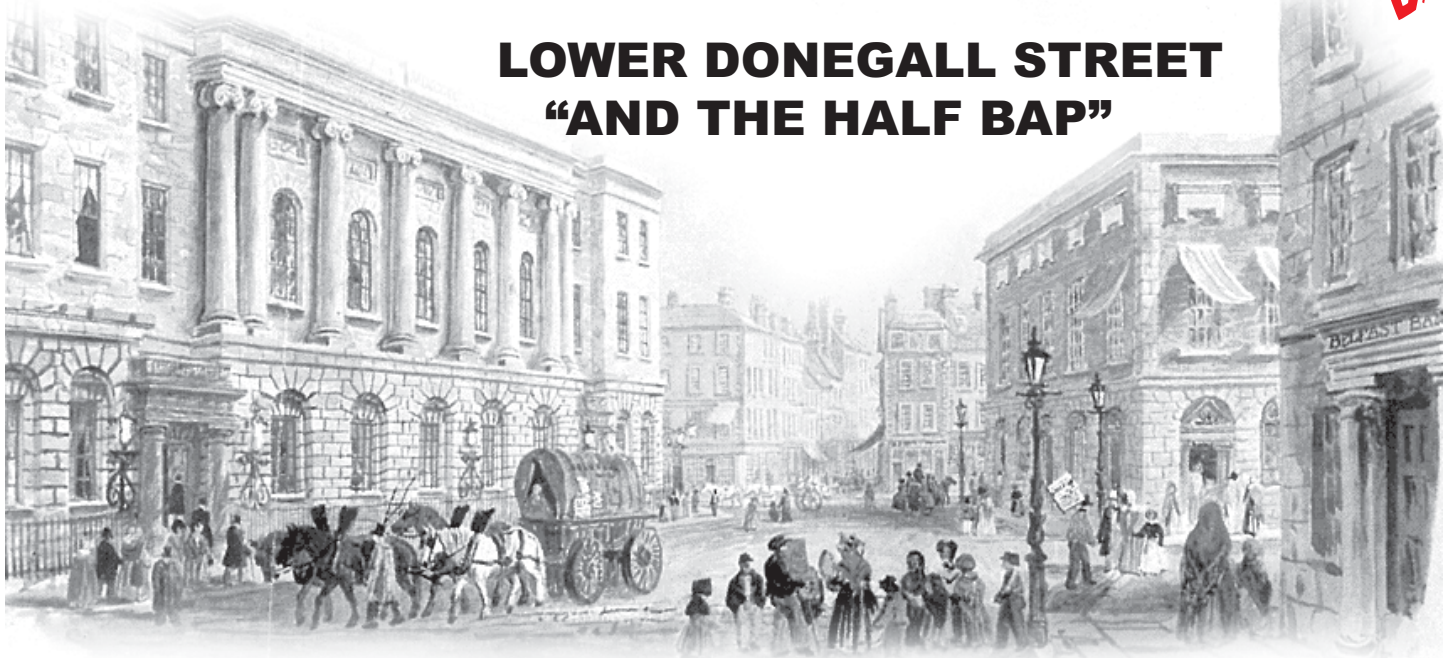


The Darker Side of Belfast's History

LOWER DONEGALL STREET “AND THE HALF BAP”



As important historically as it is important from the commercial point of view, Donegall Street forms a link with eighteenth century Belfast. It was laid out in 1754 when the struggle for the independence of the Irish Parliament was going on and when Belfast was the sole property of the fourth Earl of Donegall, his estate being in the hands of trustees. The *Belfast Newsletter* had been established seventeen years earlier in Bridge Street and in the edition of September, 1754, the following appeared:-

Six or seven new houses are now building, and will be finished this season, on the ground laid out for a new street. The new street will be very handsome - 600 yards long, 60 feet wide, and the houses three storeys high. The Linen Hall, ranging on one side of the street - about the centre - will add to its beauty. (No.1)

This new street was first called Linenhall Street, and later became Donegall Street.

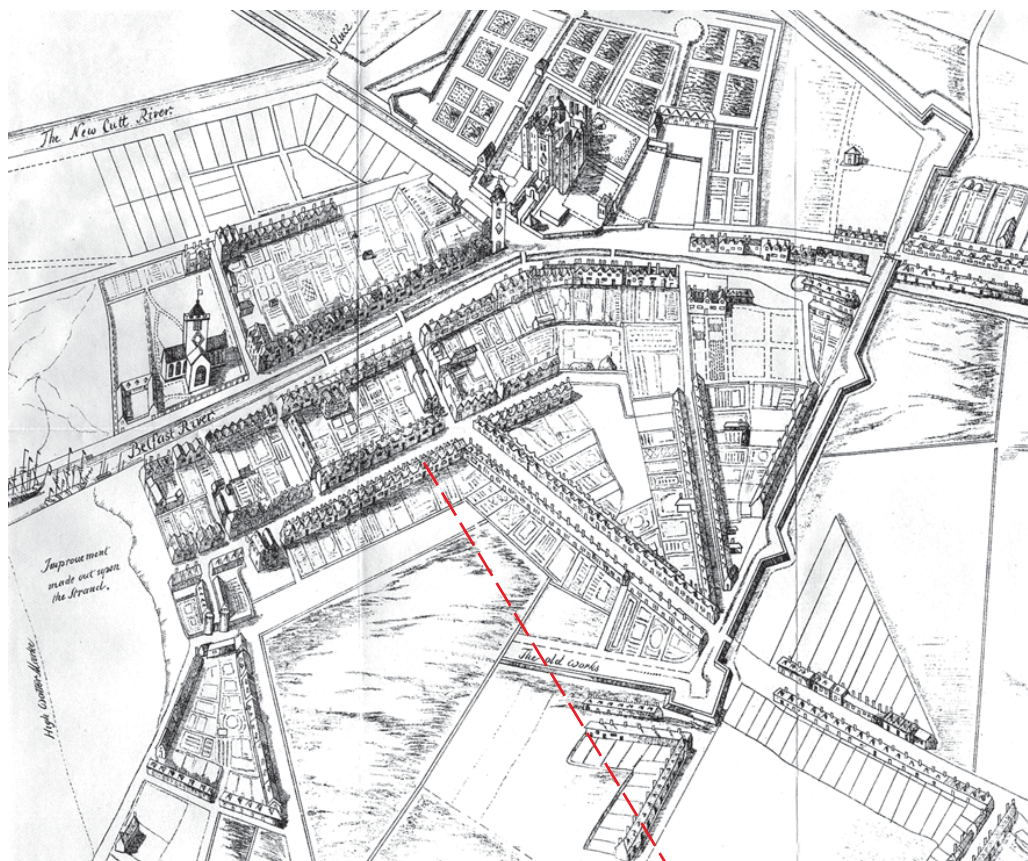
The Linen Hall referred to was on the site now occupied by Belfast Cathedral, and, when this was considered the most suitable place for the erection of the new parish church, the Brown Linen Hall was established in its stead on the other side of the street. The Brown Linen Hall was opened in 1773, and the clearing of this ground in 1920 removed the last important link with eighteenth century Donegall Street.

In 1768, David Manson, the famous Belfast schoolmaster, erected a house in Donegall Street, almost opposite Talbot Street, and in his advertisement in the *Belfast Newsletter* stated that it commanded “a delightful prospect of land and water.” “The healthful air” of the street was also mentioned as an inducement to parents to send their children to the new school. In this connection, it may be mentioned that, scarcely thirty years later, Dr William Drennan, one of the founders of the United Irishmen, writing from Dublin to his sister, Mrs McTier, expressed a different opinion as to the appearance of Donegall Street. “I suppose my mother’s complaint to be merely a

Donegall Street cold,” he said, “for I consider it as the bleakest situation of the bleakest street in the bleak north which she has chosen for the cradle of her old age, and I wish she would change it.”

In its early years Donegall Street, in the words of the Belfast historian George Benn, was “an aristocratic neighbourhood - in fact, the Donegall Place of its day,” and the opening of the first place of business caused great annoyance to the residents. The most remarkable figure in eighteenth century Donegall Street was undoubtedly David Manson, who, in addition to being a schoolmaster, conducted a brewery, wrote a book on hand-loom weaving, improved the spinning wheel, and introduced what was called a flying chariot, perhaps the forerunner of the modern guider. Many sidelights on his numerous activities are available from the old newspapers. In the *Bel-*

fast Newsletter of July 1st, 1768, Manson advertised that “Children and youths are boarded and taught the English language by David Manson, at his house in Donegall Street, Belfast, which is large and commodious, being built on purpose.” In this house Manson carried on his school for fourteen years. In the early part of the nineteenth century it was occupied by Robert Gemmill, a well-to-do muslin manufacturer. From 1827 until 1870 the house was used as the local office of the Provincial Bank, and when the Bank moved to Hercules Place (now Royal Avenue) the old school became a furniture warehouse, and was destroyed by fire on the 30th of January, 1891. From this house David Manson moved to the corner of Donegall Street and Waring Street opposite the old Exchange where he died on the 2nd of March, 1792. He was interred by torchlight in the old Parish Churchyard in High Street. In an

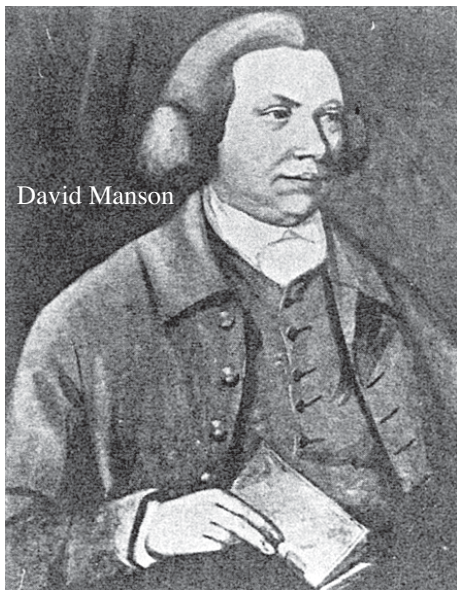


ABOVE - The four corners at the junction of Donegall Street and Waring Street.

