

# THE TOWN OF MONAGHAN: A PLACE INSCRIBED IN STREET AND SQUARE

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TOWN AND COUNTRY are two parts of all our realities which have negative and positive meanings for many people. Until a generation or so ago, contrasts in living standards led to townspeople frequently looking down on rural dwellers. My grandfather talked about the townies in Castleblayney in the early part of the twentieth century who referred to lads from the country as “yalla boots”, which had the same connotations as “culchies”. Yet it seems clear that town and country cannot exist without each other: they are locked into a symbiotic relationship which ranged in the past from the hiring fairs in the streets where the young country people sold their labour, or fair days where the countryside sold its products, or the shops where the town’s merchants sold their wares and services to the country.

While the composition of town and countryside can be described in material terms of stone and clay, field, hedge, street and shops, with shape and size and locational characteristics, there is also a symbolic significance to these places, which over time has altered their meaning for us. The form and symbolism of landscapes is often a product of the circumstances in which they were first created: the plans of streets and urban spaces especially, the names assigned to them, and the public buildings and monumental structures built in them, all have symbolic meaning beyond their obvious materiality today. So from the age of a largely Protestant gentry with colonial and imperial ties, to the rise of a Catholic nationalism and democracy, to the dominance of commercial priorities today, different codes and meanings have been attached to the landscape of town and country.

Towns like Monaghan are different from rural places in a number of obvious ways. They are concentrations of people, perhaps some thousands (or tens of thousands) compressed into a small space, in

contrast to being spread out over an extensive part of a countryside. This spatial concentration may make for a greater intensity of community identity with the place and space than in rural areas, reflected in such things as self-conscious pride in community evident in newspaper reportage. The *Northern Standard*, for example, can be seen as a (selective) record of the town of Monaghan's self-awareness for two centuries, with reportage on aspects of the progress and achievement of the town and its community. As with all urban communities, an intense sense of place is bolstered by formal institutional structures of governance: the town corporation (which existed in Monaghan until 1844), urban councils and chambers of commerce, all manifesting a pride in the place that is town, evident in reportage of council meetings, concerts and other social events throughout the past century and more. Up to several thousand people in any generation may have grown up and into this comparatively small territory of streets and lanes, and yards and municipal spaces: it is well and intimately known and remembered.

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### A staged setting

Towns might be thought of as stages, places pre-eminently developed for display, performance and show. Streets and squares are for shop-window display, for promenading to see and be seen, as well as for parade and procession on ceremonial occasions. They are man-made, entirely fabricated entities, in contrast to the more natural space and landscape of the countryside, constructed by the generations that have made their marks and modifications in incremental changes to the setting: boundaries, street layouts, even rooflines, once established, rarely change. And planning regulations today add to this tendency to inertia and limited change. Monaghan's physical shape has changed slowly, usually reflecting the economic and commercial energies of the community and the booms or recessions of the wider economy. Up until the 1990s, the old established spatial parameters remained unchanged—the Diamond, Church Square and Old Cross Square being legacies from the last big transformation in 1820s and 1830s. Only in recent years has there been a radical restructuring of the town, and it is now on the cusp of great changes as commercial and residential expansion takes over.

However, the innate distinctiveness of Monaghan as an attractive Ulster town with its uniquely interlocking squares and urban spaces will endure, although their original aesthetic achievement as elegant expressions of a past urbanity has been lost in a welter of traffic and car parks. This streetscape is a legacy of an earlier age which provided a platform for displays of political or cultural or commercial power and control. Life of town and county “took place” in the grip of Diamond, Church Square, Market Street, Hill Street, Old Cross Square and other locations, where shop windows, footpaths, residences, railings, monuments and public thoroughfares all represented transient expressions of passing parades of power, control and celebration. Its earliest focal point was the Diamond, in which was located the market cross, symbol of the town’s commercial role. The market cross was used in the eighteenth century for publishing town notices; criminals were punished in the pillory beside it, and labourers at the hiring fair waited there also. As in other urban areas, Monaghan’s municipal spaces were used for symbolic communal occasions, public spectacles of parades, processions, marching bands, flags and bunting, to demonstrate loyalty or support for party, creed or ideology.

