

VCH SHROPSHIRE

Newport

Town Hall, Market Hall and Smithfield

This text has been prepared for VCH Shropshire by Wendy Horton and Professor Richard Hoyle. It is made available to readers in advance of its full publication. We welcome suggestions for improvement, references and, of course, we invite readers to point out errors.

The history of the Newport Market and the Newport Fairs are treated in separate texts by Richard Hoyle.

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Town Hall, Market Hall and Smithfield

The new market complex was constructed in 1859-60 to the design of John Cobb Jun. of Newport.¹ It was aligned with existing buildings along the east side of St Mary's Street but also occupied a prominent position on the corner with Stafford Street (which was widened as part of the overall project). The 2-storey Italianate-style town hall is of painted brick with pronounced stone dressings including quoins, window surrounds, string courses and balustraded parapets, the latter obscuring a hipped roof. Decoration is more exaggerated higher up, making the building more conspicuous. The six-bay symmetrical front has slightly projecting outer bays with ornate triangular pediments. Originally, the four inner bays included two round-arched doorways with a pair of windows between, and the outer bays each had a window under a lintel on scrolled brackets. Large-pane sashes lit the upper storey, the four inner bays with round-arches over them. To the outer bays, the windows had cornices supporting scrolled ornaments. There is a wide decorated eaves cornice, in front of which is a large central corbel bearing the date, MDCCCLX. It supports a prominent circular clock, the centrepiece of the parapets, which has an ornate classical-style surround. There was originally an octagonal turret with cupola, but this was destroyed in a fire on 6 August 1870 and not rebuilt, whilst a coat of arms originally fixed to the front has also been lost.² The indoor market and the cattle market or 'Smithfield' was to the rear of the building, extending down Stafford St to Watery Lane. The general layout can be seen in Figure 1.

The building was conceived as supplying a range of civic purposes. A description of 1861 noted that it contained a butchers' and vegetable market, a corn exchange, rooms for a mechanics institute, a magnificent ballroom which ran the full width of the building on the first floor, a room for the sole use of the Marsh Trustees, accommodation for the magistrate's petty sessions (held fortnightly) and the monthly county court. The courts seem to have used the Corn Exchange for their sessions. The Marsh Trustees' room was on the ground floor behind the main building extending down Stafford St; at later dates it was used by other local government bodies in the town. After the Urban District Council acquired the Marsh Trust estate in 1930, it sold its rights in the room to the Market Company.³ After this date the room was broken into shop units facing on to Stafford St. (Figure 2)

¹ SA, PH/N/8/7/53; SNAP N000691, N005499; Newman & Pevsner, 444; HE list no. 1367292; Shropshire HER PRN 15068.

² For the fire see Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 40-44.

³ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 30, 79-80

In fact the aspiration for the building to be used for civic purposes seems to have not been achieved: other civic institutions which developed in the Town acquired their own premises including, of course, the Urban District Council. The name 'Town Hall' was perhaps incorrectly applied. In the late 1940s the Newport solicitor R. P. Liddle, then a leading shareholder and moving force in the Market Company concluded that the building would be better in the hands of the Urban District Council who would run it as a community asset, but although discussions took place and a price was named by the Market Company, no sale took place.⁴

As might be expected, the building has been reconfigured internally in line with changing needs. A survey of the building in September 1919 found multiple defects including in the roof which needed immediate remedy. This may have prompted some internal configuration. Most notably the Corn Exchange was closed - it had been failing for a long time - and the space used to create a bespoke cinema. Films had been shown in the Corn Exchange since at least 1913, but the new arrangements turned the Corn Exchange into a permanent cinema with its own entrance off Stafford St. As the Corn Exchange could no longer be used as a court room, the Marsh Trustees' Room was extended down Stafford St and the courts held their sessions in it.⁵ At much the same time the Lower Market was closed and the space let as a garage. It then had a variety of tenants, later on being an egg-packing station and subsequently used by a potato merchant.⁶ This configuration is shown in Figure 2.

