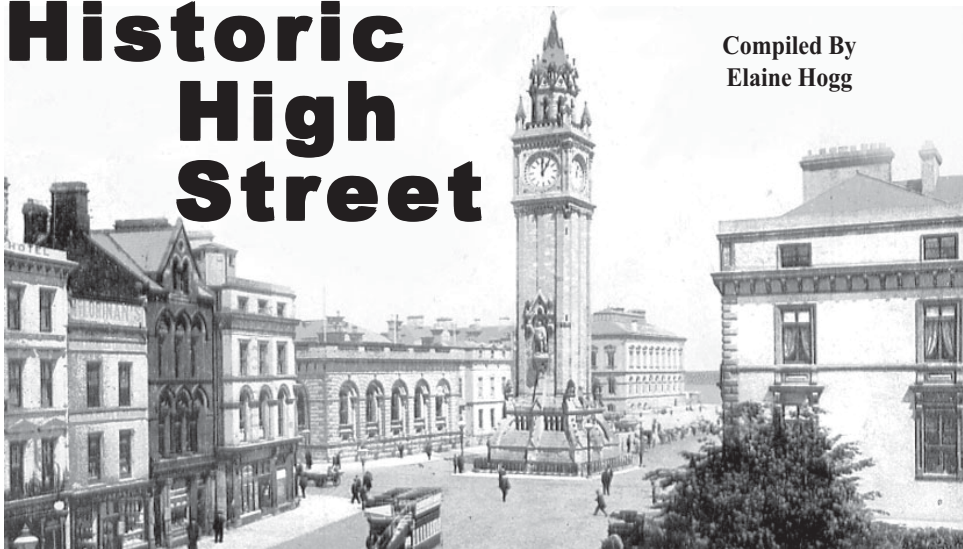


Historic High Street

Compiled By
Elaine Hogg



An ancient line, possibly pre-celtic, making a track, leads from the Black Mountain, down the Falls Road, Divis Street, Castle Street, to High Street as we know it today. High Street is funnel-shaped, wide and curving from Castle Street to behind the Albert Clock and it follows the course of the Farset River. To understand the importance of High Street to the history of Belfast it is important to set the scene and the role it played in the histories of its people.

MODEST HAMLET

In the early part of the thirteenth century the Normans, who from the many castles they built kept the native Irish under their control, took over the lands from Co Derry to Co Down. One of the Norman Castles stood at Le Ford, the name given by the Normans to the sandbank crossing of Belfast, today known as High Street leading to Castle Place. The castle or more likely a fortress was built of wood or stone on the flat top of the mound thrown up on the

south bank of the river Farset. High Street at this time consisted of a circular ditch and a sturdy palisade, and the castle stood guard over the river passage for the 'Red' Earl of Ulster, Richard de Burgo. A few humble dwellings made up the rest of High Street and Belfast at this time was no more than a modest Hamlet, the people living there making money from selling corn or cattle. They were tenants of the Earl who paid rent and sought settlement of their disputes in the lord's court. The River Farset was open, a fairly small river at this point, and it ran the length of High Street down to the Lough. Downstream from the castle, on the site of the present St George's Church, stood the Chapel of Le Ford, one of several chapels attached to the White Church at Shankill, the others being Cromac,



The Ford of Belfast

Stranmillis, Kilwee and 'Clochmestale', thought to be on the way to Carrickfergus.

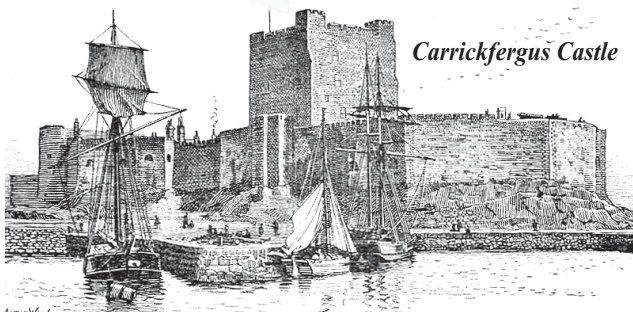
ATTACKS

By 1317 the river Farset was dammed beyond the castle to give power to a water mill, and here farmers ground their corn to flour, the profits in 1326 being 6s.8d. Much of the corn and flour was shipped to England from Carrickfergus, de Burgo's capital and then the largest town in Ulster. The Irish continued to attack the lands of de Burgo and Le Ford acted as part of a network of fortresses around Belfast Lough, linking the mottes of Ballymaghan, Duneight, Knock, Dundonald and Holywood to the south and Carrickfergus to the north.

In 1315 the Scottish invaded Ulster and attacked the de Burgo fortresses helped by Donal O'Neill, King of Tir Eoghain and soon Edward Bruce was in control of Ulster. All the castle garrisons were defeated by the joint attack except

Carrickfergus, which held out. Richard de Burgo eventually fought back and regained his castles but the strength of the English in Ulster was diminished and less than 100 years later the Irish had taken control of the High Street area and guarded the river crossing at Le Ford.

or pouring oil on attackers attempting to ram the door below. A murder hole still exists at Carrickfergus Castle today. The tower house could protect against local attack but it could not withstand a major attack. Surrounding the castle was the Farset River and some



Carrickfergus Castle

TOWER HOUSE

By 1489 Belfast Castle in High Street was ruled by Niall Mor macCuinn O'Neill who ruled Clandeboy from Whitehead to Bangor. The castle was by then a tower house, similar to many tower houses built in County Down at this time. It was a tall keep, forty feet high, with two towers flanking the main entrance, where there was a murder hole for shooting at

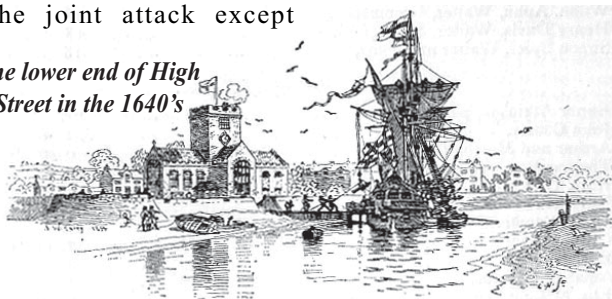
small dwellings but High Street at this time was very underdeveloped as the area was always under constant attack. The castle had been taken in 1470 and 1476 when Niall Mor's father, Conn macAodha Buidhe, was Lord of Clandeboy and in 1489 the castle again came under attack.