In contrast to the display and spectacle function of the town, the extensive rural landscape is less “on show” and more of a workaday and less symbolic space. There are some parts of countryside, however, which possess similar significance: the gentry’s demesnes, with ornamental buildings, avenues, vistas and monuments, are good examples of landscapes of power and status. Many of the gentry were also key actors in developing the towns as showpieces of their social position in an era of privilege.

The landowners of the town, like their peers throughout the country, were involved in improving their estates, and their towns and villages as windows on their estates. The Westenras, who became Lords Rossmore in the late eighteenth century, would have had extensive British and European contacts: while MP for the county, Lord Rossmore spent much time in London. These connections had impacts on town and country landscapes back home in terms of transfer of ideas on aesthetic taste in urban design. Rossmore by 1860 had an enormous Tudor revival mansion in Corlattan, and the estate was involved in facilitating improvements in the town in the early nineteenth century. The

County Monaghan Grand Jury met in the county town, and this also provided an incentive for inscriptions of status and privilege on the face of the town. Other gentry with interests in the town were Dawson of Dawsongrove, later Lord Cremourne, Hamilton of Cornecassa and Coote of Raconnell. These gentry and a growing merchant and professional middle class left their marks on the townscape in the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—in Hill Street, Market Street, Mill Street, Church Square and the Diamond.

Improvement in towns meant widening streets, replacing unsightly thatched houses with more fashionable slated buildings, encouraging imposing architecture. By the mid-nineteenth century, the town had all the marks of a self-important county town: market house, town hall, courthouse, gaol, barracks, infirmaries, churches, hotels, inns and up to fourteen different kinds of schools. In addition to its visible expression, like all towns Monaghan also has an invisible subterranean webscape supporting its landscape—a complex infrastructure of pipes, drains and cables which help it work as a town, which link up its buildings and function like arteries in the body. This network has evolved since the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries as the town's streets and buildings were improved and developed and as technology allowed. In the town's early days, water was supplied by local wells. Its governing authorities would have had ideas on municipal improvement and civilisation. Initially there was draining and culverting as streets were paved and cobbled, draining water and waste from roof gutters, footpaths and streets, and from the households and water closets of the well-to-do. As wells became polluted and unusable, water was piped into houses from streams and local lakes, though the water supply was not up to the standard of surrounding towns as late as 1895 when a public meeting was held to discuss piping water from Sheetrim lake.<sup>1</sup> Some improvements were instigated by local gentry or by the town's corporation; others were directives of an increasingly bureaucratic central government, mediated through more effective sanitary and local government legislation.

The Shambles developed on the edge of the town beside the river, which served to flush away the blood of the butcheries. Although an important part of the town's economy, its slaughtering business made it an unattractive public space. An account of 1760 presents a scene of

urban squalor and streetwise locals, in the privileged gaze of a visitor en route to a social gathering in Dublin:

We took the stage at Ballywollen St [later Dublin Street] on the first leg of our journey to Dublin for the coronation festivities of His Majesty George III. At once we passed into a large square. Our nostrils learn us, our ears tell us, and our eyes show us that this is the shambles of the town. Evil-piled offal and smoking dung are everywhere as our splendid whip [driver] advanced. Pigs-a-plenty wallow in the gutter. Tinkers and hammersmiths ply their trades. Amidst the confusion a smiling woman, bottle in hand, sits on a heap of cockles, cheerful in gin. An ugly rascal jumps on the running board, fulsomely we are wished safe journey, one and all. A bottle is dislodged from the boot by the wretched fellow who disappears into a sea of ragged wretches. We are clear of this noisome place. We climb the hill. It is the Gallows Hill and eleven bodies hang on the gibbets like a good wife's washing. They are blown about in the wind.<sup>2</sup>

Efforts to tidy up the Shambles took place during the 1820s, reflecting broader improvements in the conduct of civic life and manners in the town. Many middle class inhabitants were keen to remove the slaughter of animals from the public street. The land agent in Carrickmacross, for example, referred to the horror and disgust of these public executions, often watched by curious children, and the slovenly way in which the meat was then exposed for sale.<sup>3</sup> The pork market in the Shambles survived into the 1940s and 1950s, with the river continuing to serve as a receptacle for blood from the slaughterhouses.