RIGHT - Old Belfast map of 1685 with the line showing where Donegall Street was later laid out.

In recent times there have been various organisations in Belfast who have been making attempts to change the history of our city. This seems to be occurring all over with a perfect example being Lower Donegall Street. Over the years developers have decided to call this immediate area 'Cathedral Quarter' but to the citizens of Belfast it is, and always will be, the 'Half Bap.' The Glenravel Project have been promoting the factual history of Belfast for years - "warts and all" and if this doesn't suit people then there is absolutely nothing we can do about it. After all, as the developers should be well aware, we can change the future - we can't change the past!





David Manson

article in the *Ulster Journal of Archaeology*, published in 1908, Mr J. Marshall quoted the following pen picture from an eye witness of the scene:-

All classes respected him, and when death called him away his admirers assembled and insisted on burying him by torch-light. The vivid scene comes back to me with the fresh recollection of yesterday. The slow, measured tread of the vast multitude, the lights almost endless in profusion, waving, flickering, then stretching out a lurid flame, in which the dark pall of the coffin glistened as with a ruby hue, the faces thrust out of the windows to see the procession pass, and the shadows thrown upon them by the moving lights - ah! those were the times when there were faith and friendship and appreciation of worth amongst the people of Belfast.

Another school which was established in this area was the Belfast Royal Academy situated today on the Cliftonville Road but how many people are aware that an armed rebellion was once staged in the school?



ABOVE - Junction of Donegall Street and Academy Street showing the principals house at the corner.

INSET The Rev. William Bruce

LEFT - Donegall Street in 1965

RIGHT - Destruction caused at the junction of Donegall Street and Academy Street during the German blitz

The scene of this rebellion was not at the Cliftonville Road premises but in the old school which was situated in Academy Street (hence the streets name). (No. 2) In the schools early years one of those who had taken it over was The Rev. William Bruce. Bruce, described by the sister of William Drennan as 'henpecked' made many changes one of which was to abolish the Easter holiday's. Needless to say this did not go down too well and in the twilight hours of the 12th of April, 1792, a number of the pupils sneaked out of their dormitory, seized five pistols and a considerable amount of ammunition as well as a large quantity of food, and barricaded themselves into the maths room. A short time later Bruce was informed of the matter and told them that if they gave up the matter would go no further. His wife told them to accept the offer but when she turned to go the boys opened fire on her. Mr and Mrs Bruce were so outraged and after obtaining a crowbar they tried to smash their way into the room but retreated after coming under a considerable amount of gunfire.

The school's president, John Holmes, was sent for but he was also fired upon as was a mason who tried to pour water down a chimney. The sovereign of Belfast (the Rev. William Bristow) arrived and he informed the boys that the firing of pistols was a capital offence but he was informed that he would be shot in the wig if he did not go, even though two of the rebels were relatives.

A letter was sent to the committee which read:-

We the supposed rebellious students of the Belfast Academy, having repeatedly applied to Dr Bruce for holidays at Easter, which he has as often refused us (although he granted it to those who go home every Saturday) have now, after the example of other schools (contrary to our own inclination) taken up arms to endeavour to gain by force what was denied to us by entreaty. Any Gentleman will not hesitate to imagine that the Strictness of the Rules of this Academy is intolerable. The conditions on which we will surrender are the following:-

First

Allow us for holidays, three days at Easter and two at Whitsuntide.

Secondly

One only for every new boarder (this is customary in every school)

Thirdly

Permit any boy asked out to any Gentleman's house on Sunday to stay to nine o'clock in the evening.

Fourthly

Allow any boy asked out on Saturday to stay till nine o'clock on Sunday.

Fifthly

That you will not shorten our vacation.

Sixthly

That you will neither cause to be beat nor expelled any boy after we surrender.

To Conclude

As our conditions are not difficult to be granted we hope that you Gentlemen, professors of liberty, will incline a favourable ear to our request. If, Gentlemen, you grant our request and Dr Bruce will pledge his honour to see the articles herein required performed we will immediately surrender.

After further deliberations and a promise that they would not be beaten the boys surrendered. The Rev. Bruce lied and the following day they were each taken to the common hall and whipped in front of the schools Patrons and other pupils until their blood flowed from their backs - a practice the Rev. Bruce carried out quite freely even without an armed rebellion.

At the opposite corner in Academy Street stood Belfast's first Post Office, the sign of which can be seen today in the Ulster Museum. (No. 3) In these days the mail system was certainly very different from the modern service given the fact that the post had to arrive by stage coaches which had armed guards placed on them to prevent highway robbery.

Most of the area northward from Donegall Street and along what is now York Street was known as the 'Point Fields.' (No. 4) This was mainly large open spaces which seemed to attract many types of sports. This consisted mainly of various games but also included many 'sports' which involved extreme cruelty to animals. The most notable was cock fighting and dog fights but also included was bull and badger baiting where the unfortunate animals were usually torn to bits by vicious dogs. There are also a few cases of bear baiting. Here was also where most of the prize fights took place in which two strong men fought bare fisted in an early and bloody form of boxing.

Considerable destruction was caused to this area during the Luftwaffe blitz. During the period before this most people in Belfast believed that they were out of reach for the German planes but in Easter 1941 they were to be proved wrong. In the immediate area there were a lot of targets such as the city





centre, York Street Mill and of course Victoria Barracks. The area where the modern art college is now situated was in fact flattened by the Luftwaffe resulting in numerous deaths due to the stupid belief that Belfast was unreachable. (No. 5)

A house in Robert Street, which was situated directly behind St. Anne's Cathedral, (No. 6) was the scene of the brutal murder of a poor defenceless woman by the name of Mary Anne Phillips in 1888. When police arrived at the scene they found the woman's dead body lying inside the house. She had been badly beaten. The head and face were covered with blood from eight different wounds, varying from two inches to half an inch in length, some of which penetrated to the bone. The police quickly ascertained what had happened with the help of the main witness, an unfortunate young boy of only seven years. He pointed the guilty finger at his father, Arthur McKeown, a married man who was separated and lived at the time at 38 Robert Street with Mary Anne Phillips as husband and wife. He was promptly arrested and remanded in custody.

He eventually went on trial before Mr. Justice Holmes and a twelve man jury at Belfast Crown Court. Counsel for the prosecution opened the case claiming that the evidence which they intended to submit constituted a continuous and unbroken chain of events which would leave the jury without the slightest doubt of the accused's guilt. They then proceeded to call on several witnesses who outlined McKeown's movements on the hours leading up to the murder. This process finished with the evidence of a Mrs Margaret Crommie who on the night in question was standing on the corner of Robert Street at around fifteen minutes after midnight. Arthur McKeown called on her saying that he thought Mary Phillips was dead or dying and that he did not know whether to send for the doctor or the police. Just at that the police came into the street and everyone went into 38 Robert Street.

Constable John Douglas then went to describe the scene before him as he entered the house. In the back room off the kitchen the body of the murdered woman had been lying between the bed and a chest of drawers, parallel to the bed with the head resting on a pillow which was soaked in blood. There was a pool of blood half way between the body and the door which bore the evidence of an attempt to brush the same pool away. While Constable Douglass was examining the scene the accused entered the room and made the following extraordinary statement which the constables took a note of at the time; "You need not be uneasy about her. She has often been

this way before. All the woman wants is to get pumped, then she will be all right. The fact of the matter is, she has me robbed. She went away in July last, taking £7 or £8 with her, and when she got me away at the Maze races she took two or three more out of that chest of drawers. Tonight I got her in a house in Morrow's Entry, and brought her home. Shortly afterwards we went to bed. I was lying at the wall and she next the door. About eleven o'clock the children wakened me, saying their mother was at the drawer again. When I got up she was lying as you see her. I then rose and went out and told Maggie Crommie. She said it would be better to tell the police. There was a bottle of whiskey on the drawers when we went to bed and if you were to see all that is left of it; I suppose she was drunk and fell out of bed. Do you accuse me of giving her foul play?" The police, on conducting a search of the house discovered a mans shirt rolled up under the pillows and covered with blood as well as spots of blood on the accused's clothes. The police also commented on the fact that the bed appeared as if no-one had slept in it that particular night. Dr. W.C. Graham, who examined the body gave it as

did the accused commit the act laid at his charge, and second, if he did commit it, was he so provoked that the act was not done wilfully, feloniously, and of his malign afterthought. He put forward the suggestion that the woman had been murdered by a third party and concluded by urging the jury that if they did not believe a third party was involved they could convict him of a lesser crime of manslaughter if they believed that the crime had not been wilful or premeditated.

The judge then summed up by explaining the law to the jury before they retired to decide their verdict. After a half an hour they jury returned with a verdict of guilty. The accused was taken away to the gaol to await execution.

Arthur McKeown was 35 years of age and was born at Carrick Hill in Belfast. His parents kept a small grocers shop on the corner of Carrick Hill and Kent Street. His two little children aged five and seven were placed in the Belfast Workhouse.