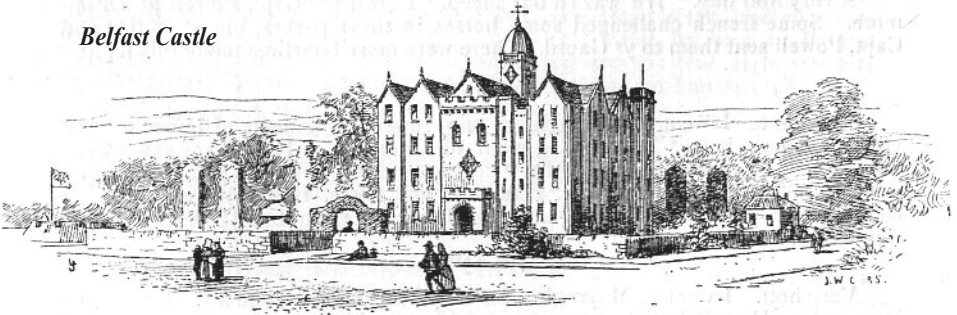
IMMENSE SPOILS

The Annals of the Four Masters records:

Hugh Roe O'Donnell, the son of Niall the Rough, proceeded with an army into Tria-Conghail, in harvest time. He committed great depredations and devastations in the Route upon MacQuillan...He went from thence to Belfast, and

The lower end of High Street in the 1640's



Belfast Castle

took and demolished the castle of Belfast; and he then returned safe to his house, loaded with immense spoils.

REBUILT CASTLE

Niall Mor O'Neill rebuilt Belfast Castle in High Street, O'Donnell returned in 1493 before the castle was completed. The annals record that Garrett Mor Fitzgerald, Earl of Kildare, destroyed the castle at Belfast in 1503 and took it again in 1512, the year of Niall Mor's death. The Earl was King Henry VII's chief governor of Ireland and this was a sign to the Irish that the English were determined to regain control over Ireland.

SUITABLE PLACE

By 1573 Walter Devereux, the Earl of Essex, had decided that Belfast was a more suitable place to make base than Carrickfergus: Belfast is a place meet for a corporate town, armed with all commodities as a principal haven, wood and good ground, standing also

upon a border, and a place of great importance for service, I think it convenient that a fortification be made there at the spring...

Essex seized Belfast and built a fort at Fortwilliam but also settled in High Street but constantly came under attack from the followers of the Gaelic lord of Clancaboye, Sir Brian O'Neill. In 1574 Sir Brian and his family were invited to a feast at Belfast Castle and again the Annals of the Four Masters records:

CUT IN QUARTERS

Peace, sociality, and friendship were established between Brian, the son of Felim Cacagh O'Neill, and the Earl of Essex at a feast was afterwards prepared by Brian, to which the Lord Justice and the chiefs of his people were invited, and they passed three nights, and days pleasantly and cheerfully. At the expiration of this time, however, as they were agreeably drinking and making merry, Brian, his brother, and his wife were

seized upon by the Earl, and all his people put unsparingly to the sword, men, women, youths, and maidens, in Brian's own presence. Brian was afterwards sent to Dublin, together with his wife and brother, where they were cut in quarters...

The Irish were furious at this act of deception and Belfast came under constant attack.