County towns especially came to represent the identity of the whole county, as the location of county administration for perhaps three hundred years. Not only does the town community have a pride of place in its town, but important events in the wider life of the county (and country) have been commemorated or represented in various ways in the public spaces of the county town. We can see how changing times, politics and identities claimed and marked the spaces in the

town. Most county towns like Monaghan, in the eighteenth century and up to the Great Famine, however, reflected the aspirations of a county ascendancy class—"county society"—rather more than the ordinary inhabitant of the county. Indeed, for the average tenant farmer in Clontibret or Donaghmoyne in the 1820s, Monaghan was principally where the gaol (one of the most extensive buildings in the town in 1787) and Courthouse were located, representative of law beyond the estate boundaries. After the famine, with the acquisition, for example, of boarding schools for boys and girls and a new cathedral, contexts and identities began to change, though the pages of the *Northern Standard* continued to reflect a gentry and unionist perspective throughout the nineteenth century. By the 1930s, the new county hospital was added to a range of other functions of county administration which had arrived since the establishment of county councils in 1898.

Buildings represent different phases in the evolution of the town's setting, framing the streets and public spaces. The location of St Patrick's Church, for instance, reflected the social dominance of the Church of Ireland into the mid-nineteenth century. In keeping with its privileged social position (Lady Rossmore had bequeathed £1100 to the building, Mrs Jackson gave £1000), St Patrick's was built in 1836 in the centre of the town, just off the Diamond and presiding over the entrance to what was planned as the New Diamond. In fact this space eventually took its name from the new building itself, becoming Church Square.<sup>4</sup> The First Presbyterian Church near the Shambles was rebuilt in 1827, initially giving its name to Meetinghouse Square, which may have been an attempt to upgrade the status of the Shambles. However, the square was called the Shambles by the Ordnance Survey in the late 1830s, though it was still designated as Meeting-House-Square in *Griffith's Valuation* in 1860. It was eventually renamed Old Cross Square in 1875 following the move there of the old market cross from the Diamond.

In keeping with their more lowly social position, Catholic places of worship were situated on the margins. So, for instance, a Catholic chapel was erected in Latlorcan and rebuilt in the 1780s. Another chapel was built near the Shambles, then moved to the rear of the Diamond. A modest barn-chapel was erected in Clones Street (later

Park Street) in 1824, succeeded by the more elaborate St Joseph's in 1898. The building of St Macartan's Cathedral in the 1860s coincided with a changing balance of power in the community, its location on a hill overlooking the town symbolising a Catholic resurgence.

There were and remain many other noteworthy buildings in this county town, emblematic of a self-consciously important administrative and commercial centre: the Market House (1792); the Courthouse (1829); the former barracks, Belgium Square (late eighteenth century); the former fever hospital (*c.*1850); St Davnet's (from 1869); St Macartan's seminary (from 1840); Old Infirmary (off Old Cross Square, 1768); St Louis' Convent (from 1859); the railway station and goods shed (*c.* 1860); the model school (1860); the police barracks (*c.* 1850); the former Savings Bank (1855); the Orange Hall (1882); the former Hibernian Bank (1875); the former Provincial Bank (*c.* 1900); and very fine domestic residences in Hill Street, Mill Street, the Diamond and North Road.<sup>5</sup>

What might be described as a modest monumentalism inscribes earlier narratives of ascendancy interests on the streetscapes and buildings. The Dawson Memorial to Colonel Dawson of Dawsongrove, son of a distinguished county political and landed family, who was killed at Inkerman in the Crimea in 1854, stands in Church Square. It is an obelisk inscribed with the battlefield names of Alma and Inkerman, and was flanked until the 1930s with a pair of captured cannon from the war, a favourite ornamental flourish in many Irish and British towns. Ignored for much of the past eighty years—indeed the siting of a brightly painted café against it in 1922 might be read as a statement of intent by the new order after Independence—it is currently undergoing conservation. The Rossmore monument, incorporating a drinking trough and weathercock, was erected about 1875 as a Rossmore family memorial. Occupying a key location in the middle of the Diamond, it displaced the older, unfashionable Market Cross, which was moved to the Shambles. Though their significance has now receded, they are important parts of the iconography and history of the street spaces in the town. The Market House, which has been described as “one of the most delicate and elegant eighteenth-century buildings in the North”, was built in 1792 as a facility and symbol of commerce and progress for the inhabitants of the town.

