

VCH SHROPSHIRE

Newport

Markets

This text has been prepared for VCH Shropshire by 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 Market buildings are treated in a separate text by Wendy Horton and Richard Hoyle.

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Newport markets

In our discussion of the manorial rights we noted how the market rights were contested in the 1630s. By the third quarter of the century there seems to have been little question about ownership: they belonged to the joint lords of the manor. The surveys of the Talbot estate from the early 1680s show the Talbot's moiety of the tolls were then leased, the moiety of the toll corn for £10 10s. 0d. and the small tolls and the rent of the standings at £2. The market was reported to be held on Saturday: there were five fairs in the year. In 1743 the tolls of corn and grain were still being let for £10 per annum, but cattle and small tolls were now deemed to be worth £3.¹ In the mid-1820s there was a weekly provision market on a Saturday and five 'quarterly' fairs.²

In 1837 a fortnightly cattle market was launched: this can be traced through the newspapers by the reports of the annual dinner held for farmers attending the market.³ Bagshaw's *Directory* (1851) reported that there was a corn market which met in the space between the pillars supporting the Town Hall. As we shall see, this was a contested space. Bagshaw also commented that the five fairs had largely been subsumed into the fortnightly cattle market launched in 1837. Bagshaw was pessimistic about how long the cattle market would last as its dates were in direct conflict with those of the Shrewsbury cattle market, now in new premises.⁴ But within a decade a new market hall with a corn exchange and extensive standings for cattle had been built. There was also a horse fair, launched in 1663, but as the directories make no mention of it, it may have been in abeyance and the horse fair announced in 1856, to be held on the day of the cattle market in February and September and on a day in May might be a new innovation.⁵ There was also a pig market. These markets all had acknowledged locations in Newport's streets, the provision market taking place around the Town Hall.

Because of an investigation made by the estate officers of the Duke of Sutherland in 1838 or 1839, we are well informed about how the markets operated in the 1820s and later.⁶

¹ Hoyle (ed.), *Estates of Thomas Talbot and John Talbot*, pp. 4, 58-9, 64.

² Pigott p. 683.

³ *SC*, 17, 24 Nov. 1837.

⁴ Bagshaw, pp. 404-5. For the cattle market see *Staffordshire Adv.* 22 Dec. 1838.

⁵ Malcolm Miles, *Newport (Salop) Market and Trading company, 1858-1993* (1993) (hereafter cited as Miles, *Newport Market Company*), p. 7; *SC*, 8, 29 Aug. 1856.

⁶ The following draws heavily on an unlisted bundle of papers in the Lillishall archive at Staffs. RO: D593/T/4/18.

The tolls were let in the late 1820s to a Newport draper, Thomas Blakemore. The lessee owned the standings (stalls); Blakemore bought them off his predecessor. Men were employed to erect them on market days and take them down at end of the day. One of the men who worked for Blakemore said that the price for a standing was 6*d.*, more for a larger one and on fair days a double rate was charged. People who did not take a stall were charged 1*d.* Some appear to have had their own standings. The tolls demanded were 1*d.* for a pig, 2*d.* for a cow, 4*d.* for a horse, 1*d.* for a score of sheep. Tolls of wheat were taken with a 'brazen dish' worth being taken from each sack. (Bagshaw says that by his time the farmers sold corn by sample.) Butter, cheese, eggs and poultry were apparently sold toll free.

Tolls were taken from people entering the market at the bars. The one at the south end of the town was opposite the Pheasant; the other was near The Swan and some 40 yards south of the canal bridge.

In 1830 Earl Gower offered the burgesses a lease for seven years of the tolls at a rent of £30, the idea being that the profits of the tolls would be devoted to the improvement of the town. The lease was finally made in 0000.⁷ Blakemore objected to it - he held that it cut across his rights - but withdrew his objections when assured that the arrangement was purely to benefit the town. Until the tolls could be publicly auctioned, he took them from the Burgesses for £35.

By the time the tolls came up for renewal, the earl's estate managers were expressing reservations about the Burgesses's management of the market, and at some stage a decision was made not to continue the arrangement with them. Their complaint was that the markets had been run as a provision market and not as a corn market. The owners of shops in Newport saw their business draining away to stallholders who came to Newport once a week. The interests of the farmers had been neglected: it seems that they had been displaced from the space under the Town Hall which the Marsh Trustees claimed as their property and where they had started to erect stalls for butchers. Once the lease had expired, the earl's agents claimed the income from those stalls and pointed out the earl's lease had specifically said that the space should be kept for farmers. The Burgesses and their agents were accused of squeezing the tolls 'up to the highest pitch'. This was seen as a danger to the reputation of Earl Gower.