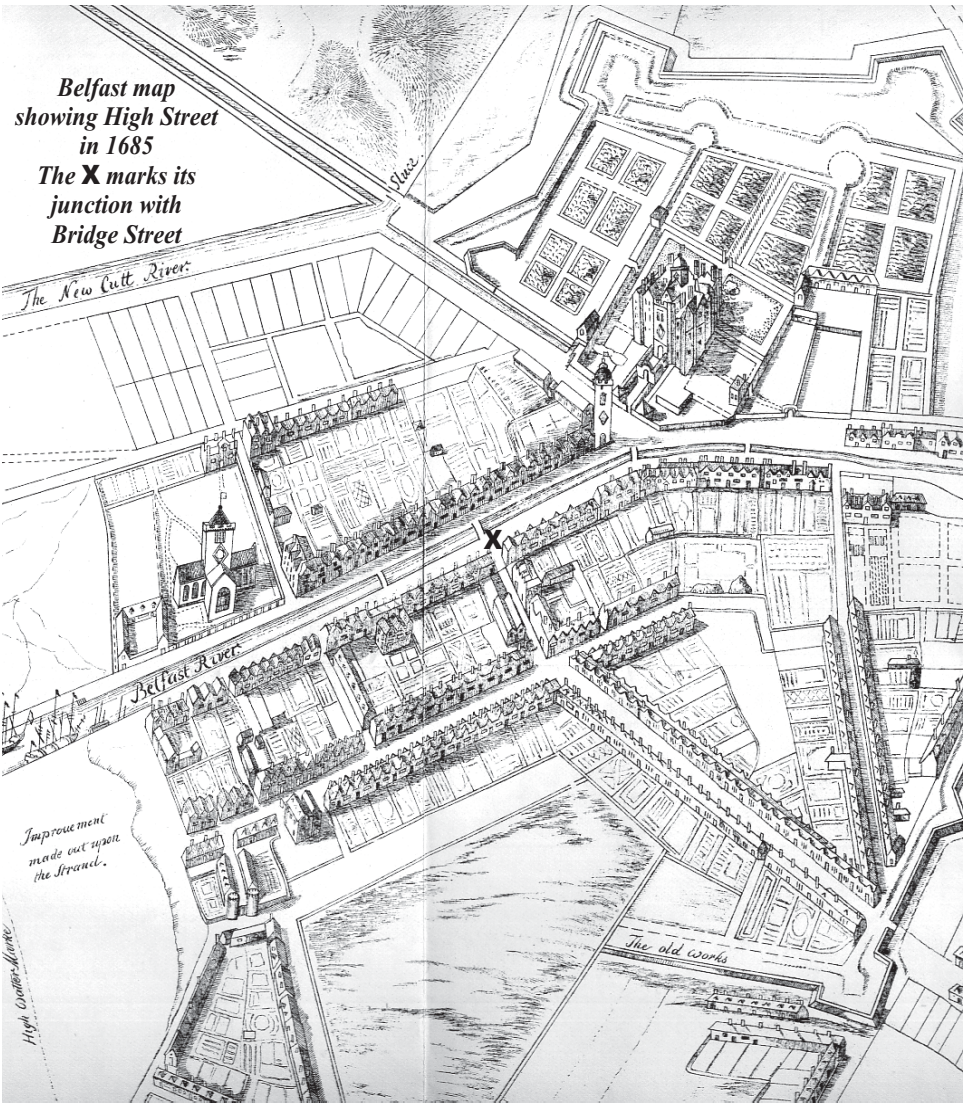
REWARDED

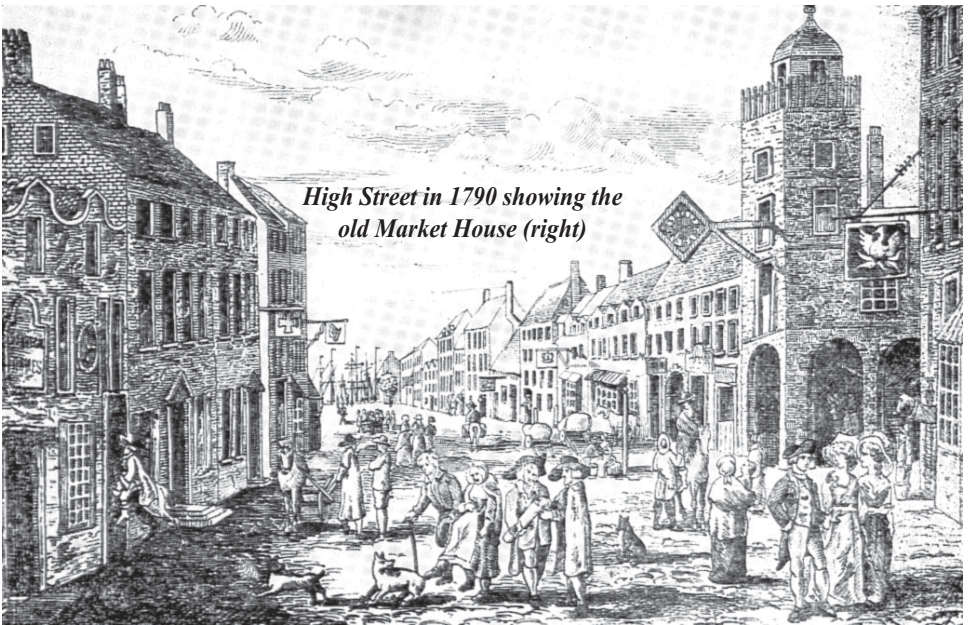
By the beginning of the seventeenth century Belfast and the area of High Street and Castle Place was beginning to develop into a town. In March 1603, six days after the death of Queen Elizabeth, Hugh O'Neill surrendered after a lengthy period of siege by the English when they tried to starve the Irish living in Clancaboye. Sir Arthur Chichester was rewarded for his services to the English crown. In a patent dated 5 November 1603 he was granted 'The Castle of Belfast, with the Appurtenants and

Hereditaments, Spiritual and Temporal, situate in the Lower Clandeboy'. Sir Arthur Chichester was not too impressed with this gift, he felt that Belfast had no real future and it was recorded at the time that he would willingly have sold the land for £5.

However Chichester felt he had to set a good example to the Protestant subjects who he wanted to encourage after the successful planting and worked hard by building a castle and a town at Belfast. By 1611 it was reported that: From thence we came to Belfast where we found

many masons, bricklayers, and other labourers who had taken down the ruins of the decayed Castle and had laid the foundation of a brick house, 50 ft long, which is to be joined to the Castle by a staircase of brick of 14 foot square.





High Street in 1790 showing the old Market House (right)

BUILDING

The Castle was to defend the passage over the Ford at High Street between the Upper and Lower Clandeboye. Those living in the High Street area at the time were English, Scottish and some men from the Isle of Man and they began building timber house with chimneys along the banks of the Farset, from Castle Place to High Street. It was reported that over twelve hundred thousand bricks were used in the building of the Castle, House and Bawne.

COLONISTS

In a charter of 1613 Belfast became a corporation town and by 1635 colonists from Lancashire and Cheshire had cultivated fields full of corn.

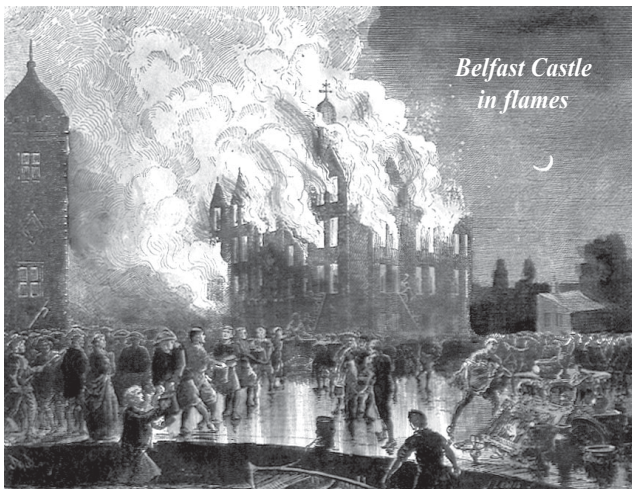
In front of the Castle gate beside the corn market a Market House was built, on the site now occupied by Dunnes Stores. Favoured freeman of the town set up stalls against its walls and were exempt from tolls. Outsiders had to pay a heavy fee, 1d for a horse load, 2d for a load of timber or animals driven through the town and 4d for each animal slaughtered in the shambles. We know that already the mayor and burgesses of Belfast were concerned about the fouling of the River Farset and the Great Street, as High Street was then known. Fines were levied for throwing anything into the river and dunghills were only left outside for three days before a fine was due.

High Street was now the hub of the town of Belfast, where people washed, sold their goods, children played, and the Market House became the centre for information and communication for the residents of the town.