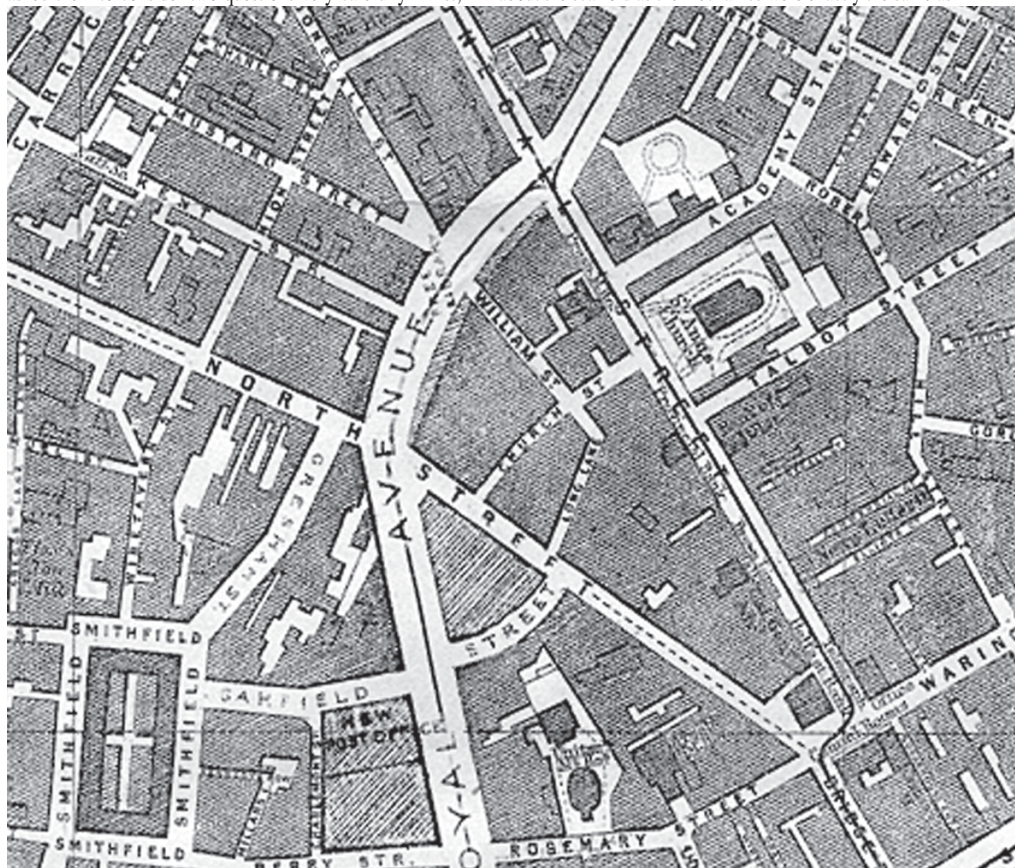
On Monday January 14th at Eight o'clock in the morning McKeown paid the full penalty for his crime on the scaffold at Belfast Prison. Crowds began to gather from Carlisle Circus right up to the gates of the gaol from as early as six thirty



his opinion that the wounds on Mary Phillips' body could not have been self-inflicted nor could they have been as a result of a fall. These findings were supported by Dr. Samuel McKee and so the Crown case closed.

The defence explained the seriousness of the jury's task and asked them to consider two questions very carefully - first,

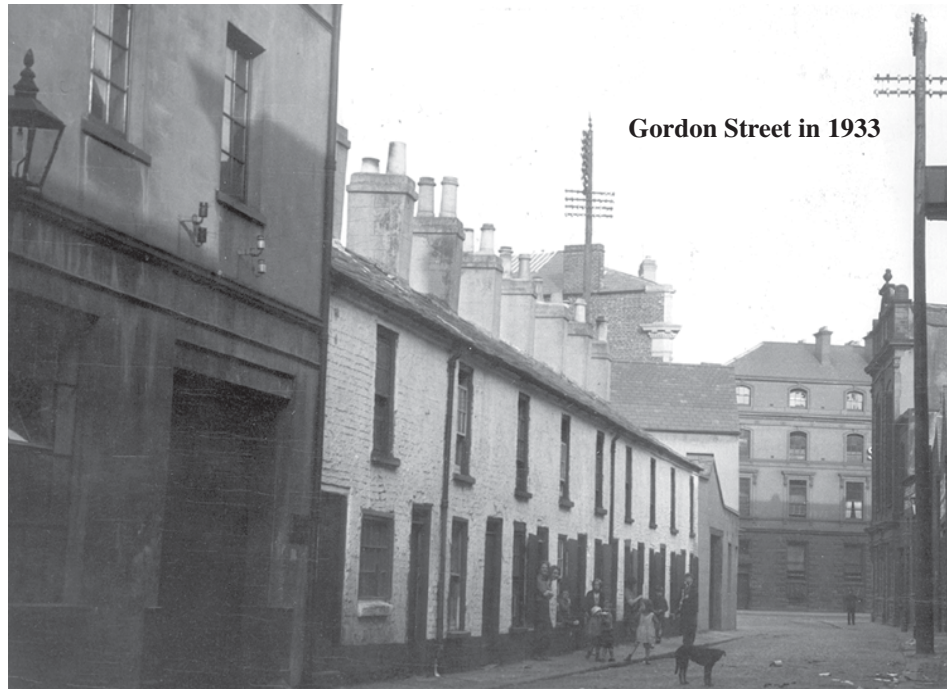
eager to monitor the movements of anyone entering the prison. The scaffold had been erected at the end of 'D' Wing (the eastern wing of the prison). The hangman was Berry and he and his able assistant had to adjust the rope so that all would go smoothly at the fateful hour. There was nothing peculiar about the scaffold as the mechanics were exactly the same as



ABOVE - The junction of Donegall Street and York Street after the Luftwaffe Blitz

CENTRE - Robert Street, was so notorious that the local authorities changed its name to Exchange Street West.

RIGHT - Belfast map of 1888 showing the Lower Donegall Street area



Gordon Street in 1933

those used throughout the country. There was however this difference taken as a whole: the condemned man was asked to ascend a staircase, the platform being on a level with the corridor. This arrangement while convenient from the inside necessitated the digging of a pit underneath, to a depth of some three or four feet to allow a sufficient drop. The bottom of this pit was strewn with sawdust. The press were allowed to visit the scaffold before the actual execution and after this they proceeded to interview the hangman. With a grin on his face that morning Berry explained that he had "pushed off" considerably more than one hundred people in his time and the rope he would be using to hang McKeown would be a tried and trusty Manilla of the Government regulation type, three-quarter inch diameter. He went on to explain that he would

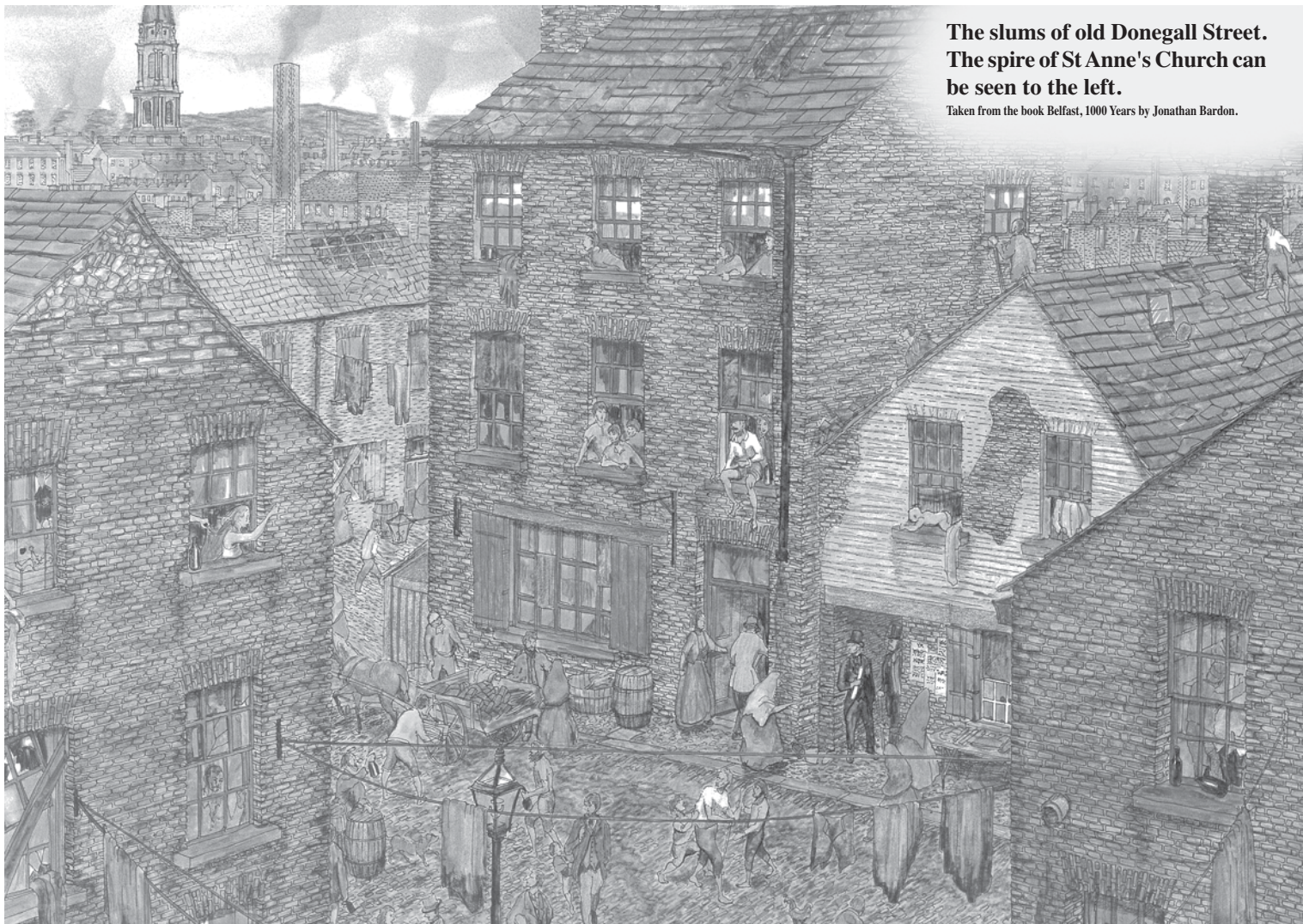
have given the prisoner an eight foot drop, but fearing the weakness of his neck and considering that he was but little over eight stone in weight, he had reduced it to seven. Notwithstanding this reduction he assured the press that the strain on the neck was equal to one ton six and three quarter hundredweight. At that the sound of a heavy door opening along the corridor brought silence among the gathering of journalists. Everyone now stood breathless, and the proverbial pin falling would have caused confusion. The first breach of the dead silence was caused by the Very Rev. John McAllister reciting the prayers for the dying. As the procession came into view it was reported that it was headed by Mr. H. H. Bottomley, the Under-Sheriff, who was followed by Mr. Jeremiah McKenna, the deputy governor of the prison; Dr

Stewart, the medical attendant at the prison; the clergyman already named, accompanied by Rev. Mr. McCartan, and the accused, a number of warders bringing up the rear. Slowly and solemnly the little company approached the hangman. McKeown held a crucifix in his hands and prayed audibly as Berry began to pinion him with the leather straps. When this was done the party proceeded through another door to the scaffold. The hangman now directed the proceedings by placing the condemned man over the trapdoor. The white cap was then placed over his eyes, the legs were strapped together, the assistant then handed the executioner the noose which he adjusted. All this time the man was constantly praying and imploring God's mercy. Stepping aside he touched the lever and Arthur McKeown was launched into eternity. The last words upon his lips were, "Into Thy hands Lord Jesus I commend my spirit". McKeown died without making any formal admission of his guilt.

