



## THE MARKETS

The earliest markets in Limerick of which we have a record were situated 'not far from John's gate.' We know that this was in the area between the Good Shepherd Laundry and Sarsfield Avenue, because the gallows for public executions was set up on the high ground on the site near the present laundry premises. All through the mediaeval period public executions were carried out here, and since these spectacles were always a feature of market places, the Limerick market was no exception, the authorities liked a large gallery. It was at the Limerick market place that Sir John Bourke was executed in 1607, and the bishop of Emly, Terence Albert O'Brien in 1651.

In 1697, after the dismantling of Thom Core castle at the junction of Broad Street, John Street and Mungret Street, the general market was moved to the site and was in operation there for more than 130 years. The Gallows did not go with it. At that time it was moved to the High ground at Singland, overlooking the city. The place, now the site of a waterworks, is still known as Gallows Green.

In the 1830's the market was opened at the other end of Mungret Street where it has survived to the present day. At that time specialised markets were still popular, though the old meat market which had been so long a feature in the Englishtown (This was situated between Sheep Street and Courthouse Lane) was moved to Ellen Street. This was known as the "New Town Meat Market."

A cabbage market was set up close to the old market in John Street, - we still have a street known as the 'Cabbage Market.'

The market cross, which was a familiar landmark in John Street for more than two hundred years was removed and destroyed in the 1860's.

From an earlier period the fish market was established on George's Quay, a little upstream of the present Mathew bridge. This was known for many years as 'Moll Darby's', after a woman of that name who controlled the market for the best part of a lifetime.

A few years after the establishment of the corn market the potatoe market was opened in Merchant's Quay, on the site of the mediaeval harbour which had been filled in, mainly from ballast from vessels arriving at the port. At the time the following legend appeared on a tablet close to the bridge:

A.D. 1843.

This market was erected by



the reformed Corporation,  
during the mayoralty of  
the Right Worshipful  
Martin Honan  
in the second year of his office.

This was a busy place for nearly a hundred years. Potatoes were brought long distances on horse carts, and great quantities were brought upstream from places along the Shannon estuary; some from as far away as Kilrush. This market ceased in the 1940's

Owing to the narrow and congested approaches to the corn market a decision was taken by the market trustees to seek a more commodious venue, and in the late 1860's a spacious site was found in Ramper's Road (now Cathedral Place). Here the corn market, butter market and Pig market were set up in grand style.

After the corn market - which, of course, catered for all cereals and hay and straw - had been removed from its old site at Mungret Gate, and set up in the fine open space at the west side of the cathedral, the whole area smelt of new-mown hay the whole year round. This was much appreciated by the local people, who were thus enabled to tolerate the less prepossessing odours from the pig market a little further up the street.

These markets have long ceased operations, but there are many who remember the hay carts, which were an unforgettable feature of the place. Only the heads of the poor overburdened beasts could be seen as they drew the heavy and cumbersome loads to and from the market. Straw was brought in and sold in the same manner.

The corn trade was all but wiped out at the time of the transfer of the market to Cathedral Place, but the hay and straw trade continued to prosper for many years. These commodities were purchased in great quantities by the hundreds of horse and donkey owners in and about the city, and also by the very poor, who could afford no better than straw bedding. A number of "Hay and Straw" stores served as retail outlets.

The adjoining butter market was also a busy and colourful place. Butter was sold in the "lump", or in firkins - small wooden hooped casks - and was brought to market on carts of every description from the surrounding countryside. It was judged by taste and consistency of colour; and the numerous cow hairs, and other flotsam that often showed up against the bright creamy background were accepted as if the adulteration was commonplace and a part of the bargain.

A Mrs. Burke, who kept a public house cum grocery store



opposite St. John's presbytery gate (now the "Sarsfield Arms") was known as "Taste Me Butter," from her custom of inviting prospective buyers to sample her wares. This colourful name has stuck to the old pub even up to the present time. In those days butter was not of a uniform standard quality but varied greatly according of the expertise of the maker.

The butter market was formerly located in Ellen Street, adjoining the Linen Hall in Carr Street. The fine market building with its splendid arcade has been recently opened up to view ( I hope that this is not preparatory to its destruction).

A carnival atmosphere pervaded the adjoining pig market on market days. On arrival, horses and donkeys were untackled and allowed to rest after their journeys; while the owners stood by their creels until the grunting and squealing occupants found new owners. Groups of schoolboys, on their way home from the nearby Christian Brothers' school, were often to be seen enjoying the lively jargon of the buyers and sellers, as they excitedly waited for the dramatic clinching of the bargain with the traditional spit and slap on the palm.

Of the Cathedral markets the butter market was the first to go. Creamery butter in attractive 1lb. packs took over from the firkins. However butter was still being brought to the old market in Mungret Street ut to the fifties. This was known as 'country butter', and was always in demand.

The hay market died in the thiries, when the demand for the commodity almost ceased as the city was well on the way to becoming motorised.

The pig market went out long before the demise of the bacon factories, and the market place became the calf market; this in turn was superseded by the marts.

The old pig market is now the headquarters of the fire service.

#### THE MARKETS TO-DAY

Tradition dies hard, the old market at Mungret Street is still going strong: even when the old premises were closed for two years recently for reconstruction that was never carried out, the market was carried on in the streets outside. The modern butcher shops have superseded the old meat markets.

The recently renovated potatoe market has so far been a failure. People have refused to use it as a market.



## THE HIRING FAIRS

Another feature of the old markets was the hiring fair. This fair in Limerick took place at the old market in John Street, and continued long after the market was removed, indeed it operated there into the 1920's, when it was moved to Ball's bridge. At these places farmers hired suitable hands, principally at ploughing and harvest times. These poor fellows, with the tools of their trade, spades, forks, scythes etc., their only possessions, represented the large section of the peasantry that emerged from the turmoil of the land war with none of the laurels. They were still subjugated by a tyranny no less oppressive than that endured under the landlord system. By and large the Irish farmer regarded the day labourer as a 'man of straw', and the social cleavage that existed between both was no less marked or unjust than that which existed between black and white in the United States.

The hiring fair died from a condition that, happily, left the labourer less dependent on the farmer and the farmer less dependent on the labourer. The fair is gone and the memory only recalls the sad situation of the fine young men who laboured for pence in the greenery of their own country, a yard of which they could never call their own.