ARRIVAL OF KING WILLIAM

In 1690 William of Orange arrived in High Street with £200,000 in cash to pay his men in order to remove King James and his French and Irish allies. King William made a speech outside the Market House, in poor English, pale and asthmatic, his face in pain from his ill health and said that he had come to reduce Ireland 'to its due obedience, that his good subjects may not only be

rescued from the present force and violence but be settled in a lasting peace...' That night High Street and Castle Place was filled with bonfires to send a warning to the enemies of King William of his arrival in Belfast. Williams's victory at the Battle of the Boyne ensured the continued growth and prosperity of Belfast but also the continued confiscation of Irish lands and religious restrictions imposed.



BURNED DOWN

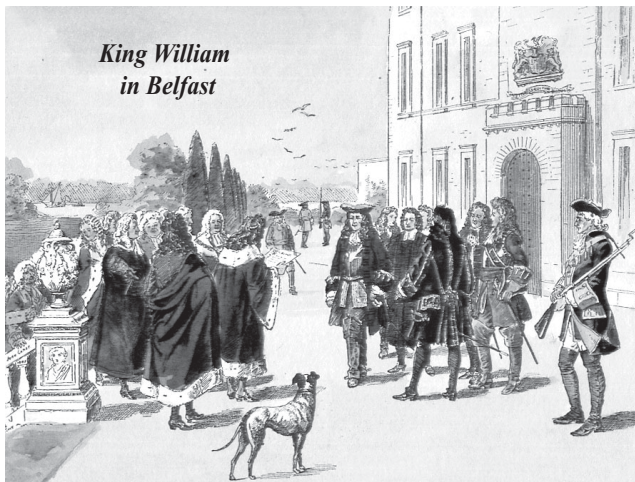
At the end of the seventeenth century private 'Latin schools' were being set up in Belfast and to meet the need for private schooling a David Manson set up a school in High Street to teach his pupils to spell, read, and understand English. In the eighteenth century Belfast Castle burned down and High Street and

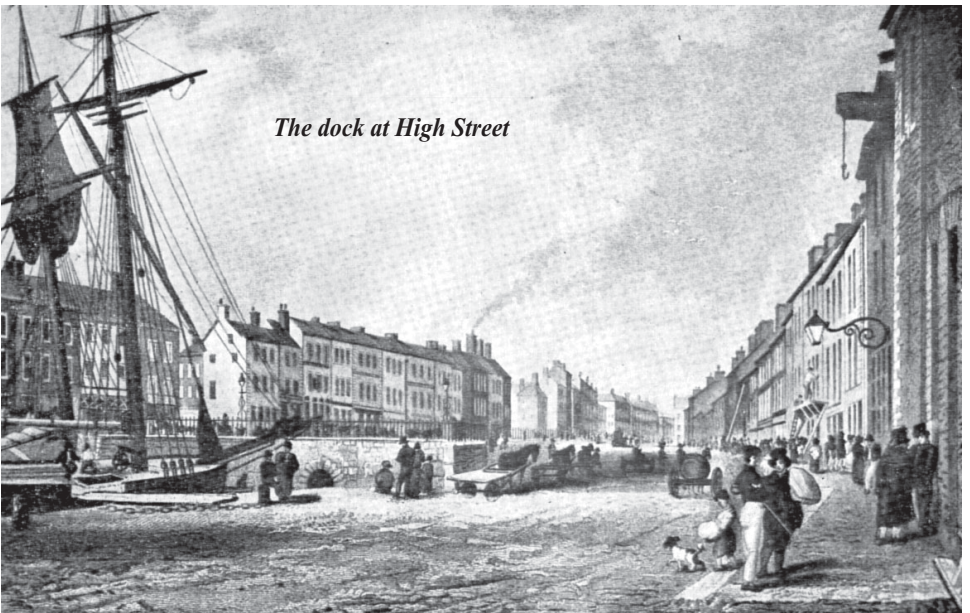
surrounding area developed with the changed society in Ulster. The 5th Earl of Donegall was responsible for building new brick houses built to strict standards. Between 1750 and 1775 over 143 emigrant ships left Belfast for America. The higher rents and fines imposed for the renewal of leases in Ulster encouraged both Protestants and some

Catholics (their migration was mostly during the nineteenth century during the famine) to take a ship across the Atlantic, not a pleasant experience in the eighteenth century, and this caused great discontent across Ireland.

BURNED TO DEATH

One such ship was the Sally, which sailed for America from High Street in 1762. High Street at this time was best reached from Ann Street by cutting through the lane by the old Parish Church. The castle, destroyed by fire in 1708, when three sisters of the 4th Earl of Donegall burned to death, was no longer at the top of High Street. The Chichester's had moved from Belfast and as they were no longer resident they had neglected Belfast until the beginning of the 1760's. Now in 1762 Belfast was being rebuilt and High





The dock at High Street

Street thronged with traders and dealers while importers, shipping agents a sugar refiners in the entries were full with customers. Passengers would cross the Farset by one of the High Street bridges to New Street where there were shipping agents. The fare would have been £5, or passengers could choose to travel as an indentured servant, agreeing to work without pay for a fixed term on arrival in America on a plantation in return for a free passage. A longboat would leave the dock and the vessels such as the Sally would be boarded in Belfast Lough.