The black flag was hoisted just on the stroke of eight and the large crowds who having their morbid curiosity satisfied, quietly dispersed.

Previously McKeown had appeared in the Belfast Police Courts on several occasions charged with assaulting the same woman. The street in which he lived in, Robert Street, was so notorious that the local authorities changed its name to Exchange Street West.

Some of Belfast's most notorious slums were situated in the streets and alleys which ran off Lower Donegall Street. Most were the property of Hill Hamilton who lived in a massive mansion at Mount Vernon. The houses were tiny and in many cases they had up to seven families living in each with up to ten people sometimes being crammed into one room. There was no running water and water was often obtained through



The slums of old Donegall Street. The spire of St Anne's Church can be seen to the left.

Taken from the book Belfast, 1000 Years by Jonathan Bardon.

one tap which supplied most of the streets and which was often situated beside a toilet which served the same purpose. It will be no surprise to learn that during the fever and cholera epidemics these diseases spread like wildfire in areas such as these. One person living in the house caught it then it was inevitable that all the others did and when one house was affected then so was the whole lane or street. People were dying at an alarming rate and the grave diggers at the nearby Clifton Street Cemetery could not keep up as was described in the *Belfast Newsletter* on the 9th of July, 1847:-

In the course of the present week we saw no fewer than twenty coffins, containing the corpses of persons who had died of fever in the various hospitals in town during the proceeding twenty four hours lying for internment in that portion of the New Burying Ground appropriated for that purpose; while cart loads would arrive before the common grave was ready for their reception.



For the young boys who lived in areas such as the slums in and around Donegall Street their future was indeed very bleak. Most turned to crime such as pickpocketing and general theft but for others untold suffering and early death was what lay before them.

There is an old superstition that a sweep is a bringer of luck, but why this should be is somewhat of a puzzle, as it was this very occupation which was the cause of it.

Just over 150 years ago unwanted children were sold to sweeps who forced them to climb up the wide chimney's of the period - often while the fire was still burning. For this slave driving the sweep received (to quote from a Belfast price list of 1843) sixpence for cleaning a chimney of two stories, rising by steps of 3d to 1s 3d for a chimney of five stories.

Worse still, as sweeps of that period were notoriously heavy drinkers, the child's only reward for his deadly work would often be a beating after his master had returned from drinking the day's earnings.

The unfortunate children - usually spoken of as 'Climbing Boys' - seldom had beds and often slept on a bag of soot, spending their short lives in an atmosphere of kicks, grime and dirt until death released them.

It is horrible to think that in January, 1834, one of these climbing boys was actually roasted alive while sweeping a Belfast chimney. The local newspapers state that "the householder would not have the fire put out while the sweeping was being done. The child twice came down the chimney, saying it was too hot, but was forced up again until he came down for the last time dead, with large patches of his skin burnt off."

A protest meeting of the townsfolk followed the death of the boy, but it was not until there had been many similar 'accidents' in England that the Government was forced to take action. In 1840 legislation was passed forbidding the use of boys to clean chimneys.

This did not come into force, however, until 1842 and even after that date it seems to have been neglected as in June, 1851, Belfast papers report that the boys were still climbing, and in August of the same year it was estimated that there were upwards of 30 climbing boys working in the town.

It is not to be wondered that these unfortunate children were lacking in morals, as everyone's hand must have seemed to be against them. In January, 1843, a sweeps boy who stole a pair of shoes from a house in which he was working in the Malone Road was given a savage prison sentence of several months. A local newspaper which reported the case seemed quite gleeful at what they called the "Downfall of SOOTY."

Mechanical chimney cleaners were advertised in Belfast in 1841, but so little was thought of child life - despite all the efforts of the reformers - that climbing boys were still operating in Belfast up until the early 1900's.

A Belfast lady who remembered climbing boys as a child remembers an early morning visit of a sweep attended by a climbing boy who was the sweep's own son. The lady of the house was so disgusted with the arrangement that she drove sweep and boy out of the house, and it was many years before a sweep entered it again. The chimneys in the meantime were decarbonised by the 'master' of the house firing up them with a blunderbuss.

In the 1850's a local minister, the Rev. William O'Hanlon of the Donegall Street Congregational Church (No.7), decided to expose these dreadful living conditions through the letters column of the *Northern Whig* newspaper and later compiled them into a book *Walks Among the Poor of Belfast*. In this book O'Hanlon describes the Donegall Street slums as follows:-

Here my companion and myself fixed upon two houses as specimens of the whole. In one of these we found that seven persons live and sleep in the same room - their beds, if such they may be called, lying upon the floor. The desolation and wretchedness of this apartment - without windows, and open in all directions - it is utterly impossible to describe. Four of the persons huddled thus together are females, the other three males. And among these females, two, a mother and her grown up daughter, have no affinity with the other inmates. In the other house in the same "row" we discovered that a family of

seven sleep not only in the same room, but in the same bed. This information we had from the poor half naked mother herself. Here the eldest daughter is nineteen years of age, and the eldest son twelve. The revolting, disgusting and heart rending spectacle presented by the interior of this hovel, and by its inmates, it is impossible to forget. It haunts one like a loathsome and odious spectre, from which the eye and the thoughts cannot escape.

We entered Johnny's Entry, which lies off Talbot Street, and here we found some degrading and demoralising practice prevailing. In the very first house we visited in this place, the husband, wife and six children all sleep together, the eldest son being fourteen and the eldest daughter twelve years of age. Morrow's Entry runs between Hill Street and Gratten Street and here, also, in the very first house we entered, we learned that the father (the mother is dead) and all his children occupy but one sleeping apartment, the eldest daughter being twenty six and another daughter seventeen years of age. I should add, however, that my companion, whose walk, as a town missionary, lies among people of the same social grade, informs me that he often finds two, and even three, families all occupying the same room - fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters, all sleeping indiscriminately upon the floor.

Gratten Street was a small street off Gordon Street which was the centre of the slum areas and which was later renamed Dunbar Street (No. 8) In 1870 a man named James McKenna owned its only public house which in reality was a hive for prostitutes and criminals. In February of that year Mr McKenna died in a tragic accident with his new wife in Maghera when they were suffocated in a room in which they were staying in. The public house, which was at the junction of Talbot Street, continued but this time with the ghost of James McKenna. Since his death many of the regulars continued to state that they had seen Mr McKenna in the upstairs rooms and these sightings were also by the new owners who were quite sober at the time. Those who saw this claimed that it was clearly Mr McKenna and was life like as opposed to being the traditional ghost image. It was never seen for any great length of time as each sighting only lasted a few seconds before completely disappearing.

Today when we think of unearthing skeletons in the centre of a city we think of television programmes such as Time Team but over the decades quite a few have been unearthed in Belfast. For example a skull found recently at a dig at the junction of Waring Street and Hill Street (No. 9) cast new light on old medical practices. The male skull which may date from medieval times had holes drilled in it. In ancient times this practice - trephination - was used to release the pressure which people then believed caused everything from migraine and epilepsy to madness. Today a similar albeit more scientific form of trephination is still used to relieve pressure on the brain following an injury such as a depressed brain fracture. Thankfully for the Waring Street 'patient', archaeologists believe he probably died naturally from 'peritonitis'. In all probability medical students of the time were then allowed to practice the art of trephination on the skull - which would explain why no healing marks are evident. But how it came to rest in Waring Street is a mystery which we may never solve. During the Victorian period this corner was occupied by an R.I.C. Barrack.

In nearby High Street quite a few skeletons were unearthed when the old river was being covered indicating that in those days many bodies of the dead were simply thrown into the river which ran down the centre of High Street.

Skipper Street is the small street which connects Waring Street to High Street. (No. 10) Not much is on it today but at the turn of the last century it was a busy commercial area and at No. 3 was an office used by the military for recruiting into the Royal Marines. In 1900 the recruiting sergeant was Sergt. Charles Kebble who resided at lodgings at No. 4 Regent Street in the Carrick Hill area the owners being Mr & Mrs Payne. On Saturday 18th August, 1900, Sergeant Kebble left his lodgings to go to the Skipper Street office. Later that day his wife was sitting in her Southampton home with the couples three children when one of them rushed into the room shouting "Daddy's home, Daddy's home." When asked about this the child stated that her father was in the upstairs bedroom looking out the window. This was strange considering that Mr Kebble was not due home for another seven weeks and Mrs Kebble heard no one come in. She went upstairs with the excited child to investigate and much to the child's disappointment no one was there. Mrs Kebble questioned the child further on this but the little girl maintained that she had seen her daddy standing at the window. Mrs Kebble checked the other rooms of the house to make sure no one was in but found nothing. About an hour had passed when the child screamed upstairs. Her mother rushed up and found the young girl crying hysterically at the top of the stairs. When she eventually calmed her down the little girl told her mother that her daddy was in the room again and when she went to hug him he vanished before her eyes. Mrs Kebble then went to a neighbour and asked her to keep an eye on the children while she went to her mother-in-laws home, which was only a short distance away. She told her what was occurring and both women agreed that