There are hints of forgotten imperial narratives evident in the iconography of St Patrick's Church: an 1842 memorial to Charles Westenra, missing in action in India, 1824; a memorial with drum, cannon, spears and bayonet to Captain Lucas, killed at Ferozeshah (India) in 1845; to H. C. J. Lloyd, killed at Isandula (southern Africa) in 1879. Finally, the Courthouse (built in the early 1830s) has a large coat of arms of the royal House of Hanover carved on its pediment overlooking the Church Square and its historic monuments.

### Spectacle and parade

Throughout the past couple of centuries, the town and its public spaces have formed the symbolic site for a variety of performances which have marked changes in power politics and popular causes. Marching in procession, with banners, bands and oratory, has always been a feature of the use of urban spaces. Monaghan town's Diamond and Church Square have been used as premier ceremonial spaces, appropriated by different groups to mark their ascendancy down through the generations in local and county society.

A short survey of major public events in the town over the past couple of centuries illustrates the manner in which the town has been used for what might be called public performances of power, celebration or populist issues. Most of the record comes from the pages of the *Northern Standard*, which was very much a voice of the ascendancy and unionism in the nineteenth century; by the 1930s it had changed its editorial policy substantially to reflect the new social and political order. The usage of the streets for show and display was not necessarily confined to official or formal demonstration. More ordinary groups, such as local sporting clubs, sometimes took the opportunity to parade through the town, as when the supporters and players of Cremartin Shamrocks, travelling to the sports in Threemilehouse in June 1936, dismounted from the lorry in Monaghan and marched with a pipe band through the town.<sup>6</sup>

In the 1826 general election, Henry Westenra, son of Lord Rossmore, was elected to Westminster with E. P. Shirley. Nominations for the election were lodged in the Courthouse, then located in the Diamond, on 24 June, which was subsequently called Stoney Saturday in memory of the riot which ensued. Contemporary accounts mark an



early use of the town's primary public spaces in demonstrations of political influence:

At twelve o'clock Mr. Westenra made his entry into the town accompanied by five or six hundred men equipped with newly-cut sticks and wearing a green sprig in their hats. In front of the procession a mounted man bore the tree of liberty followed by one hundred mounted men. At the end of the marching file of men a small band of musicians preceded the candidate, Mr. Westenra, who was borne in his carriage by enthusiastic supporters. The party proceeded twice around the Diamond . . . The horse police were scattered through the excited crowds in vain trying with the flat of their swords to disperse them. The attention of all was suddenly directed on Glaslough Street as Leslie accompanied by Shirley rode into the Diamond amid the tenants from the Glaslough area. As the crowds surged into the Diamond small squabbles ended in a bitter conflict between the Leslie and Westenra factions . . . For some time the horse police tried to resist the tenants as the battle raged in the centre of the Diamond. Some stones were thrown at this stage . . . Under the order of a magistrate shots were fired at the multitude without reading the riot act or giving any previous warning. The crowds retired leaving three of their followers stretched on the ground and many among them wounded. The three men later died of their wound . . .<sup>7</sup>

Because Monaghan town was on a religious-political boundary, it became a sort of touchstone of regional tensions in south Ulster which escalated in the later decades of the nineteenth century. In 1861, 35 per cent of the town and parish population (8988) was Protestant, equally divided between Church of Ireland and Presbyterian communities. As nationalist influence rose, the Orange Order strengthened in the county, and in elections from the 1860s to 1880s the town, as the election headquarters, became a stage for sectarian demonstration. The 1868 election was celebrated in verse:

The Monaghan men in rank and file came marching up the street,  
With young James Clarke their foremost, the Clones men to meet.  
And when they met upon the spot they gave three hearty cheers,  
For Madden our bold leader and the Dartry volunteers.  
If you had seen their forces as they marched into the square,  
No Fenian mob or "Midnight Man" to show their faces dare.  
The rebel mob of Monaghan, before them they did fly,  
For well did they remember the Thirteenth of July.<sup>8</sup>

There were other less contentious public demonstrations of communal pride by the town's community. In 1831 the laying of the foundation stone for St Patrick's Church provided an opportunity for ostentatious spectacle in New Diamond, starring the Lord Lieutenant "attended by the gentlemen of the committee and a large concourse of the respectable parishioners of all religious sects . . ." <sup>9</sup> In March 1840, Fr Mathew held a large meeting in the Plantation where *c.* 40,000 people allegedly took the pledge not to drink alcohol. Later in 1896, the incoming Lord Lieutenant again travelled from Dublin for the opening of Monaghan Infirmary, an important institutional addition to the town's services, and the flag-bedecked streets and ceremonial parading was probably one of the last public tributes in Monaghan to a representative of the crown in Ireland.<sup>10</sup> The *Northern Standard* contained regular reports on the annual training of the Royal Irish Fusiliers, who occasionally paraded from the barracks: in June 1890, for example, it reported that:

Our county regiment, which has been up for training since 27<sup>inst</sup> will be all discharged today . . . On Thursday last the inspecting officer, Col. Hopton commanding the 87<sup>th</sup> Regimental District, arrived on the 11 am train from Armagh and at once proceeded to inspect the Regiment in the drill ground at Blackwater vale meadows . . .<sup>11</sup>

A last attempt at possession of the streets was made by the old order in June 1921 following the sudden arrival of a large military force:

. . . there were large numbers of military lorries with them, and even an aeroplane. The lorries parked at the

RIC barracks and the troops bivouacked at certain points in the neighbourhood of the town on the western side. The aeroplane was housed in a hangar at Camla, beside Rossmore Park. During the weekend the roads in the area were a constant scene of military activity. Motor lorries, Crossley tenders, horsed limbers, motor cyclists, ambulance cars and an armoured car were all passing to and fro between Monaghan and the various camps. Soldiers off duty visited the town in large numbers and Monaghan had the appearance of a town in the war zone of France in the Great War. The military on Sunday night entered the post office and ensured that telephonic communications could not be used.<sup>12</sup>

Theo McMahon's *Old Monaghan 1785–1995* contains some of the last photographs of the British army parading in the Diamond in 1920.

The increase in what was called "party feeling" in the later decades of the nineteenth century was evident in marches and parades staking claims over the public streets. The Orange Order was especially noteworthy, with extensive reportage of the Twelfth of July commemorations:

In Monaghan from 9 o'clock in the morning, well-dressed excursionists commenced to arrive, and by eleven o'clock large numbers were in town waiting for the several lodges to form in procession, previous to proceeding to the place of meeting. At about twelve o'clock the several lodges from Monaghan, Castleblayney, Clontibret, Ballinode, Smithborough and surrounding districts having arrived, they then proceeded with the several bands to the North Road and shortly afterwards . . . to Mr. Henderson's very picturesque demesne, where in a portion of the park within view of that gentleman's strikingly handsome residence, a large platform was erected . . . the Monaghan contingent was in itself a very imposing procession of well-dressed and well-to-do people, representative principally of the farming and industrial classes.<sup>13</sup>

Tensions arose as the balance of power shifted, however, and other groups were laying claim to the streets. One such demonstration was indignantly reported in 1885:

The open desecration of the Sabbath has seldom been practised under the suspension and sanction of the Police authorities as far north as Monaghan but on Sunday last the peace and quietness of our town was disturbed by a band of nationalists from Castleblayney. Not content with disturbing the peace of private dwellings these scoffers at religion and religious feelings played when passing the Presbyterian church gate and stopped outside it while evening service was being conducted.<sup>14</sup>

The subsequent dominant influence of the Catholic community was presaged in the post-famine decades with the establishment of boarding schools in Louisville and St Macartan's College. The St Louis school was especially significant into the twentieth century in cultural terms, establishing a reputation for top class concerts which boosted the morale and self-image of the urban community. St Macartan's Cathedral was an especially significant addition to the built landscape of the town and to the social ascendancy of the Catholic community. An imposing architectural statement symbolically adorning a hill dominating the town:

The ceremony of laying the foundation stone was performed by the bishop in the presence of all the prelates of Ireland on 18 June 1861 . . . and the sinkings for the foundation were carried on most vigorously. It was not, I have been told, unusual to see 400 or 500 horses and carts, filled with lime, stone and sand, arrive at the building together—the horses and carts and the men having been supplied gratuitously by the people of the various parishes surrounding.<sup>15</sup>

From the 1920s, the Catholic community had gained in self-confidence. My father remembers processions through the streets of the town by both schools for Easter religious ceremonies in 1928:

We used to march in procession [from St Macartan's College] into Monaghan to take part in the Easter ceremonies at the Cathedral. The convent girls would be there too but they had not as far to walk as we had. I remember once when we had come up Glaslough Street, the girls were coming into the Diamond at the same time. We broke ranks and mingled with the girls and Fr McGahan who was in charge of us went wild and rushed up and down waving his stick to try to separate us . . .<sup>16</sup>

This spirit of Catholic triumphalism peaked during the Eucharistic Congress in 1932, when Monaghan was reported as being “resplendent with flags, bunting and arches” in decorative schemes which commenced in Old Cross Square:

In a few nights the wide thoroughfare was transformed from the end of Dublin Street to the head of the Pound Hill. The Old Cross was converted into an altar which at night is profusely illuminated and before which public prayers are recited . . . Every house in the Square has a little altar over the door with a little red lamp burning before religious pictures. Streamers stretch across the entire square. The Congress, Papal, Episcopal and National flags all find a place . . . the whole town gradually came into the scheme of decoration and on Friday and Saturday nights of last week, hundreds worked into the middle of the night . . . Dublin Street is almost completely closed in above the shop premises so thickly is it be-flagged and arched . . . Park Street has its profusion of flags and bunting, so has Market Street, Church Square and the Diamond. In the evening, crowds stroll through the town admiring the streets in their congress garb . . .<sup>17</sup>

By the 1940s and 1950s, the *Northern Standard* was no longer the voice of unionism, as the balance of power in national and local life had shifted decisively. The newspaper reported exuberantly on a Corpus Christi procession through the streets of the town in 1957, demonstrating a total appropriation of all its public spaces by the rituals of the Catholic Church:

. . . the annual Corpus Christi procession of the Blessed Sacrament took place on Thursday evening when the Sacred Host was borne through the streets of Monaghan from St Joseph's Church to St Macartan's Cathedral amid remarkable scenes of religious fervour. The Sacred Host encased in a golden Monstrance was borne . . . through streets resplendent with flags and bunting fluttering in a breeze that relieved the heat of the sun. Flowers and shrubs lined the footpaths along the processional route and religious tableaux were arranged in doorways and windows. None could fail to be impressed by the devote [*sic*] atmosphere that pervaded the town during the procession. As it wound slowly along the route to the murmur of prayer, the chant of hymns and the music of St Macartan's Brass and Reed Band . . . People from the country areas who had joined in at the assembly point in Park Street lined the footpaths and sank to their knees in adoration as the Blessed Sacrament was borne past . . .<sup>18</sup>

Groups of religious sisters, women's and men's confraternities, Children of Mary and Legion of Mary took part representing the various interests in the town's Catholic community. The State was often indirectly involved by the participation of units of the FCA.

New political allegiances also claimed the streets in large-scale demonstration. New flags and emblems, tricolour and papal flags, adorned public buildings and streets where Union Jack and military regimentals had previously been raised. However, public demonstration in the town reflected differences in ideology and allegiances between Fine Gael, Fianna Fáil and Sinn Féin, rooted in attitudes to partition and the civil war. Contemporary reports also highlighted the growing participation of women in these events: in earlier decades public space was a largely masculine world; revolutionary Ireland saw more women coming into the picture. In 1934, Eoin O'Duffy was holding large rallies in towns throughout the country, and in February in Monaghan:

From one o'clock detachments of the Guards paraded from the barracks and took up positions at vantage points in the town. . . . Contingents poured into town on bicycles, buses

and cars and at one o'clock a special train from Dundalk brought contingents from the southern end of the county. A procession was formed on the North Road in which General O'Duffy marched with prominent local leaders of Fine Gael. It was an inspiring parade. It is estimated that about 1,500 marched in the procession and most of those wore the blue shirts. The Monaghan Blue Shirts fife and drum band and Clones pipers band discoursed choice selections of Irish music . . . A striking feature of the procession was the remarkable number of young ladies wearing blue blouses and black berets.

