at the west end with a public clock'*. It stood close to the market cross, which still exists today. This very elaborate structure was designed by Fernando Stratford and completed in 1771. It consists of a large single-bay central section flanked by two long lower two-storey wings each of five bays. The central section has a large lower arch, above which is a Venetian window with Doric pilasters. It is topped by a pediment with a clock. On the roof is a square tower topped by an octagonal cupola with Ionic columns. The building occupies almost the whole length of the north side of Conway Square.

Hillsborough Market House

Another 18th century example is Hillsborough Market House which stands in the middle of the market square in front of Hillsborough Castle. It was built about 1790 and consists mainly of a single-storey building nine bays long and five bays deep. While the central portion was the market house, one section of the building housed the town courthouse while another contained the Downshire estate office.

Market houses continued to be built in the 19th century. About 30 were built in Ulster alone. Most of these are small two-storey buildings with three or four bays. They were built mainly between 1830 and 1860.

In the second half of the 19th century some notable large covered markets were built, including the English Market in Cork built in 1860. The entrance on Princes Street was designed by Sir John Benson (1812 – 1874). Within the building there are many shops on several levels. All of them are devoted to food. The building was seriously damaged by fire in 1980 but the interior has now been largely reconstructed. During her visit to the Republic of Ireland in 2011, Queen Elizabeth visited the English Market.

The structures associated with marketing in County Armagh have been greatly reduced over the years.

Armagh Market House is a very fine building which stands in the middle of the market square. An inscription below the cornice indicates that the building dates from 1815 but it may not have been completed until about 1819. The architect is unknown. However the style of building suggests that it may have been Thomas Duff (1792 – 1848) or Francis Johnston (1760 - 1829). Duff designed the courthouses at Newry and Markethill and at least two market houses (Edenderry, Co Offaly and Hilltown, Co Down). Among the many fine buildings designed by Johnston are the courthouse in Armagh, the Bank of Ireland Trevor Hill, Newry and the General Post Office in Dublin.

The Armagh market house was originally two storeys high and five bays long. There was an arcade of five arches in the lower storey. In 1913 the roof was raised and a third storey added. The building was used as a technical school, although the lower storey continued to be used as a grain store until the Second World War.

Interior of the Corn Market

The **Corn Market** in Dawson Street was built in 1827. It is a nine-bay single-storey building with a central

square tower. At either end is a pedimented pavilion linked to the tower by long walls each of which has three recessed arches. Each of the pavilions has an archway. There is a copper dome with a weathervane. According to the early OS Map the building was used as a shambles or slaughterhouse. The large yard at the rear has been used as an open market. The building is again being used as a covered market. The interior is divided into bays with arches supported by cast iron pillars.

Gateway of the White Linen Hall, Newry

The White Linen Hall in Newry was built about 1783 to promote the direct export, from Counties Down and Armagh, of linen products manufactured there and to bypass the services of dealers in Dublin. By that time the large linen hall in Dublin had been extended and it was hoped that some of the trade would be devolved on Newry with its inland canal. However the large linen hall in Belfast was built about the same time and handled most of the trade in the north of the country. At this time weaving was still a cottage industry and the linen halls were adequate to handle the volume of linen. Early in the next century wet spinning was invented and spinning mills began to be built. The centre of the linen trade moved northwards and Belfast handled most of the trade. The term 'Belfast Linen' came to mean any linen from the north as well as some other parts of Ireland. Newry Linen Hall was sold early in the 19th century to the British Army as a barracks. In the 20th century it was bought by the local council for private housing. The only remaining original feature is the gateway. On the piers are carvings of a spinning wheel and a crowned harp.

Loughgall Market House was built in 1746. It is a simple four-bay two-storey structure. The upper storey was used as a court room. Loughgall had a market and four fairs, but by 1835 these had been discontinued and the market house was unused by 1846. There are four large carriage entrances at the ground floor. They are now glazed and protected by wooden doors. Access to the upper level is via an external ramp.

Loughgall Market House

The original market house in **Markethill** appears to have been a two-storey structure. It now has an extra storey with a three-bay facade. The central bay breaks forward and has a pediment.

Markethill Market House

The circular opening which held the clock is now blocked. The building had a central carriage entrance which can still be seen today. It was flanked by two round-headed windows, which are now masked by awnings. The creation of a third storey was achieved by the insertion of a mezzanine floor. The height of the building does not appear to have been changed.

Another half-dozen buildings are known to have existed but only small traces of some of them remain. There is some confusion as to the nature of the market house in **Richhill**. According to the Ordnance Survey Memoir of 1838 it was *"a hexagonal building, with each side 9ft long, not used since 1826"*. Another memoir of 1835 describes it as *'a plain neat building but in a rapid state of decay'*. The hexagonal building may have been a shelter possibly associated with a weighbridge. A similar building still exists in Scariff, Co Clare. It is an irregular pentagon. The larger building was built in 1753. Its original function may have been a market house but it

was later used as a session-house before being converted into a chapel-of-ease in 1868. It still stands at the edge of the square.

The OS Map of the 1830s shows **Lurgan Market House** in the middle of the main street, a short distance south-east of the church. According to the survey it measured 65ft by 27.5ft. The builder and time of construction are not known. Just beside the church is a linen hall, only one of many such structures found throughout Ireland. An earlier market house was burned down in 1776. It is said to have belonged to the previous century. The latest market house seems to have been demolished in the mid- 1880s as part of a road widening scheme. Photographs of the area dating from the early 20th century show a small polygonal building with open sides near the south end of Market Street. It may have had a similar function as the small market house in Richhill. One of the photos shows the balance beam. It stood near the southern end of the street.

The first OS Map of **Newtownhamilton** (1830s) shows the New Market House at the northern extreme of the village at the edge of the market square. It also shows a long rectangular building centrally placed in the town square, a short distance to the south of the market square. This is possibly the Old Market House. Both buildings have been demolished.

Mention is made in the Survey of a market house in **Forkhill**. It is described as 'a small wretched building' constructed c1800 at the expense of Susannah Barton. It measured 40ft by 21ft. There is now no trace and it does not appear on the 1830s OS map.

The earliest market house in **Crossmaglen** was built before the 1830s and may have been the rectangular building near the north edge of the square shown on the first OS Map. It was replaced about 1865 by a large two-storey, five-bay building built by stone masons Hearty and Gregory for the local landlord, Thomas P. Ball. As with many of such buildings the upper storey housed the court-house and the market house was on the ground floor. It had three large entrance archways flanked by two small rectangular doors. In later life the upper level

housed a cinema. The building was almost totally destroyed by fire in the 1980s. It was eventually decided that it would be replaced by a community centre and library on the site. The lower half of the entrance façade was retained as a link to the original building. The new building was opened in 1984.

The market house in **Keady** was built on the site of a small court house in 1870. The architect was Fitzgibbon Louch (1826 – 1911) and the contractor was John Cullen. It was a two-storey building with two arches at the ground floor and four windows at the upper floor. At the corner was a round tower topped by louvered turret and a weather vane. All the window and door openings were capped by polychrome brick. The Gothic monument in the square opposite the market house was designed by Louch in 1872. The market building was destroyed by a bomb in 1970.

Middletown Market House

The inscription on a plaque on **Middletown Market House** indicates that it was built by the '*Trustees of Bishop Sternes's Charities in 1829*'. It is a two-storey four-bay structure with the two outer bays breaking forward. For many years this building was in a sorry state. The archways were blocked and the building was partly overgrown with ivy. It has recently undergone extensive renovation and is now in a presentable, though far from original, condition.