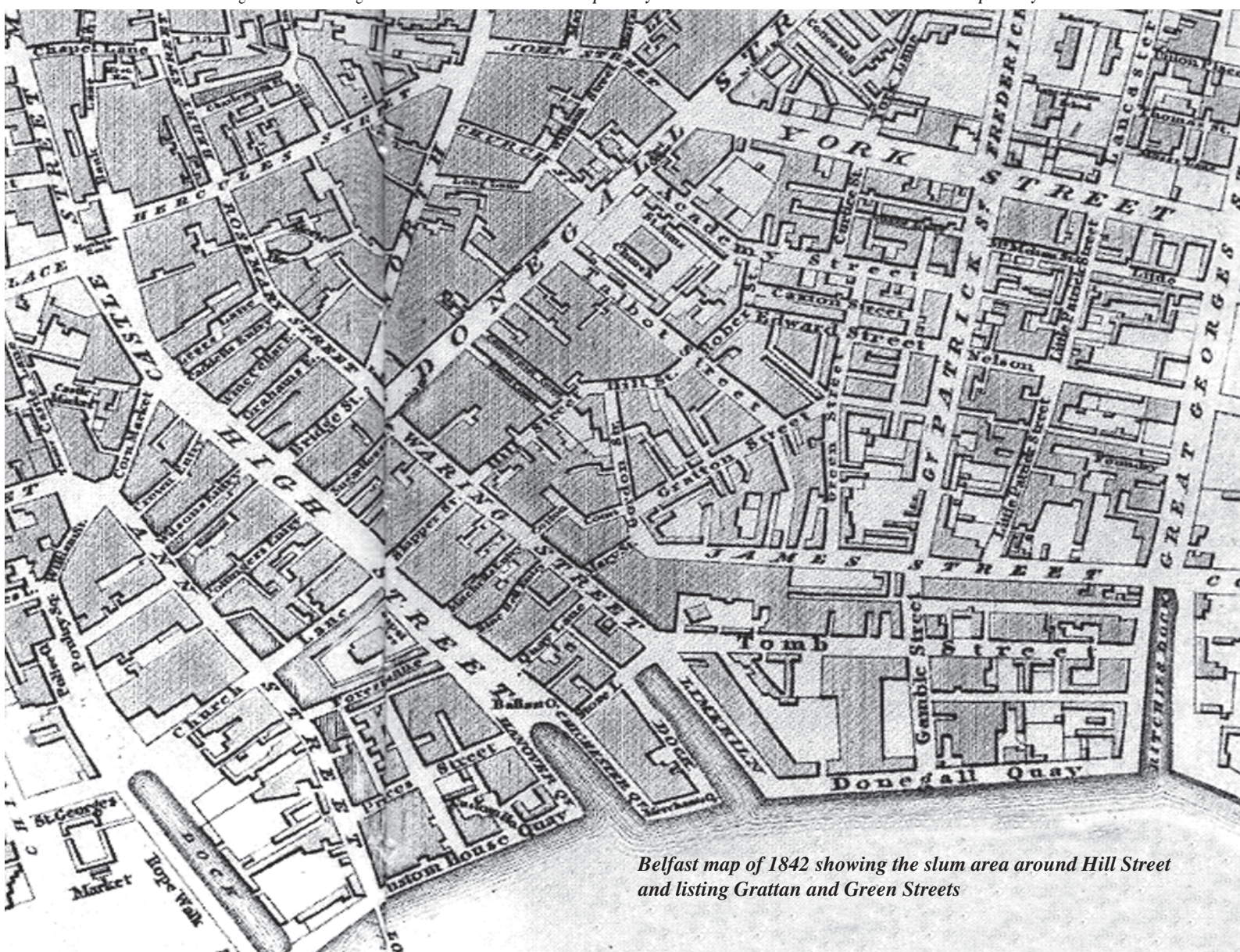
it was all nothing more than an over active child's imagination. Back in Belfast a few days had passed and Mr Kebble had not returned home to his lodgings in Regent Street. Mr and Mrs Payne were now concerned about him and set out to his office in Skipper Street to find out if he had returned home. The office was closed and they immediately knew that something was wrong as the office was never closed during weekdays. They then approached a police constable in nearby High Street (Constable Godfrey Walker of Glengall Street Barracks) and informed him of their concerns. All three returned to the recruiting office and the police officer forced open the door. The constable then began to search the building and when he reached the small toilet he discovered the body of Sergeant Kebble in his full uniform suspended from the high ceiling. Needless to say he had hanged himself and had been there three days.

All these streets and alleys which made up one of Belfast's most notorious slums are now gone. Grattan Place, Grattan Court, Talbot Court, Morrow's Entry, to name but a few, were pulled down while streets such as Grattan Street and Green Street were changed to unrecognisable names in a foolish attempt to clean up this part of the town. Needless to say life went on for those who lived in and around this slum and crime of every nature was committed day in, day out. Life was hard but if anyone living in these slums were caught and brought before the courts then life was made unbearable.

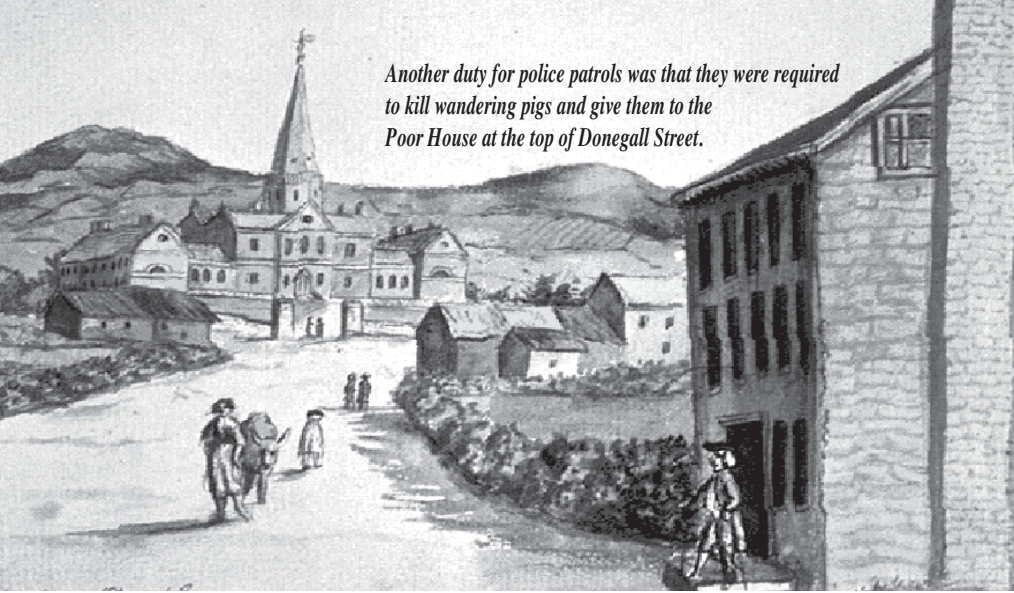
For example shortly after Queen Victoria came to the throne the following sentences were imposed in July 1837 alone:-

*Bridget Loughrey, stealing two gowns,
Transported 7 years.*

*John Cassidy and Charles Stewart,
stealing a chemise,
12 months in jail and whipped three times.
Thomas Ryan, stealing stockings,
Transported 7 years.
Francis Harvey, stealing two grates,
Transported 7 years.
George Warnock, (a cripple) assaulting a day constable,
Transported 7 years.
Ellen Brown and Ann Stitt, stealing a shawl,
Transported 7 years.
George McCormick, Henry Green, John Cornwell and
Eliza McKee, stealing from the dwelling house of John
Rutherford in Donegall Pass one slice of bacon,
Transportation 14 years.
Ann Murphy, stealing a shawl,
Transported 7 years.
John Molony, stealing a handkerchief,
Transported 7 years.
John McAlister and John Ward, burglary,
Death
John McClean, highway robbery,
Death
Russell Abbott and Alexander Park,
highway robbery,
Death
James McCloskey, larceny,
Transported 7 years
James Granny, larceny,
Transported 7 years*



Belfast map of 1842 showing the slum area around Hill Street and listing Grattan and Green Streets



Another duty for police patrols was that they were required to kill wandering pigs and give them to the Poor House at the top of Donegall Street.

This had no effect on crime as it simply continued. The prostitutes carried out their trade at the foot of Donegall Street (No. 11) and when arrested they were held in the military barracks, many of them would lure unsuspecting men back to a house in the Hill Street area and once there rob them of everything they had. In most cases the victim would have been ashamed to report it and therefore the prostitutes mainly got clean away with it.

But with crime come the police, which in these days were the Belfast Police Force, some of whom were no better than the criminals they were trying to protect the town of Belfast from. The Bulkies, as they were known, were also fond of the prostitutes trade and any constable found in the company of prostitutes was dismissed and quite a few were dismissed when it was discovered they had VD.

The constables were entitled to half the proceeds of the sale of stolen goods as well as half of the fines imposed on publicans. When this was stopped the prosecutions against publicans was dramatically reduced. Constables also received large cash rewards from insurance companies when they discovered fires leaving many to question who started them in the first place. Drunkenness was such a problem in the Belfast Police Force that publicans were ordered never to serve them.

But life for the police constable was also a tough one and in addition to the constant crime in the Hill Street/Donegall Street area one of the main problems they also faced here was cruelty to animals. There were numerous cases of dog and cock fights as well as badger baiting in the fields beyond this district (now mainly York Street area). However in February 1858 a Belfast man had killed two rats with his teeth for a wager. The rats tails were nailed to a table in a public house and the gambler had to kill them quicker than a dog which was chasing three others on the floor. The 'sportsman' lost and in the process had his face cut to pieces by the teeth and claws of the rats. Another example was in June 1862 when a scripture reader was prosecuted. John Wiley stuck the prongs of a pitchfork through the eyes of a boy's dog before disembowelling it with a knife. However, public opinion in this case was so strong that he had to leave town.

Another duty for police patrols was that they were required to kill wandering pigs and give them to the Poor House at the top of Donegall Street. (No. 12) It was also their duty to kill any dog within fifty yards of any public road that did not have a 5lb block of wood around its neck.