The meeting in Church Square was large and enthusiastic . . . the huge assembly listening attentively for over three hours to the various speakers. General O'Duffy came on the platform and was received with tremendous cheering and the blue shirt salute . . .<sup>19</sup>

As the parade proceeded from Dublin Street into Old Cross Square, it was ambushed by opposing groups throwing old horse shoes from upper storey windows.<sup>20</sup>

On 10 April 1953, the *Northern Standard* reported on a "Hugely Attended Assembly in Monaghan for Easter Week Commemoration":

One of the biggest gatherings ever assembled in Monaghan was that on Easter Monday [6 April] when thousands of people from all over Ulster thronged the town to witness and participate in the Easter Week 1916 commemoration ceremonies in which veterans of the five Northern IRA Divisions from the nine counties of Ulster . . . joined.

Over 4,000 veterans marched past a saluting base in Church Square to the music of twenty two bands . . . Crowds thronged Church Square to view the stirring scenes as the parade swung past the saluting base where the salute was taken by Mr. Charles McGleenan, MP for South Armagh . . . The parade proceeded up Park Street and returned to Church Square via the Mall Road and Dublin Street . . . Slowly the tricolour on the Courthouse

was lowered to half mast as the Guard of Honour came to the present and all eyes were turned to the flag. Then clear-cut in the silence sounded the mournful notes of the "Last Post". Then three volleys were fired by a firing party drawn from the Monaghan Coy. Old IRA.

The monuments of the former ascendancy age continued to preside over these street tableaux, though in straitened economic circumstances they were in increasingly poor condition and were little regarded in popular discourse. The Crimean cannon trophies were hauled away from the Dawson monument and vanished from sight and memory in the thirties. In 1957, the *Northern Standard* reported a meeting of the Urban Council where "Monaghan Town's Deformities" were headlined, including "the North Road Dump, and Corner stones hanging precariously from Market House. . . ."21 However, unlike Nelson's Pillar in Dublin, which was witness to similar displays of republican fervour in the capital city, the Dawson Memorial with its imperial connotations survives. The survey of the town's buildings heritage, undertaken in 1970, marked the beginning of a new era of appreciation of the built and cultural environment of the town.<sup>22</sup>

The "Coronation of Queen Elizabeth the Second" was headlined almost nostalgically in 1953, but an event which would have been marked ceremonially in Diamond or Square fifty years earlier passed off in silence in Monaghan:

There were scenes of rejoicing and festivities through Great Britain and the Dominions and cities and towns were profusely decorated . . . In Eire generally there was much comment on the attitude adopted towards the great event by the powers that be . . . and in every town where there was a wireless set the impressive proceedings throughout the day in London were followed . . . Few people were to be seen in the streets of the town, especially while the Coronation service was being broadcast . . . On this occasion public celebration might be described as being "extra-mural", restricted to Crosses outside the town where throughout the day, the Union Jack was flown



on the Orange Hall as well as from private residences. In the evening a large crowd assembled and sang "God Save the Queen".<sup>23</sup>

A Sinn Féin rally in the town in 1957, following the death of Fergal O'Hanlon, was a harbinger of troubles to come arising from the proximity of the border with Northern Ireland:

Despite the heavy rain that fell the Monaghan branch of Sinn Féin staged an enthusiastic victory rally on Monday night. Several bonfires blazed in various parts of the town and several hundreds, including young women, marched in a torchlight procession through the streets in the pouring rain. Three bands participated. A big crowd assembled in Church Square to listen to brief speeches interspersed with items of Irish dancing, songs and recitations . . .<sup>24</sup>