Alterations to the ground floor took place in 1963 after the cinema had closed, when the four inner bays were swept away to make shops and the outer windows were converted to doorways. In its current configuration, the north and south ends of the Town Hall have shops, that to the south replacing two windows and with two round-arched windows above.

The assembly room, given its size, presented particular problems for the Market Company. It ceased to be used for social events in 1967 having fallen foul of safety regulations. It then had a number of unsatisfactory retail uses.⁷ It opened in January 2018 as a dance and sports centre.⁸

The Indoor Market

⁴ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 88.

⁵ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 69.

⁶ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, 00, 96

⁷ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 99.

⁸ SA, P207/V/2/8: Act, 1858; SA, NTM/6/5/1; OS map 25', Sheet XXXI.5 (1892, 1938 edns); Brown, F., *Silver Screen Memories* (1984), 10, 17-19; SNAP N003316, N003359

The indoor market lies behind the Town Hall. There is a yard and entrance on the north side, access from Stafford Street through the shops on the south side, whilst the east end formerly faced into the Smithfield cattle market. The market building consists of adjoining gabled ranges constructed of red brick with sheeted roofs. It is characterised by gables with circular vents, brick dressings and tall round-arched windows with cast iron glazing. There are nine gables on the north side, the current entrance cut into the westernmost gable end. The east end of the building has five windows and a dentilled brick eaves cornice. The latter continues around to the Stafford Street front, forming triangular pediments to the five gables. A large half-gable to their west adjoins the modern shops. (see above).

In 1966 the indoor market was modernised and it was announced that it would open on both Fridays and Saturdays. There would be 24 stalls.⁹ An entrance into the indoor market from Stafford St was made in 1969.¹⁰ When the lease of the lower market fell in in 1989, this was refurbished and restored to retail use as a food hall: the remainder of the market was then refurbished and the opportunity was taken to reroof the building. It reopened with a flourish on 8 November 1991.¹¹

The interior of the market hall is a large open space, the valleys of the gabled roofs supported on narrow cast iron columns with decorative brackets. The eastern pitches of the roofs are glazed, and there are V-struts and strengthening iron ties. There is a galleried upper level at the east end and a flagstone floor.

Smithfield cattle market

A modern housing development occupies the site of the Smithfield cattle market, but an old red brick boundary wall survives around the north side. Originally, the market extended as far east as Water Lane, photographs showing a substantial coped wall with rounded south east corner. There were inset double gates with piers on the south side.¹² In 1998 the owners were investing in the Newport Smithfield and predicting its future with confidence. But the market never reopened after the Foot and Mouth epidemic of 2001 because, it was reported, its floors could not be cleaned to an adequate standard. After closure there was an abortive proposal to use the site for a supermarket but after public consultations, in September 2004 planning permission was granted for 41 houses.¹³ The Ordnance Survey map for 2005 shows the east

⁹ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 96.

¹⁰ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 96

¹¹ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 99; unpaginated pages after p. 100.

¹² OS map 25', Sheet XXXI.5 (1892 edn); SA, PH/N/8/9/1, 2, 6

¹³ *Newport and MD Advertiser*, 20 Jan. 1998; *Shropshire Star* 31 Jan. 2002; 23 Jan. 2003.

end of the site cleared of buildings and cattle pens. The building of houses along Stafford St, and Tan Bank, and a small close called the Smithfields followed shortly thereafter.