The Belfast Police Force was stood down on the 1st of September 1865. Belfast Protestants were very angry when they were replaced by the Royal Irish Constabulary and referred to them as a 'bloody lot of Fenians.' Belfast's Catholics weren't

over the moon either and referred to the RIC as "Orange Peelers." A Belfast judge later remarked that the only thing that united Catholics and Protestants in Belfast was "their common hatred of the police."

One of the main money making activities for some of the men folk was bodysnatching. This is when a dead body is stolen from a grave and sold to members of the medical profession for various experiments. There are countless cases of bodysnatching in Belfast mainly from the Poor House Graveyard which was behind the building (No. 12) There are various reports on this activity to be found in the old Northern Whig newspapers but one interesting report told of the appearance in court of James Stewart, James Pemblico and Robert Wright who were all charged with the offence of attempting

to steal away bodies from the New Burying Ground (Poor House Ground now known as Clifton Street Cemetery) on the night of the 24th of November, 1827. Part of it reads:-

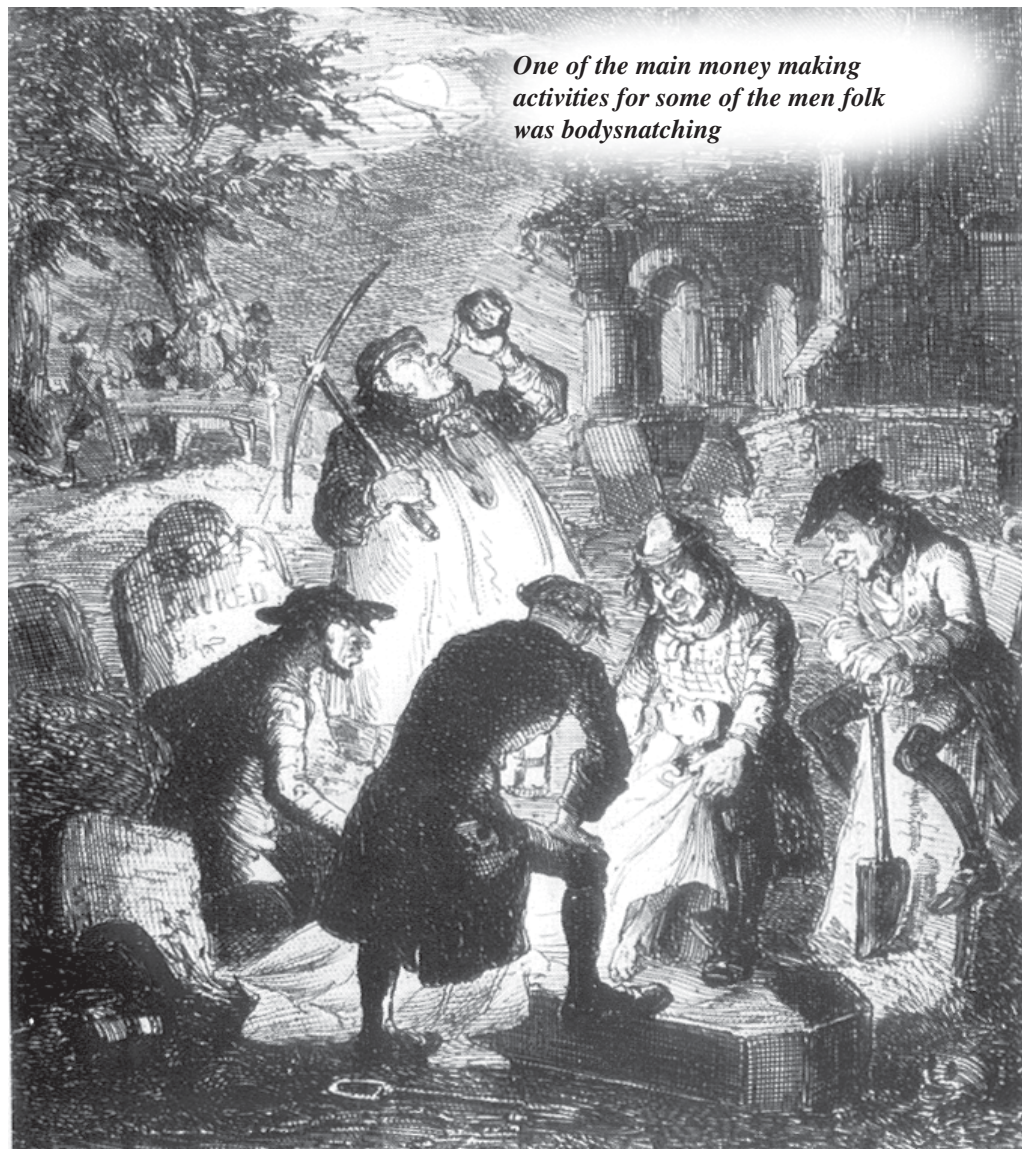
Between five o'clock and six o'clock on Monday morning, the watchman at the cemetery was accosted by one of the prisoners who asked him did he ever 'rise a body' as it was a proceeding which gave him such delight.

The watchman surprised at the question, immediately entered the graveyard but found all right and on his return he was told that if he would consent to join in the work, money and drink should be given him in abundance.

Determined to detect the persons who attempted to bribe him from his duty, he manifested an inclination to come to terms and subsequently made an appointment to meet his unknown friends at a public house at 10 o'clock. He met the three prisoners there, who treated him with ale, entered fully on the subject, discussed the pleasures of bodysnatching, and promised to give him two sovereigns for allowing them to enter the churchyard in the night. This he agreed to and received a sovereign on account. He informed Mr Kilshaw, his employer, of the matter and in the course of the day five constables were placed to watch.

Needless to say the would be grave robbers were caught and transported for their attempt at bribery.

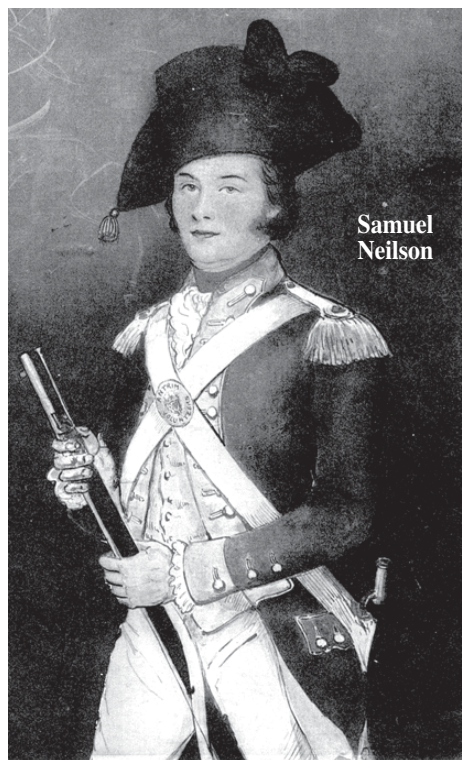
The area at the foot of Donegall Street where the prostitutes stood is also one of the most historic in Belfast (No 11). Known as the Four Corners it is difficult to work out how this came to be considering that there were in fact seven of them. Situated here is the Waring Street end of Sugarhouse Entry where the United Irishmen were first established. The immediate



One of the main money making activities for some of the men folk was bodysnatching

origins of the 1798 Rebellion in Ireland can be traced to the setting up of the Society of United Irishmen in this entry in October 1791. Inspired by the French Revolution, and with great admiration for the new democracy of the United States, the United Irishmen were led by Theobald Wolfe Tone, Thomas Russell, Henry Joy McCracken and William Drennan. They came together to secure a reform of the Irish parliament; and they sought to achieve this goal by uniting Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter in Ireland into a single movement.

From the beginning, Dublin Castle, the seat of government in Ireland, viewed the new organisation with the gravest suspicion, and with the outbreak of war between Britain (and Ireland) and France in February 1793, suspicion hardened to naked hostility. The unabashed admiration of the United Irishmen for the French seemed akin to treason. The discovery of negotiations between certain United Irishmen, notably Theobald Wolfe Tone, and the French government confirmed suspicions and led to the suppression of the society in May 1794.



Samuel Neilson

Driven underground, the Society re-constituted itself as a secret, oath-bound, organisation, dedicated to the pursuit of a republican form of government in a separate and independent Ireland. This was to be achieved primarily by direct French military intervention. The plan came closest to success following the arrival of a French invasion fleet, carrying some 14,000 soldiers, off the southern coast of Ireland in December 1796. Adverse weather conditions, however, prevented the French from landing, and the fleet was forced to make its way back to France. From this date on, Dublin Castle stepped up its war against the United Irishmen, infiltrating their ranks with spies and informers, invoking draconian legislation against subversives, turning a blind eye to military excesses, and to those of the resolutely loyalist Orange Order, and building up its defence forces lest the French should return in strength. (www.bbc.co.uk/history). Needless to say the United Irishmen were defeated but today a lot of myths still surround the organisation. For example one of these is that the Society was formed by Wolfe Tone. This is wrong and while Tone certainly played a leading part the organisation was in fact established by William Drennan and whose cottage stood at the corner of Sugarhouse Entry and Waring Street.

Neilson was the son of a Presbyterian minister who was born

in Ballyrone in the 1st of September, 1761. At sixteen he was apprenticed to his elder brother, a woollen-draper, and at twenty-four he married and set up in business for himself. He had made a fortune of £8,000 by 1790, when he abandoned business for politics. In 1791 he suggested to Henry Joy McCracken the idea of a society of Irishmen of every persuasion to work for Catholic emancipation and parliamentary reform. He became acquainted with Tone about this time, and together they founded the Society of United Irishmen in Belfast, with Tone the chief organiser.

In 1792 Neilson established the Northern Star, the organ of the United Irishmen in the north, and became its editor. He had now adopted Tone's republican outlook and in his paper advocated complete separation from England. Several prosecutions followed, and in September 1796 he was arrested and imprisoned in Dublin, first in Newgate and then in Kilmainham. His health suffered, and in February 1798 he was released on condition that he abstain from 'treasonable conspiracy'. However, he was soon active in assisting Edward Fitzgerald in preparing for a rising.