⁷ SA, NB/B/1, minutes of 6 Apr. 1830, 31 Mar, 19 Dec. 1831; correspondence in Staffs RO, D593/T/4/18.

It appears that the estate reverted to the practice of making leases of the tolls to individuals, initially the solicitor William Liddle, but whether for his own profit or on behalf of the town is never reported.⁸ In 1845 the tolls were leased for £31.

In the 1850s Newport followed the route taken by many towns which had markets - and especially cattle markets - in the streets. The noise, smell and fouling of the streets by animals brought for sale and then driven away was no longer acceptable in any town with aspirations towards politeness. In common with others, the objective became one of removing the cattle to a space segregated from the remainder of the town.

Newport was doubtless aware of the new cattle market created in Shrewsbury after 1850.⁹ When, in 1855 and early 1856 it was anticipated that the Marsh Trustees intended to relay the streets with granite setts, it was argued that it would be inappropriate to allow the cattle market to continue in its traditional street venues once the work had been done. The *Newport and Market Drayton Advertiser* published an editorial on the subject in March 1856 and subsequently advocated the creation of a market company which would erect buildings on a new site and so remove the cattle market from the High Street.¹⁰ This proposal seems to have prompted some debate in the town. A contribution published in the newspaper on 19 May in the form of a poem included the cattle fairs amongst a whole list of grievances which needed addressing.¹¹

On 14 June 1856 the paper carried an announcement that a market or 'Smithfield' company was to be established.¹² The announcement of a new horse fair in August was perhaps ill-timed: it was not unreasonably asked where it was going to be held. A letter carried the *Advertiser* on 4 October raised that question and called on the Newport Cattle Market Committee, the promoters of the fairs, to meet and devise a plan. The writer suggested a town centre site, essentially that finally adopted.¹³

Little more was heard of the market company in the second half of the year but with hindsight it can be seen that much planning was being undertaken. In December though the Burgesses wrote to the Duke of Sutherland as Lord of the Manor asking for his agreement

⁸ Staffs RO D593/T/4/18, correspondence 1838-9, esp. James Loch to Mr Lewis, 14 Apr., Mr James to James Loch, 18 Apr. 1838.

⁹ This account draws on Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 3-30. Miles drew heavily on the *Newport and Market Drayton Advertiser* which is currently not digitised for these years.

¹⁰ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 6

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

that the cattle market and fairs be removed from the streets. He replied in January 1857 giving his consent.¹⁴ Perhaps aware that a prospectus was being circulated, a notice appeared in the Newport paper published on 31 January asked for a meeting of the Fortnightly Cattle Market Committee to consider the proposals to move the market from the streets.¹⁵ A meeting was announced for 10 February. This seems to have been a rearguard action by the Newport publicans who feared a loss of trade if the market was moved. They were gently lampooned in an editorial in the *Newport Advertiser* on 7 February. Their requisition was countered by a petition printed in that same issue in which 93 residents of the town - many of them shopkeepers of various sorts - drew attention to the intended repaving, asked for the discontinuation of the street cattle markets before the repairs started and expressed their satisfaction with a plan for cattle market drawn up by the Newport Architect John Cobb. The 93 signatories did not include a single publican.¹⁶

The prospectus for the Newport (Salop) Markets Ltd was also published in the *Newport Advertiser* on 7 February.¹⁷ It sought to raise £3,000 in £10 shares. It had decided on a town centre site for the cattle market and had entered into negotiations with Mr Duncalfe for its purchase. The market would have two entrances, one in St Mary's Street for stock coming from the Wellington and London side of the town and another one from Stafford St through which cattle coming in that direction could enter. This proposal certainly stopped cattle being sold in the streets, but it did not stop them passing through the town on the way to or after being sold. To an unknown degree, the choice may have been a compromise with the publican interest where a more distant site would have served the town better.

The meeting called by the opponents of the scheme proved to be an embarrassment to them.¹⁸ By all accounts it was well attended with 150 to 200 people. But after the chair had been elected, no one was willing to seize the initiative and propose a motion. There was some puzzlement expressed as to why the meeting had been called. Eventually a motion to keep the markets on the streets was proposed by the landlord of The Crow. His motion was reluctantly seconded. Only a handful (three or four) persons voted for it and it was near unanimously rejected by the meeting.

The solicitor Henry Heane then took the opportunity to outline the plans of the market company, explaining the history of their plans and the way in which Henry Fisher, secretary

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 8, 11.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 12.

¹⁷ Ibid., pp. 8-9.