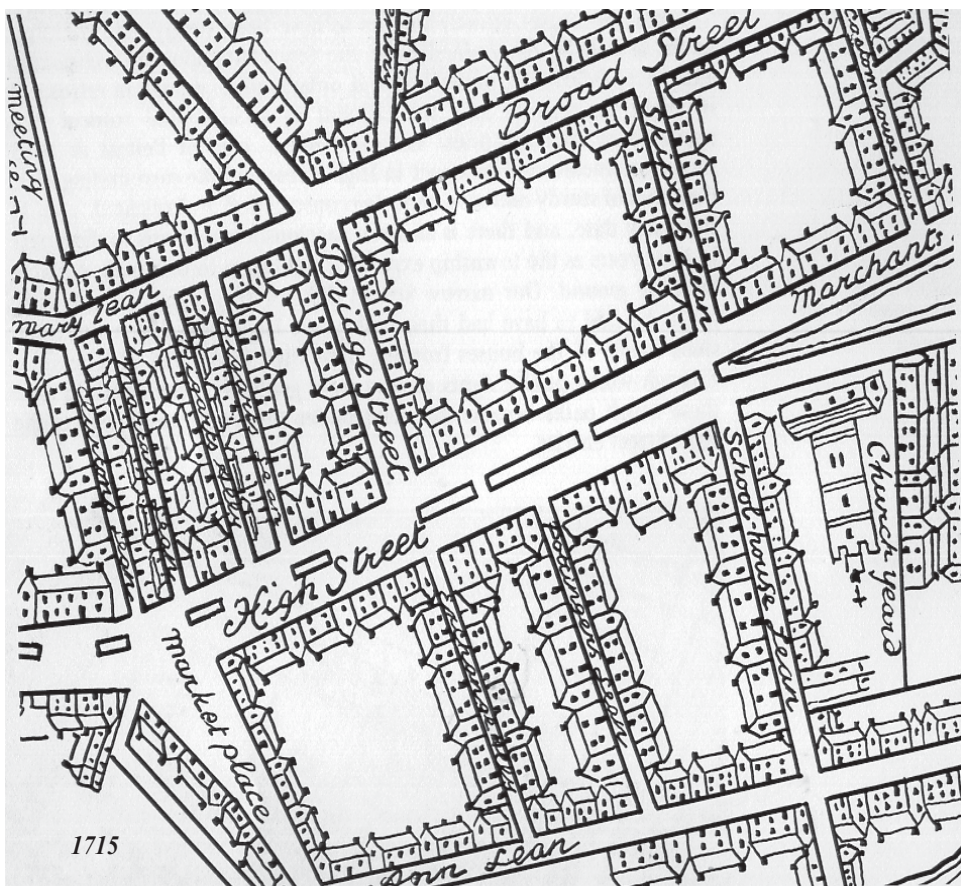
One emigrant on the Sally called John Smilie wrote to his father describing the voyage, who then sent it to

the Belfast Newsletter who published it for the benefit of prospective emigrants.

On the 31st we lost sight of Ireland....we had full allowance of bread and water, only for the first fortnight, then we were reduced to three pints of water per day, and three pounds and half of bread a week...we had a south west

wind which drove u so far north that our weather became extremely cold, with much rain and gales of wind...a storm which lasted 9 hours... and we spied a mountain of ice of prodigious size....on 16th July we espied a sail an we gave her chase, and fired six guns at her but the fog soon hid her from us....





And after 10 weeks at sea:
Hunger and thirst had now reduced our crew to the last extremity; nothing was now to be heard aboard our ship but the cries of distressed children, and of their distressed mothers, unable to relieve them. Our ship was now a spectacle of horror! Never a day passed without one of our crew put over board; many killed themselves by drinking salt water or their own urine... our captain showed no the

least remorse o pity despite never rationing neither his, nor his mistress, nor five others who were his favourites.....on the 29th August a great shower of rain I ever saw was sent on that day of the Lord which was the means of preserving our lives.
A few days later the Sally landed in America but only after sixty four passengers died and after a passage of fourteen weeks and five days. The horrors of the

journey did not deter the emigrants who thronged High Street looking for passage.

WIDEST STREET

The lower Farset River was covered over in stages from 1770 onwards, making High Street the widest street or road in Belfast. At the bottom of the street ships tied up at high tide in Town Dock and at Chichester Dock, butter, salt beef and pork, bleached linens and barrels of cured herring and salmon

were lifted on board the vessels for export. Wine and brandies, raw sugar, exotic fruits, salt, coal, timber staves, iron ingots and other foreign imports were brought up from the dock by mules or in horse drawn cars.

POOR HOUSE

By the end of the eighteenth century Belfast was a flourishing port with a population of around 19,000. Two families dominated in High Street and were typical of the Presbyterian merchant class, which were prominent in the commercial and industrial life. Francis Joy founded the *Belfast Newsletter*, the first paper for the town, in 1737, and it was so successful that it quickly transferred from Bridge Street to larger premises on

the corner of McKittricks entry and High Street. Joy's sons edited the paper and the Blackstaff River at Cromac was dammed to power their paper mill. Henry Joy led a group of businessmen to build the White Linen Hall in Donegall Square in 1783 and Robert Joy designed and promoted the building of the Poor House at what is now Clifton Street. Captain John McCracken lived next door to the Joys in High Street near Church Lane. He was a ship owner, sail maker, and proprietor of a ropewalk at Chichester Quay. He was known as the first man to import the first bale of raw cotton into Belfast. Captain McCracken married Francis Joy's daughter, Ann, and the third son born in 1770 was Henry Joy McCracken.

HENRY JOY McCracken
The Joys and the McCracken's became very involved with the Volunteer movement, founded in 1778, not only to defend Ireland from French invasion but also to campaign for Irish legislative independence and parliamentary reform. They as Presbyterians resented the Anglican power and also sympathised with the Catholics who sought emancipation from the Penal Laws. Henry Joy McCracken was one of many who were prepared to take up arms to achieve democracy. In June 1798 McCracken led a rebellion of United Irish insurgents from Craigarogan rath to Antrim Town. By July Belfast was under martial law and McCracken was spotted as he made his way



The old Belfast Poor House



Henry Joy McCracken

to Belfast to try to get a ship out of the country. He was handed over by a fellow Irishman who refused a bribe not to betray him.