In 1966 the newspaper reported on the fiftieth anniversary of the 1916 Rising when a parade of 2000 was held, one of the last official state commemorations to take to the streets in the town:

. . . members of the Army, FCA, Old IRA, Civil Defence Corps, the GAA, Red Cross etc took part in the impressive parade to the music of bands and beautiful weather . . . The town was in gala garb. Flags and bunting fluttered in every street with the tricolour flying from almost every house. Business premises featured window displays of Irish goods and bookshops displayed books dealing with the Easter Rising . . . The Military Ceremony in Church Square was the highlight of the occasion. The Salute was taken by Comdt John J. Fitzpatrick, an Old IRA man and brother of the late Comdt Matt Fitzpatrick who was shot by British forces in Clones 1922 . . .<sup>25</sup>

An alternative parade by Sinn Féin was held a couple of hours later.

The following thirty years of "troubles" across and along the border, which struck at the heart of the town with the bombing of 17 May 1974, marked a reduction in high-profile public demonstration.

Although lives were lost and property damaged, the physical and symbolic structures of Church Square survived the outrage.

#### Notes

1. *Northern Standard (NS)*, 26 March 1898.
2. P. Livingstone, *The Monaghan Story* (Monaghan, 1980), p 478, quoting from *NS*, 29 September 1963.
3. Longleat papers, Trench correspondence, accounts year ending 1 March 1855.
4. *List of Historic Buildings; Groups of Buildings; Areas of Architectural Importance*, prepared by C.E.B. Brett for Ulster Architectural Heritage Society and An Taisce, 1970, 35pp., and review by Rev. Seosamh Ó Dufaigh in *Clogher Record*, vol. vii, 1970, pp. 325–35; see also Theo McMahan, *Old Monaghan 1785–1995* (Monaghan, 1995).
5. Brett, *List of Historic Buildings*.
6. Unpublished diaries in possession of author.
7. Rev. Martin Cahill, “The 1826 General Election in County Monaghan”, *Clogher Record*, vol. ii, 1964, p. 171, citing reports in the *Dublin Evening Mail* and the *Dublin Evening Post* of June 1826.
8. C.D. McGimpsey, “Border Ballads and Sectarian Affrays”, *Clogher Record*, vol. xi, 1982, p. 23.
9. Brett, *List of Historic Buildings*, p. 33, and Ó Dufaigh in *Clogher Record*, vol vii, 1970, p. 326.
10. See McMahan, *Old Monaghan*, p. 51.
11. *NS*, 21 June 1890.
12. *NS*, 12 June 1921.
13. *NS*, 20 July 1889. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, Orange Order commemorations in the area more commonly took place in Clones, Ballybay or Cootehill.
14. *NS*, 31 January 1885. Quoted in Lindsay T. Brown, “The Presbyterian Dilemma”, *Clogher Record*, vol. xv, 1995, p. 61.
15. *Freeman’s Journal*, January 1864, reprinted in Ó Dufaigh, *Clogher Record*, vol vii, 1970, p. 329.
16. In Patrick J. Duffy, *Landscapes of South Ulster: a Parish Atlas of the Diocese of Clogher* (Belfast, 1993), p. 75.

17. *NS*, 24 June 1932.
18. *NS*, 21 June 1957; see photograph in McMahon, *Old Monaghan*, p. 170.
19. *NS*, 23 February 1934; see McMahon, *Old Monaghan*, p. 103.
20. From Francie McCarron.
21. *NS*, 10 May 1957.
22. Brett, *List of Historic Buildings*.
23. *NS*, 5 June 1953.
24. *NS*, 22 March 1957.
25. *NS*, 15 April 1966.

### Acknowledgement

For further reading on the public and symbolic use of urban space, see Yvonne Whelan, “Monuments, Power and Contested Space—the Iconography of Sackville Street (O’Connell Street) Before Independence (1922)”, *Irish Geography*, 34 (1), 2001, pp. 11–33. Theo McMahon’s *Old Monaghan 1785–1995* is an important source. The photograph collections are especially valuable, as these precious-ly maintained images of long-ago days and faces help us to imagine and understand identifiable places in the past.

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