After the arrest of Fitzgerald in May 1798 Neilson went to Newgate Jail to reconnoitre for a rescue but was captured af-

ter a desperate resistance in which he was badly wounded. He was indicted for high treason with other leaders. Some of the prisoners, seeing that the rising had failed and in order to stay further executions, agreed to disclose their plans without implicating individuals, and to submit to banishment. Neilson was included, probably because the government was unsure of being able to secure his conviction. Despite the agreement he was detained at Fort George in Scotland from 1799 to 1802 and then deported to the Netherlands.

After making a secret visit to Dublin and Belfast he made his way to America in December 1802 and was about to launch an evening paper when he died suddenly at Poughkeepsie, New York, on the 29th August 1803.

Another United Irishmen connection with this junction is the old Exchange Buildings (No 13). Built in 1769 as the Exchange it was enlarged in 1776 by Lord Donegall when the Assembly Rooms were added as a first floor. It was in these that the famous Harp Festival was held in 1792 but it was also here that the United Irishman Henry Joy McCracken stood trial in 1798.

Proud to belong to two important Belfast Presbyterian families, Henry Joy McCracken always used his full name. His

SUGARHOUSE ENTRY

Today nothing much remains of what was once Sugarhouse Entry. The small entry was once a passageway, which connected Waring Street to High Street. The entry itself is situated behind the Bridge Street offices of Northern Ireland Electricity. Looking at it today it is hard to believe that it was once a hive of activity but this shadowy passage of old Belfast, which had its friendly mirror near High Street end, is still fresh in the memories of our older generation.

Its story begins in the latter part of the 1600s when it was situated in 'My Lady's Garden.' The Countess of Donegall ('My Lady') by a lease dated 1678 granted to George Macartney, this garden and a house at the Waring Street end, which was occupied by a Mr. Wilkinson. On this leasehold Macartney erected a sugar house and so commenced a sugar refinery with its stoves, ports and pans near Waring Street, which was then known as Broad Street. Macartney, in his will dated 1683, bequeathed the refinery to his two sons, Chichester and Arthur. In those days, when tea and coffee were very rare beverages in Ireland, sugar was used for confectionery and cooking, so most of the brown sugar made at the works was exported, the Baltic countries receiving the molasses and syrups. This old byway was called 'Sugar House Lane' in a legal document of 1707, and at the High Street end was an inn known as the 'Sugar Loaf.' The sugar house carried on business and passed through different ownerships until the night of the big fire, November 17th 1785, when between one and two o'clock in the morning the premises went up in flames. A new sugarhouse was built and the Belfast Sugar House Company carried on in Belfast in the days of the Peninsular War. It was in this entry, in an inn kept by Peg Barclay, that the Society of United Irishmen was incubated in the stormy last decade of the 18th century under the name of the 'Muddlers Club.' It was in the same building that the bewitchingly attractive barmaid Bell Martin, from Portaferry, played the notorious role of a government spy and informed on the 'United Men.' Later the inn became the favourite 'local' for the Scottish and English soldiers and was referred to as 'Nugents Den,' after the Commander-in-Chief of the Royalist forces in the north. In 1817 an order was made that no lady was to be carried through Sugarhouse Entry in a sedan chair after midnight, but



later with the establishment of the Borough Police, that order was withdrawn. Today we can scan through the old Belfast as a place of good cheer, good business, and the haunt of 'horsey' fans. But in April 1941 all was to be lost forever. On that date the German Luftwaffe came to Belfast and completed what was then thought impossible. A massive bombing raid was carried out on the city in which many parts were obliterated including Sugarhouse Entry. When the Second World War ended new rebuilding programmes were started throughout Belfast. The buildings, which made up the old Sugarhouse Entry, were never rebuilt and a large government building replaced them and although the entry is still there it is closed at each end to protect the government building from bomb attacks during the IRA campaign. To the people of the city Sugarhouse Entry was one of those essential and quaint city near cuts where the shades of old Belfast still lingered but unfortunately its memories are now almost forgotten.



TOP LEFT- The old Exchange rooms where Henry Joy McCracken stood trial.
BOTTOM LEFT - The execution of Henry Joy McCracken at nearby Cornmarket.

BELOW - Number 25 Donegall Street where the Lying in Hospital was first set up and which later became the Royal Maternity Hospital.

BOTTOM - A view of lower Donegall Street showing the Brown Linen Hall to the right.



there are some guide books and tours which inform us that St Anne's cathedral is the street's most notable building but nothing could be further from the truth. For example a small building near the bottom of the street is among the 'plain' looking buildings but in terms of history it really is something else. Situated at the corner and above Exchange Place it was here that the Lying in Hospital was first established. Basically what this was was a place for the poorer women to come and give birth. It later moved to larger purpose built premises on nearby Clifton Street before eventually becoming the Royal Maternity Hospital. These misleading guides would also inform us that Donegall Street was a street comprising some of Belfast's grandest buildings but an old lady who was still living in 1868 at the age of 92 remembered that on one side of Donegall Street the houses were thatched with straw.

There were indeed some prominent buildings erected after these houses and all have a fascinating history but unfortunately most are now long gone.

father, John McCracken, was an entrepreneur and associated with many of Belfast's leading philanthropic ventures; his maternal grandfather, Francis Joy, owned important paper mills and was the founder of The Belfast News-Letter. The Joys - of Huguenot descent - were also a public-spirited family.

Henry was early interested in radical politics and used his position as owner of a cotton mill to travel extensively, making political contacts; he was always concerned with the welfare and education of his workers. He became a United Irishman in 1795 and was arrested on suspicion the following year, spending fifteen months in Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin.

When the insurrection broke out in June 1798, McCracken was made general of the forces mustered at Donegore, which then attacked Antrim town. They were defeated by government troops; after a month on the run McCracken was captured in Carrickfergus, and tried for treason and hanged in the Cornmarket, Belfast, on the same day: 17th July 1798. His sister Mary Ann had a doctor standing by in case there was still life in the body after it was cut down; but in vain. McCracken was buried at St George's, High Street, but the remains were later transferred to the Clifton Street Cemetery behind the old Poor House (No. 12). www.ulsterhistory.co.uk

One unique feature about Donegall Street is the fact that at either end of it it has Belfast's two oldest buildings, the old Poor House (No. 12) and the old Exchange (No. 13). Today



In more recent history Donegall Street has also featured prominently but sadly not for the right reasons. In the 1970's, at the height of the IRA's bombing campaign against commercial and economic targets in the centre of Belfast, one such bomb exploded in Donegall Street outside the arcade which connects it to North Street (No.14). The following extract is taken from Issue 11 of *The Troubles* magazine:-

Monday 20th March 1972 - Six die in Belfast bomb

Six people, two of them members of the RUC, have been killed and more than 97 others injured when a bomb exploded in the centre of Belfast. Every available ambulance in Belfast was rushed to Lower Donegall Street, near the Newsletter offices after the 50 to 100lbs of gelignite blew up in a car. Many of the people caught in the horror were fleeing from a bomb scare in nearby Church Street. Two RUC men and four civilians were killed outright. Donegall Street looked like a battlefield in seconds, as the smoke and dust began to clear, injured people could be seen lying in pools of blood. Others were being helped into shops where they were given on-the-spot first aid. Some of the casualties lay in agony with splinters of glass embedded in their wounds.

Confusion was caused by a number of different phone calls: 11.45am - A call was received from Northern Agencies, Church Street (off Donegall Street) saying that they had been warned that a "big bomb" was in their premises.

11.52am - A call received by the RUC from the Irish News that they had been warned that there was a "big bomb" in Church Street.

11.55am - A call received by the RUC from the Belfast Telegraph saying that an anonymous caller had warned that a bomb was planted in a building in Lower Donegall Street.

11.58am - Bomb explodes in Donegall Street.

The death toll reached seven after one of those who was badly injured died a short time later in hospital.



Those who died were as follows:-

ERNEST McALLISTER, AGED 38

Mr McAllister was one of two RUC killed in the blast and lived in Lisburn

BERNARD O'NEILL, AGED 36

Mr O'Neill was the second RUC member and lived in the Orangefield area of Belfast.

SYDNEY BELL, AGED 65

He lived in Finsbury Street and was driving past in his van when the blast occurred.

ERNEST DOUGAN, AGED 40

Mr Dougan lived in Tennent Street.

SAMUEL TRAINOR, AGED 40

Mr Trainor was one of the refuse collectors in the area at the time. He lived in Northwood Drive and had been a member of the UDR.

JAMES MACKLIN, AGED 27

He lived in Penrith Street in the Shankill area and was also one of the refuse collectors.

A seventh victim, **HENRY MILLAR, AGED 79**, died a few weeks later as a result of injuries received in the bomb blast. He lived in York Parade.

One hundred and fifty people were injured in the blast.