FREE FROM CARE OR TROUBLE

On Monday 16th July 1798 McCracken was brought under escort to the Donegall Arms Hotel in High Street, temporarily requisitioned as a gaol. Late in the afternoon, Henry Joy McCracken was

taken through Cornmarket and down Ann Street to held in the old Artillery Barracks. Next day he was brought by Bridge Street to the Exchange, where six years before he had listened, fascinated, to performers at the Belfast Harp Festival. Mary Ann McCracken his sister made a record of what happened:

The moment I set my eyes on him I was struck with the extraordinary serenity and

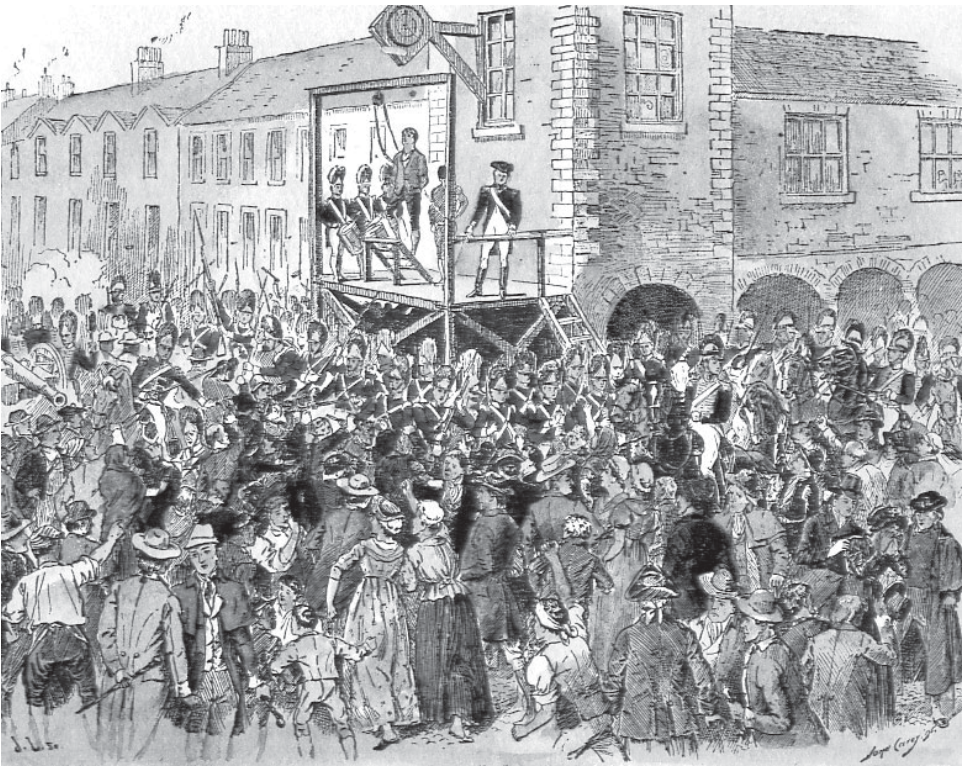
composure of his look. This was no time to think about such things, but yet I could not help gazing on him, it seemed to me that I had never seen him look so well, so full of healthful bloom, so free from the slightest trace of care or trouble, as at that moment, when he was perfectly aware of his approaching fate.

FAREWELL FATHER

Found guilty McCracken was offered his life if he would give up his fellow conspirators. It was reported that his father said, 'Harry, my dear, I know nothing of the business, but you know best what you ought to do.' Henry Joy McCracken replied, 'Farewell father', and then whispered to Mary Ann, 'You must be prepared for my conviction'. Mary Ann cut a lock from her brother's hair, which she was not allowed to keep, and she later recalled:



Mary Ann McCracken with her niece Maria, daughter of Henry Joy McCracken



The hanging of Henry Joy McCracken

About 5pm he was ordered to the place of execution, the old market house, the ground of which had been given to the town by his great, great grandfather. I took his arm, and we walked together to the place of execution....clasp my hands around him, (I did not weep till then), I said I could bear anything but leaving him. Three times he kissed me, and entreated I would go; and looking round to recognize some friend to put me in charge of, he beckoned to a Mr Boyd, and said, 'He will take charge of you...'

HANGED

Henry Joy McCracken was hanged in High Street a few yards from his family home, outside the Market House, where Dunnes Stores now stands. The McCracken's standing in the town ensured a more dignified death for Henry Joy McCracken than for others executed as traitors at the time.

The fly blown heads of a Crumlin lawyer and two Ballynahinch insurgents were already on spikes outside the market house. John Smyth recalled "the front of the market house was

seldom without a skeleton in chains, the corner of it never without a ghastly head rotting in the open air".

In 1811 work began on the building of St Georges Church where the old Chapel of the Ford stood. The two-storey church was built in sandstone and the portico came from the Earl Bishop of Derry's unfinished Ballyscullion House near Castledawson of 1788 and was brought to Belfast by lighters along the Lagan Navigation. The Church was completed in 1816.



*Belfast map showing
High Street in 1819*



By 1819 many streets, entries and lanes had risen up around High Street. The following are some of those recorded at this time:

Bridge Street, Castle Street, Prince's Street, Skipper Street, Byrty's Entry, Caddell's Entry, Crown Entry, Graham's Entry, Joy's Entry, Mitchell's Entry, Orrs Entry, Pottingers Entry, Sugar House Entry, Church Lane, Forest Lane, Legg's Lane, Store Lane, Weigh House Lane, Chichester Quay, Hanover Quay, Corn Market and Hamiltons Court.

RESIDENTS

The Street Directory from 1819 gives us some idea of what High Street may have looked like by the names and occupations of the people who lived there or who ran businesses in the street.

Alexander Blackwell was a Linen draper at number 67, Samuel Bryson an Apothecary at 86, Margaret Cardwell a Straw bonnet manufacturer, Carlton Conway, Sarah Armstrong and Thomas Bell were all Haberdashers, Henry Curry, skipper at number 115, William Dunlop ran the Bear Tavern at 140, J & H Anderson were surgeons at 35 and Samuel Arnott was also a surgeon at number 8 High Street. Alexander Black, Wm Biggar, Wm Brice, John Cavan, Davison & Charley and John Donnelly all ran grocery businesses in High Street.

Booksellers and stationers were also well represented in High Street with Samuel Archibald, Samuel Archer and McMillan all present.

ESCAPING FAMINE

By 1851 the population of Belfast had risen to 87,000 and the streets in and around High Street were densely populated as more and more people moved from the county to the town to escape the famine ravaging Ireland and also to work in the many mills that had been built in Belfast. Andrew Nicholl, one of the most popular artists from Belfast, was born in Church Lane and spent much of his time as an artist giving drawing lessons, as well as working as a compositor with the *Northern Whig*.

He later left Belfast to live in London, Dublin and Ceylon working as a full time landscape painter. After his death in 1886 over 300 of his paintings were exhibited in

Belfast in order 'to vindicate the reputation of the late Mr Nicholl as an artist of no mean order.'