¹⁸ For the following. Ibid., p. 12.

of the Fortnightly Cattle Market Committee, had declined to co-operate with them. There was some debate about whether the projected site was the best that could be found. It was agreed to adjourn the meeting for a fortnight to see if the opponents of the scheme could come up with a better one. Fisher subsequently approached the Marsh Trustees to see if they would offer a site, but they took the view that the central site was universally welcomed and they saw no reason to offer an alternative. A second meeting convened to consider alternatives received no new suggestions and was again adjourned. In the following weeks the *Advertiser* published letters in support of the project.¹⁹

Whilst the site was settled by the acquiescence of these public meetings, the scheme was substantially revised over the next few months to include a large public building for the use of the town. The new plans were presented in the *Advertiser* on 30 June and at a public meeting on 2 June.²⁰ The first change was that as a part of the scheme, the narrow Bakehouse Land (Stafford St.) was to be widened to 31 feet. The cattle market would run down the north side of the street. At the front, facing onto the High St., there would be a substantial building in an Italianate style, with clock tower, which would contain rooms for a mechanics institute, a court room, a room for magistrates' meetings and public meetings. There would be an assembly room 66 feet by 28 feet. On the ground floor there would be a Corn Exchange and a butchers' market. It was hoped that the Marsh Trustees would join in the venture allowing the old Town Hall to be demolished. Obviously, this scheme would be vastly more expensive than the initial proposal for a cattle market. The market alone was costed at £1,450: the building for the Town Hall, Corn Exchange and indoor market would cost £10,050, a total for the scheme of £13,000. It was proposed to raise the bulk of this by issuing 500 £20 shares: much of the balance would come from gifts.²¹ This appears to have been well received within Newport and surroundings. One way in which we can see this is that by October £11,820 had been subscribed for shares. In fact the share capital was finally to be 650 £20 shares totalling £13,000.²²

This was stated in a public notice outlining the purposes of the markets and fairs company published in October.²³ At the same time it was notice was given of an application for a private act of parliament. The notice of application for the bill was made on 14

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 13.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 13.

²¹ The newspaper reports give a detailed exposition of how the money was to be raised, for instance *SC*, 5 June, *Staffs. Adv.* 6 June 1857

²² For the founding shareholders, see Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 18-19.

²³ Ibid., pp. 15.

November 1857; the bill was given a second reading in February 1858 and received the royal assent on 21 May 1858. Whilst the preamble stressed that the purpose of the act was to improve the market facilities in Newport, it also gave the company power to undertake the compulsory purchase of land in the town to widen roads (although not at the Market Company's charge) and to demolish the old town hall and butter cross, offering the Marsh Trustees rooms in the Town Hall for their use. In this way the act shaded into an improvement act for the town.²⁴

The Directors of the company met for the first time on 11 June 1858. Their priority was to purchase the property needed for the site of the cattle market and town hall.²⁵ Demolition quickly followed in the summer of 1858. Notice was given that the cattle market would be held in the new premises from 14 December. The last street market for cattle and sheep was held on 4 December 1858. This was something of a squib with little offered for sale and few purchasers. The market on 14 December was the Christmas market and was launched with quality livestock from the Duke of Sutherland, and neighbouring gentry.²⁶

Attention now turned to the erection of the Town Hall, the building of which was undertaken in 1859.²⁷ The covered market was opened on 26 November. Fitting out the building took longer but was finished by March 1861. An agreement with the Marsh Trustees was achieved in December 1859. The Trustees accepted the offer of a room for their sole use: they agreed that the Town Hall should be pulled down at the expense of the market company, the latter getting whatever value they could make of the demolished structure.

Under the terms of their act, the Market Company acquired the market rights for Newport from the Duke of Sutherland and his trustees. The Act also gave the company a monopoly on the sale of animals within a mile of the old Town Hall.²⁸ The Fortnightly Cattle Market Committee wound itself up and donated its remaining funds towards the costs of the cattle market.

The Market Company removed the cattle market from the streets. It also moved the provision market indoors. The cattle and horse fairs disappeared and were merged into the regular cattle markets. What remained in the streets as a relict of medieval circumstances

²⁴ Statute 21 Vic. c. xxi, 'An act for providing a market house and market place and other buildings for public accommodation at the town of Newport'. The powers conferred are given in Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 17.

²⁵ The properties acquired by the Market Company and cleared are described at length in Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 17-23.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 24-5, 28.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

²⁸ 21 Vic. c. xxi, sect. 24, 21.

were the two pleasure fairs which offered entertainment to the people of Newport and quite large numbers of people who came to the town.

There was no outdoor market after 1860 and that remains the case today. It did creep back into the space outside the Town Hall with the Vine Vaults on the north side between 1921 and 1936: this space came to be called the Market Square.²⁹

At the end of 1921 the Market Company erected stalls outside the market hall in what was to be called the Market Square. From the Market Company's point of view, this perhaps followed on from a decision to convert the Lower [indoor] Market into a garage. It also allowed for a very different sort of trader, 'pitchers' who sold by auction, a style of selling called 'do the shouting'. Shouting was not allowed in the indoor space. The erection of these stalls was complained about by the Council but they continued to be erected weekly as part of the Friday market. The Market Company took tolls from the stallholders - in effect licencing them to sell - but did not claim stallage (the rent for erecting the stall).