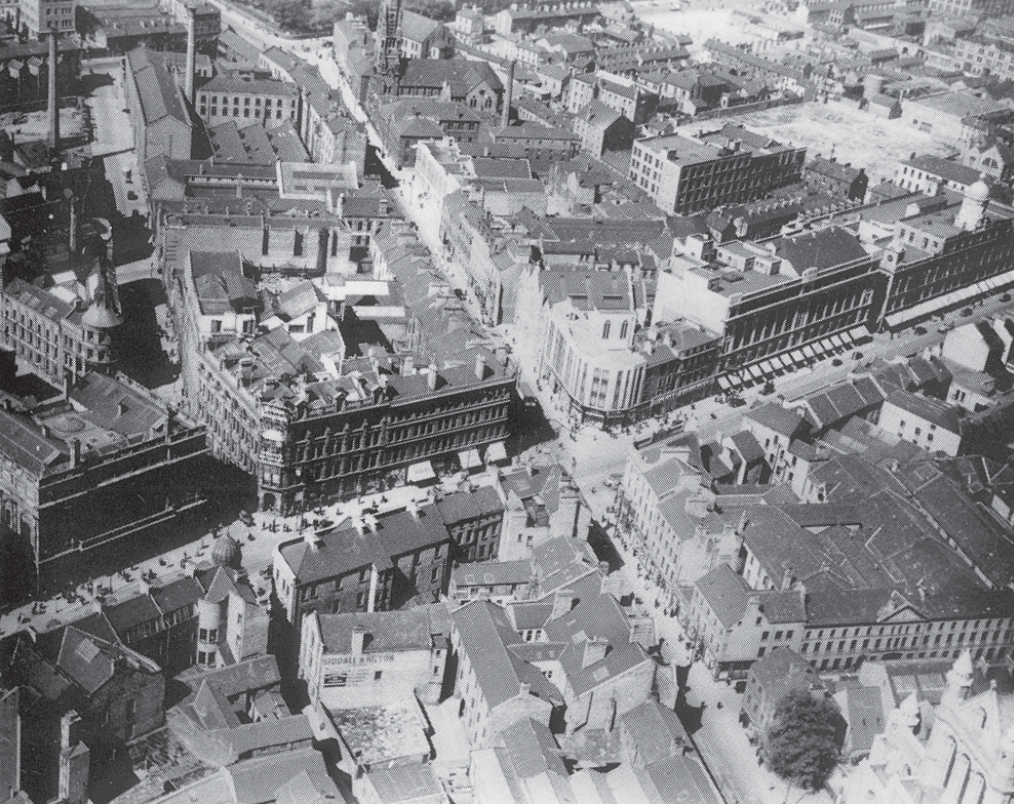
The junction of Donegall Street and Church Street (No. 15) was also the scene of an attack during the conflict. During a 'Rag Day' students parade on the 3rd of March 1978, which was going along Donegall Street, a number of IRA members emerged from the crowd dressed in rag costumes and shot dead a civilian searcher and British soldier who were manning a permanent road block. The victims were 25 year old Norma Spence from Arran Park in the Dundonald area and 21 year old James Nowasad, a trooper in the Royal Tank Regiment.

Going back to the Victorian period Church Street was the scene of a dreadful fire a few days before Christmas in 1867 as described in the Weekly Northern Whig of the 28th of December:-

The fire took place about ten o'clock in the premises of Mr. Joseph Macaulay, hat and band box manufacturer, Church Street, a small sized three-storey house, or about two ordinary storeys in height, and about twenty minutes past ten o'clock is stated to have been the time at which information was taken to the station. Mrs. Macaulay, aged about thirty years; her step daughter, aged thirteen years, and three other daughters still younger have all died in consequences. The head being in the Corn Exchange conducting a class and the first information he had was the dreadful fate of his whole family. When the fire brigade arrived with an engine and tender on the scene of the conflagration, the flames were issuing out of the shop windows in dense masses. The shop stairs were burning up to the first landing, and the heat in the lower part of the premises was so intense as to preclude any person from passing through. A considerable portion of the stairs on the second storey was also burned, and the heat was so great in the part of the house that the paint on the doors and windows was in large blisters. Such was the intensity of the heat and smoke that it was pronounced by those competent to judge to be sufficient in a short time to take away life. The superintendent, Mr. Reilly, immediately on being informed that there were people in the house, gave orders to a portion of his men to get their ladders jointed and placed on the side of the house, which they quickly did. All the endeavours of the men were in the first instance directed to the saving of the life, and when the live and the dead were got out, then Mr. Reilly directed a base to be laid on, and endeavoured

successfully to confine fire to the premises where it originated. The water was plentifully held on the flames, which were subdued in about half an hour. Two jets were brought from the main Donegall Street - the length of the hose employed being about six hundred feet.

The fire originated on the ground floor, where the business of box making was carried on. In consequence of the tinder like nature of the goods, it raged with fury; and what makes matter all the more deplorable, and the fatal results all the greater, is the fact that it is said to have been burned for at least half an hour before the alarm was given at the fire engine station. In the meantime a crowd had gathered and Mr. Martin painter who resides opposite being among the first on the scene, and hearing the cries of the inmates, at once made of the efforts he possibly could to have them rescued. They produced a ladder, which was, unfortunately, to short, but which a number of the crowd attempted to climb. The result was that the ladder, through over stress, snapped, and a man, as we are informed, had his arm dislocated. On the alarm being given at the engine station, the Brigade under Superintendent Reilly, started with the greatest possible despatch; said in five minutes from the ringing of the fire bell Deputy Superintendent Moorhead and Hugh Nelson were in the room in which Mrs. Macaulay and the children were. The apartment which turned out to be the kitchen, is situated on the third floor, and this rendered the difficulty all the greater in reaching there. The members of the fire brigade put up one of their ladders, and with the assistance of another ladder, which had in the meantime been procured by the crowd; they ascended; but whether to enter or not was questions which the firemen had to weigh, lest on so doing too much time every moment of which was then so precious - might be lost, as they were not sure whether or not which was the apartment in which the women and children were. Indeed a number of people in the crowd shouted that there were more inmates in the house. When Moorhead and Nelson got up the length of the kitchen window, and, indeed, for some time before, no cries of any kind were to be heard. Both the brave fellows "encircled their ears," as one of them afterwards expressed himself to endeavour, if they could, to hear sounds that would indicate the presence of any person in the flames. At this time the room was filled with smoke, which also came in dense clouds out of the window at which the firemen were. Nelson said he heard a sound which, if not the hissing of the hose, must be some person breathing. In he then went through the window followed by Moorhead. When inside the sounds were, of course, more audible, and, having felt around, they discovered Mrs. Macaulay lying close to the window, with the two younger children in her arms. The second eldest girl was first caught hold by the firemen, who brought her to the window, when each man took a separate ladder, and she was lowered to some other members of the brigade, who received them when about half way down. The shout from the crowd which went through the air as they saw the girl upon the ladder was one of exultation and joy. Moorhead went back into the room, when the first object he got hold of was the eldest girl. She, poor thing, had been too long a subject to the fire and smoke to render any assistance herself; but the firemen, with almost incredible agility, which was all the more astonishing and laudable when we consider the awful position in which they were being at the time almost half suffocated - had her brought out of the window and lowered in the same way as before, amid still louder cheers.



LEFT - Junction of Upper and Lower Donegall Street with York Street and Royal Avenue shortly before many of the buildings in the picture were destroyed in the Luftwaffe blitz of 1941.

BELOW - Looking up Upper Donegall Street from Lower Donegall Street in the mid 1920's

John Street was the street which connected Royal Avenue to Donegall Street and which was later renamed Royal Avenue as a continuation of this thoroughfare. (No. 16) As previously mentioned human skeletons were unearthed in the centre of Belfast on a regular basis and quite a few in this one small street. For example an interesting discovery was made when quite a few human skulls were unearthed at its junction with North Street. One newspaper report which appeared in the Northern Whig on March 2nd, 1883 described the findings. *At the present time foundations are being cut at the junction of North Street and Royal Avenue for an extensive establishment to be erected for Messrs Foster Green & Co. It will, when completed, adjoin their North Street premises. While the workmen were engaged in cutting the first section of the foundations, they came upon some interesting relics of old Belfast. At one place they found a number of human skulls and bones, and a little further on (a few feet from North Street) they discovered what were evidently the remains of the wall of the old garrison. The wall, which is five feet thick, appears to have been skilfully constructed, and consists of outer layers of solid masonry the centre portion being filled up with 'puddle,' the whole forming a very strong wall. There has been dug up a number of trunks of trees, which had been used as pipes for the conveyance of water to the garrison. They are apparently the trunks of apple trees, and are in a thorough state of preservation. They appear to have been hollowed out by a burning process, and the cavities at the ends, forming junctions, are made larger than at the centre.*

Needless to say the report seems to be more interested in the wall and the old pipes but once again we must ask how these skulls came to be here? Were they the result of some sort of burials and if so where were the rest of the bones? One theory which we come to is that they may be the skulls of people who were hanged who had their heads removed and stuck on

pikes as a warning to others. But if this is the case then how come there is not even a mere mention in any of our history books?

Before John Street was demolished in the 1880s for the erection of buildings such as the present Telegraph and Central Library one section of the old street consisted of a row of small country type houses. One was derelict and boarded up for a

number of years because it was said to have been haunted by the ghost of an elderly woman.

The residents of the street told of how the former occupants were terrified out of their home in the 1860s by a ghost who threw various items of pottery and furniture around the back downstairs room and that on one occasion it wrecked every item which sat in the yard. One of the families children later claimed to have seen what appeared to have been an old woman walking up and down in the back room talking to herself. The young girl then stated that the woman completely disappeared before her eyes. The family fled the house and after doing so the owner boarded it up and it was never let again.

In May 1882 (almost a year previous to the above discovery) workmen were laying new pipes and sewers through the street and as they were digging the trenches one of them discovered what appeared to have been human bones. The police were called and the bones were later found to have been of an old woman which had lay buried for a number of years.

The bones were removed and buried in the Union Workhouse Graveyard and it appears that the haunting was never heard of again.



The upper section of Donegall Street leading to the old Poor House also has quite a disguised history. Today quite a few of the old historic buildings in this section have been restored to their former glory at either side of St Patrick's Church. The Congregational Church is still situated there which has a long history including the fact that it was from here that the Rev. William O'Hanlon carried out his walks among the poor of Belfast. Unfortunately a lot of the old buildings are long gone including the two hotels which stood at the junction of York Street and the Turkish Baths. This establishment was set up by Dr Barter three years before the Turkish Baths for the Destitute Poor (also known as The People's Turkish Baths) in Cork. Although it continued to be known as the Working Class Turkish Baths until at least 1872 it does not appear to have been very successful. Thomas Coakley, the manager, wrote to Richard Metcalfe in 1872 saying that,

...though...in operation here about twelve years, yet, so very few avail themselves of them, that, in fact, they are not worth keeping open, inasmuch as they are not paying expenses.

Some time after Dr Barter's death, these baths were taken over by John North who, in 1882, was to purchase Barter's large establishment in Upper Sackville Street (now O'Connell Street) Dublin. They were demolished in the 1930's but all this is a history lesson for another time.

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