CENTRE OF SHOPPING

Photography became popular in the late 1800's and William Abernethy set up business in High Street. He provided all purpose love letters to accompany his photographs and he marketed his business not only to those living in the city but also to the country people who often visited the city to trade in High Street.

By the 1860's High Street had become the centre of fashionable shopping, and it was described as an airy, wide and of imposing aspect with magnificent shops and warehouses.

MILK OF MAGNESIA

Sir James Murray the inventor of Milk of Magnesia was a resident of High Street and the poet and archivist Samuel Ferguson was born in High Street. John McGee opened his London Hat warehouse at 42-46 High Street which received a regular weekly supply of 'Best London Hats, so that Gentlemen may depend on always getting the newest shapes an the very best quality'. McGee went on to give the world the "Ulster" great coat available from



**THE LARGEST AND MOST EXTENSIVE
S A L E
Of Real Sheffield Plated Goods, Fine Cutlery,
&c. &c. &c.**

EVER OFFERED TO THE PUBLIC, IN BELFAST,
FOR ONE MONTH ONLY !
TO CLOSE A CONSIGNMENT.

EDWARD CRIBBEN,
3, High-Street,

BEGS to inform the Public in general, that he has received instructions from one of the FIRST HOUSES in SHEFFIELD, to SELL OFF

A LARGE and ELEGANT ASSORTMENT of NEW and FASHIONABLE GOODS,

AT MANUFACTURERS' PRICES; VIZ.:-

(DEDUCTING 25 PER CENT. OFF INVOICE PRICE.)

Such an opportunity may never again occur, of the Public being able to supply themselves with equal advantage in the above line, as the English Houses are withdrawing their Travellers from the Irish Market. The Stock of PLATED GOODS will be all

WARRANTED SHEFFIELD MANUFACTURE,

WITH REAL SILVER EDGES AND CONSISTS OF :

Branches and Candlesticks;
Dinner, Card, Table and Chamber ditto;
Snuffers and Trays;
Liquor and Fruit Frames;
Dishes and Covers;
Wine Coolers;
Tea Urns;
Large and Small Salvers;

Bread and Cake Baskets;
Epergnes;
Large and Small Coasters;
Tea and Coffee Pots;
Sugar Bowls;
Cream Ewers;
Toast Racks;
Egg Frames, Salt Stands, &c.

IN THE
Steel Plated Line,

Dinner and Desert Knives and Forks, in Cases;
Soup and Sauce Ladles;

Fish Slices;
Marrow Scoops; Nut Crackers, &c.

**THE CUTLERY CONSISTS OF
TRANSPARENT IVORY HANDLED KNIVES AND FORKS;**

RAZORS, OF EVERY DESCRIPTION;

PEN-KNIVES; SCISSORS, &c.;

A Splendid Assortment of every description of

J E W E L L E R Y ;

CONSISTING OF

**Rings, Brooches, Locketts, Ear-Rings, Pins, Gold and Silver
Guard Chains, Seals, Keys, &c.**

MORDANT'S PENCILS, SOLID SILVER.

TWO BEAUTIFUL FRENCH CLOCKS, WARRANTED;

A great variety of Gilt and Fancy GOODS, to be sold at one-half of the Original Cost.
A handsome Assortment of Bronze Table LAMPS; INK STANDS; and Chimney ORNAMENTS.
A large Assortment of BRITANNIA METAL GOODS.

Belfast, Jan. 30, 1832.



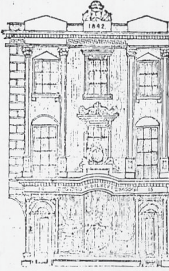
**Belfast Map of 1900 showing
High Street**

1866. The Ulster was a voluminous, heavy and utterly weatherproof, and became well known as the coat worn by Sherlock Holmes.

**WILLIAM GILBERT,
JEWELLER, SILVERSMITH,
AND WATCHMAKER,
16 HIGH-STREET, BELFAST.**

Importer of Geneva Watches, Clocks, Music-Boxes, Accordions, &c.

BEST
LONDON
MADE
WATCHES.
Dardin's
GLOBES.



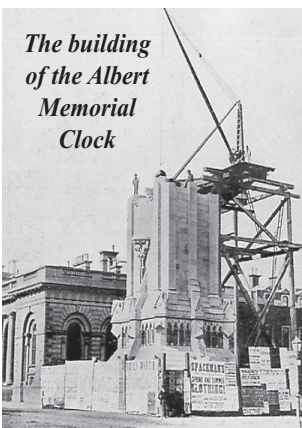
Superior
HIGHFIELD
Plate,
FINEST
STEEL
RAZORS.

Optical, Mathematical,
AND
PHILOSOPHICAL INSTRUMENTS;
TABLE AND OTHER CUTLERY.

W. G. respectfully informs the Nobility, Gentry, and Inhabitants of the North of Ireland generally, that he has opened the above Concern with an assortment of Articles of FIRST-RATE QUALITY, and NEWEST FASHION, employing Workmen of Superior Talents, and sparing no expense to make his Establishment equal to any in the Three Kingdoms. Having purchased his entire Stock for Cash, and being determined to sell for a Moderate Profit, he respectfully solicits a share of Public Support.

ALBERT CLOCK

The Albert Memorial Clock, or simply the Albert Clock as it is best known, was



Looking up High Street in 1897

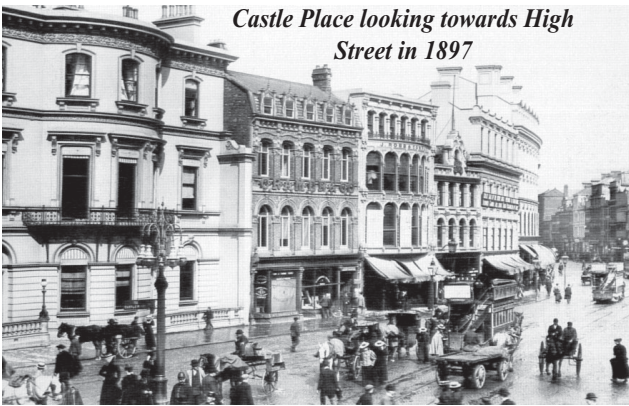


constructed between 1865 and 1870 at the end of High Street, close the river. It was built as a memorial to Queen Victoria's late Prince Consort, Prince Albert, and it stands 113 feet tall. A statue of the Prince in robes of a Knight of the Garter stands on the western side of the tower. A two tonne bell is housed in the tower. Designed by William J Barre, who also designed the Ulster Hall in Bedford Street, it is described as a mix of French and Italian Gothic styles. It was built on wooden piles on marsh, reclaimed land around the River Farset, the top of the tower leans four feet off the vertical and is known colloquially as Belfast's "Leaning Tower of Pisa". The Albert Clock was recently restored in 2002 during which the wooden foundations were strengthened, the majority of the decaying carvings were replaced and the entire tower was cleaned. Being situated close to the docks, the tower

was one infamous for being frequented by prostitutes plying their trade with visiting sailors.