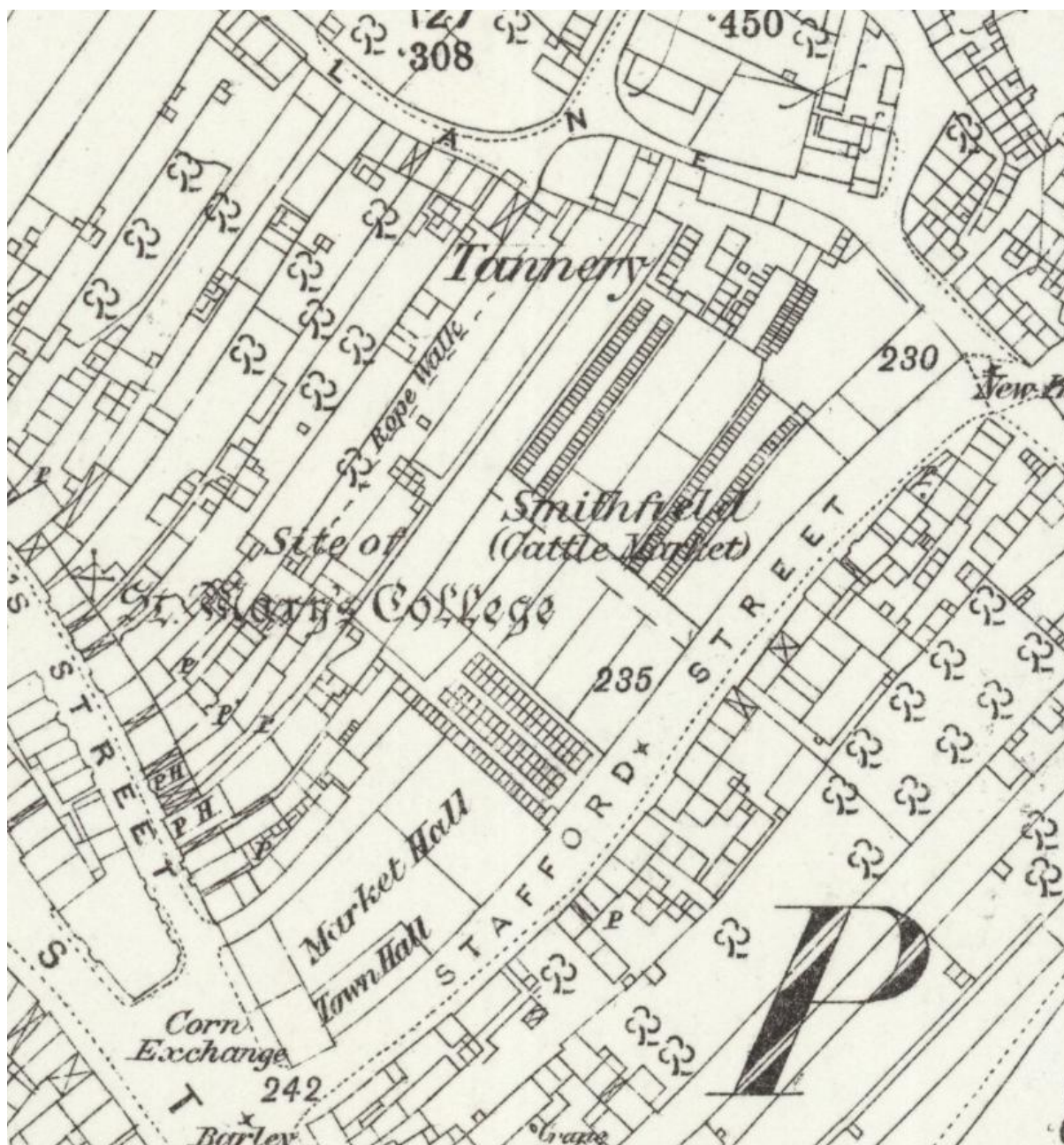


Figure One. The Town Hall, Indoor Market and Smithfield, 1879-80

Source: OS 1:2500 survey, Surveyed 1879/80, Published 1892. Image from NLS.