The Urban District Council seems to have been slow to address this. At a later date it became plain that the Councillors were split over how to proceed. When the question became a matter of litigation in 1935, the council allowed it to proceed only on the chair's casting vote and one councillor gave evidence on behalf of the Market Company. Opinion in the town favoured the continuation of the market, a public meeting (albeit convened by the Market Company) in October of that year coming out strongly in favour of the of the open-air stalls.

From the Council's point of view, an area of the High St was marked out as a bus station in January 1922. The whole street was a highway. It was also designated as a public parking space under the Public Health Act of 1925. However, the matter was allowed to drift until the Market Company overplayed its hand in 1933. In January 1933 it was told that it been unable to erect its stalls at the end of December because the Market Square had been let for a Gawby Market (Christmas Fair). At the next Christmas Fair the Market Square was let to the showman Pat Collins and the Market Company wrote to him objecting to its loss of income. It appears that the Christmas Fair did not take place that year, meaning a loss to the Council (and other traders). There were meetings between the parties in 1934, the Council apparently claiming the tolls levied by the Market Company as compensation for its costs in street

²⁹ The following is based on Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 73-4; reports in the *Wellington J.* 26 Oct. 1935 and 7 Mar. 1936.

cleaning after the market. It wished the stalls to be set up in the market hall so that the Market Square could be used for parking on market days.

In December 1934 the Market Company took counsel's advice on the Fairs whilst later that month the Council told the stallholders to stop selling in the Market Square. In response the Market Company told the stallholders to ignore the council and undertook to indemnify them for any legal costs they might incur. In July 1935 the Council announced its intention to prosecute anyone with stalls in the street on market days. A summons was brought against seven stallholders for obstruction. One of them was further prosecuted for selling contrary to the Market Company's act of 1858. Five Newport women who had purchased goods from the stalls were also prosecuted.

The Market Company convened a public meeting on 21 October, evidently in the hope that a show of public opinion would deter the council from proceeding. But the case was started on 31 October and then adjourned due to the ill-health of the Council's clerk.³⁰ It was 5 March 1936 before it was heard before the Newport bench.

A specimen charge was brought before a stallholder called Blackshaw from Crewe for illegal selling under the 1858 act. He was also charged with obstructing the Highway. One of the women, a Mrs Hodges, was prosecuted for illegal buying. The magistrates dismissed the case against Blackshaw and Mrs Hodges but Blackshaw was however fined 1s. for obstruction. The remaining cases were then withdrawn.

This appears to have given the Council what it wanted. The street market ceased to be held and has never reappeared. In this way an encroachment on the Council's space and rights was brought to an end.

The buildings of 1859 underwent a succession of adaptations which are discussed elsewhere.³¹ At various times parts were used as a cinema and garage and the Lower Market was leased. The buildings underwent a series of adaptations for retail uses. When the lease on the Lower Market expired, it was refurbished as a modern food hall opened in 1991. There were then works undertaken throughout the building.³² The indoor market, opening on Fridays and Saturdays, was still active in 2026.

³⁰ *Wellington J.* 2 Nov. 1935.

³¹ See the account of the market buildings by Wendy Horton and Richard Hoyle.

³² Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 99-100 and unpaginated pages following

The fortunes of the cattle market ebbed and flowed with the strength of the agricultural economy. It was decided in 1889 to hold weekly cattle markets but the experiment was abandoned in less than a year only to be revived in the 1890s.

The Market Company gave the Newport auctioneer Richard Pooler exclusive rights in the market in 1866. This was contested by another auctioneer, George Furber (later trading as Furber and Burton) and after much dispute the two firms were given alternating rights in the market. In the years after the First World War, the market was operated by the firm of Pooler, Davies and White who held cattle markets in alternating weeks in Newport and Shifnal.³³ In 1925 a new lease was agreed with Anna Louisa Davies of Park House in Newport, Thomas White of Newport, Richard John Davies of Edgmond and Albert Norman Perry of Shifnal for £250 per annum which continued long-established arrangements.³⁴ In 1960, the Market Company, under pressure from a predatory investor in the company, sold the Smithfield to its operator, J. P. Davies of the Newport firm of Davies, White and Perry for £16,000. Having closed during the foot and mouth epidemic of 2001, the cattle market never reopened and the site was cleared and redeveloped for housing.

³³ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, pp. 34-5.

³⁴ Miles, *Newport Market Company*, p. 77.