However the regeneration of the area and in particular the Custom's House Square has turned the area into an attractive, modern public space with trees, fountains and sculptures. In 1947 the film *Odd Man Out* starring James Mason was filmed in Belfast with the Albert Clock as a central location, although neither the town nor the clock is identified in the film.





ECONOMIC INDEPENDENCE

By 1901 only one fifth of householders living in Belfast had been born there. Belfast offered the prospect of moving up the occupational and educational ladder, as well as providing higher earnings than could be obtained in the countryside. Most migrants arrived without skills and remained so and for women, work in Belfast promised some economic and social independence. There were

166 butchers in the High Street area of Belfast alone at this time, along with 1195 shoemakers, 312 tavern, 73 hotels, 300 coach and car drivers who all plied their trade from a base in Castle Place.

FISRT CINEMA

In 1908 the first cinema opened in Belfast at St Georges Hall part of St Georges Buildings in High Street, designed by Thomas Jackson & Son in 1881. The cinema opened to a packed

audience of 1500 and its first film was Bluebeard on 17th August 1908. It closed just eight years later as the public demanded more luxurious surroundings. It later became a dance hall with balcony on all four sides and was also used for boxing matches up to the 1960's. In 1912 the Panopticon Cinematograph Theatre opened to later become the Lyric Cinema Theatre. It had the only grand electric orchestral piano in Ireland and closed only when badly damaged in the Blitz of 1941.

BOMBS

The Blitz over Belfast of 1941 caused enormous damage to High Street and surrounding area. The buildings damaged or completely destroyed were,

*Junction of High Street and
Bridge Street following the
Luftwaffe raid on Belfast in 1941*



37-43, Gt Georges Buildings, Orrs Entry, 20-22, 42-46 the Panopticon Cinematograph Theatre, Sugarhouse Entry, 48-56 now River House, 70-74 Imperial Buildings, 78-80 on the corner of Skipper Street, and the Albert Hotel at number 82-94. The style and variety of the buildings in High Street was now replicated in the rebuilding of the area and this had an effect on its influence within the city. It was no longer a meeting place or a major point of travel and the authority it held by the prominent citizens and businessmen shifted to the area around the Belfast City Hall completed in 1907.

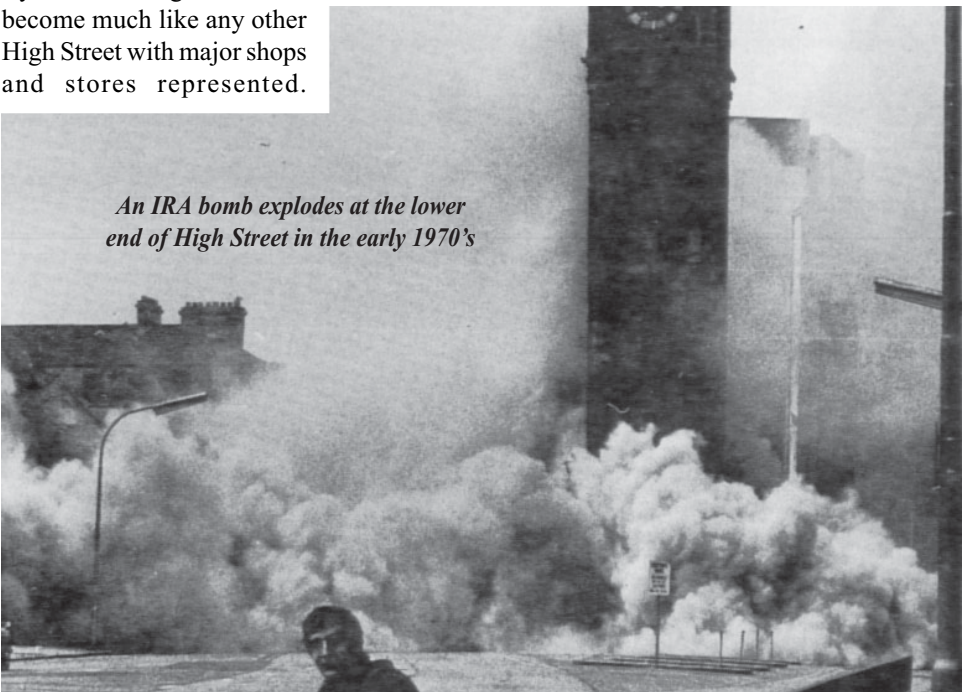
By the 1970s High Street had become much like any other High Street with major shops and stores represented.

Many of the older buildings had been demolished and replaced with modern buildings of little architectural or aesthetic value. After 30 years of conflict High Street had become a rather run down part of the city centre but in recent years is experiencing a new lease of life with the major investment and development of the Laganside area and large shopping developments in the area. It remains the main pedestrian link from the heart of the city to the river and is often thronged with tourists on the way to the riverside or queuing to take an open top bus tour of the city. There

was even talk in recent years of a plan to open up the river again, and turn this part of Belfast into a “mini Venice”!

As we’re now several years within the new millennium High Street is changing dramatically. In the overall city centre many traders who have survived the countless IRA bombs on the city over 30 years are now being forced out by developers and with multi-national outlets being established Belfast’s High Street, which has survived the German Luftwaffe and the IRA bombs looks as though its going die after all - this time in the name of progress!

An IRA bomb explodes at the lower end of High Street in the early 1970’s



High Street
21st June 2007



For More on the Local and Factual History of Belfast

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