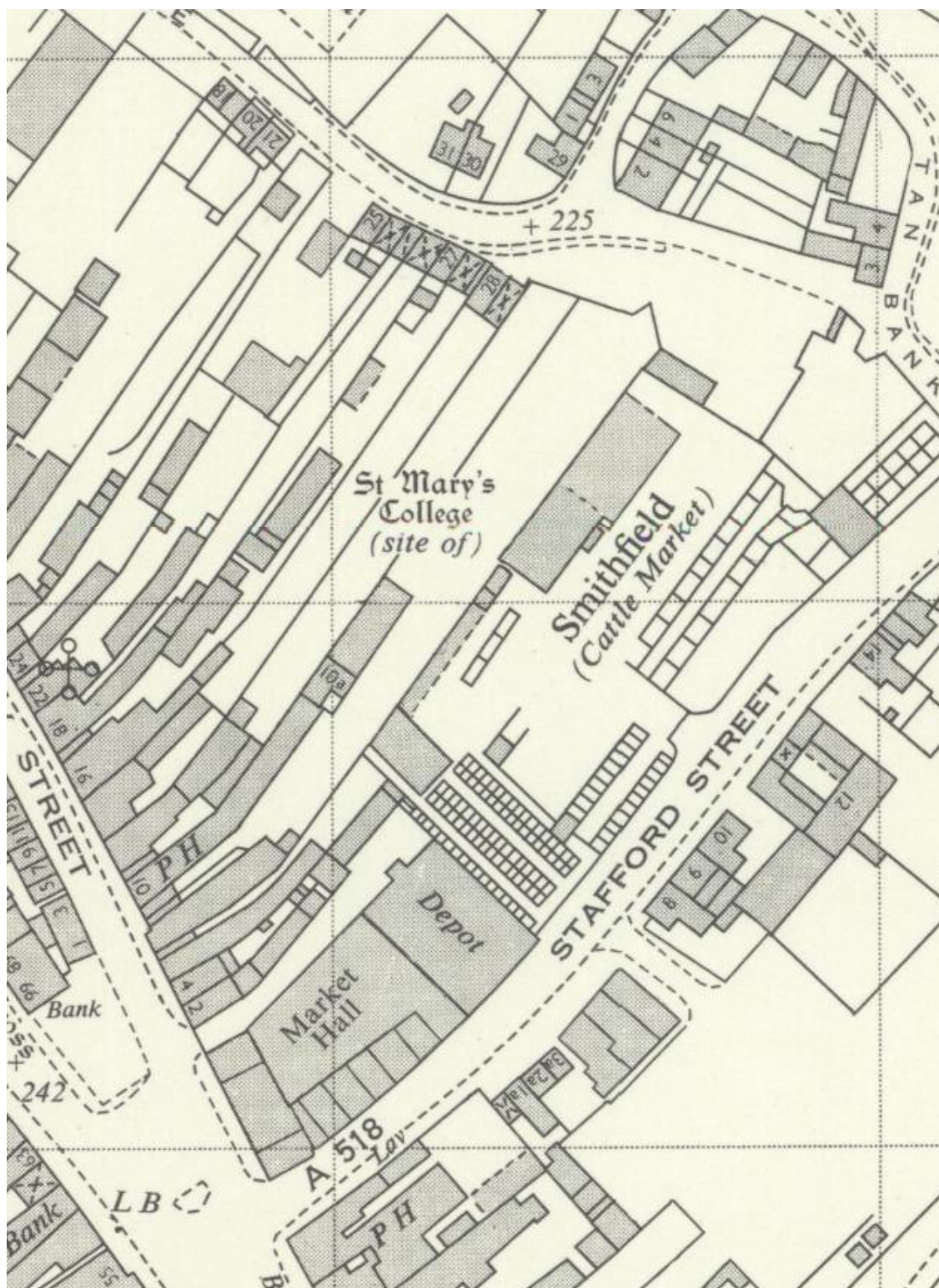


Figure Two. The Town Hall, Indoor Market and Smithfield 1936, showing the division of the Stafford St frontage, formerly the Town Hall, into shops.
Source: 1:2500 survey, Surveyed 1936, Published 1937. Image from NLS.