

DESIGN STATEMENT

Part 8 for 'Weighmaster's House'
2 Church St., Shandon, Cork.

Proposed Refurbishment, alterations and change of use of 'Weighmaster's House' to community and creative space.

November 2024



Fig. 1: Proposed Street Elevation to Weighmaster's House, Church Street, Cork.

Executive Summary

This Design Statement is to be read in conjunction with the drawings prepared by Cork City Council Architects Department which together with other schedules and reports, form a Part 8 submission.

The 'Weighmaster's House' refers to the former Weighmaster's House and western bay of the Butter Market to the rear.

The proposal is to refurbish the existing heritage building utilising best conservation practise to transform it into a versatile and multifunctional but purposeful and accessible community and creative space. This will link with and compliment the permitted enterprise centre for the Butter Exchange.

It is considered that the proposed developments is consistent with the proper planning and sustainable development of the area, will significantly contribute to enhancing the special character of the protected Structure and Architectural Conservation Area and will positively contribute towards the revitalisation of the Shandon urban neighbourhood.

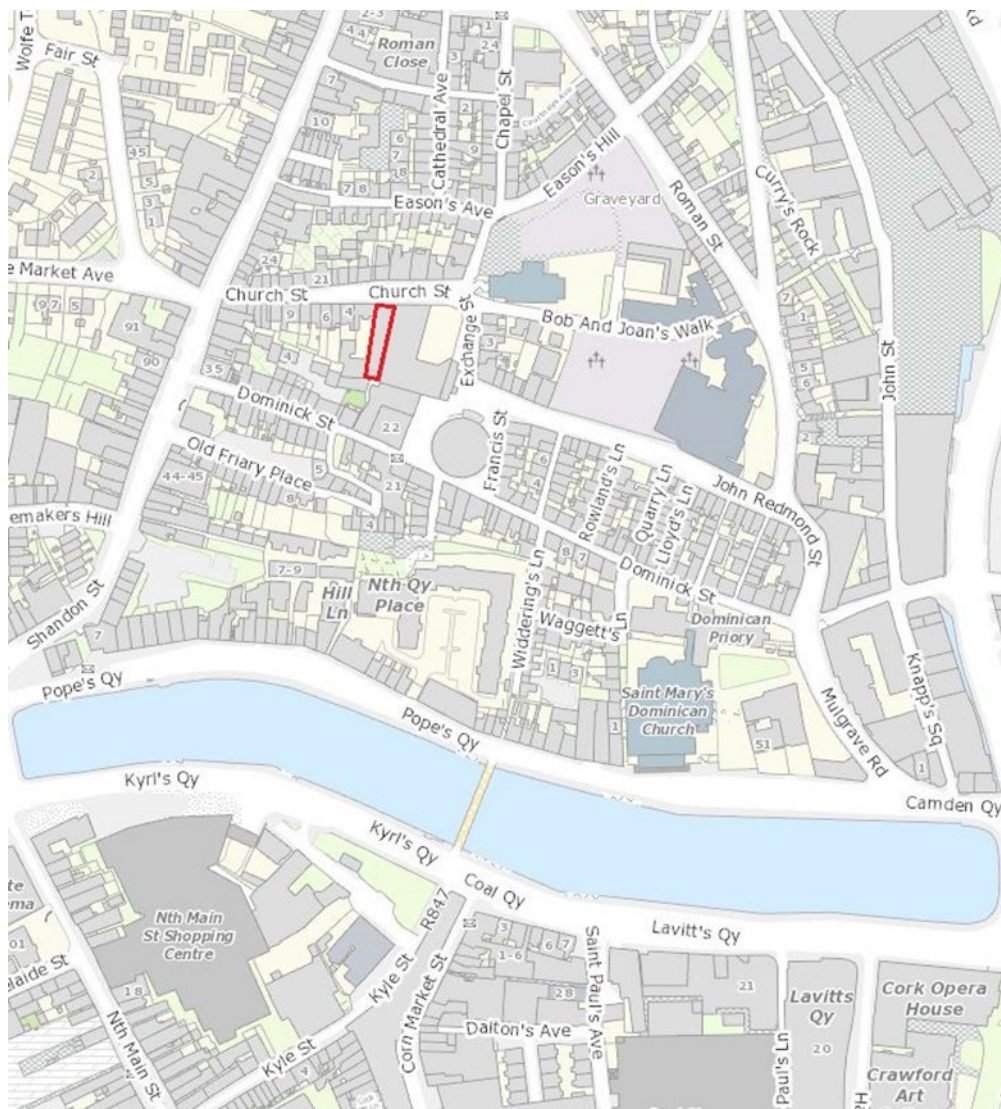


Fig. 2: Site Location – the Weighmaster's House outlined in red.

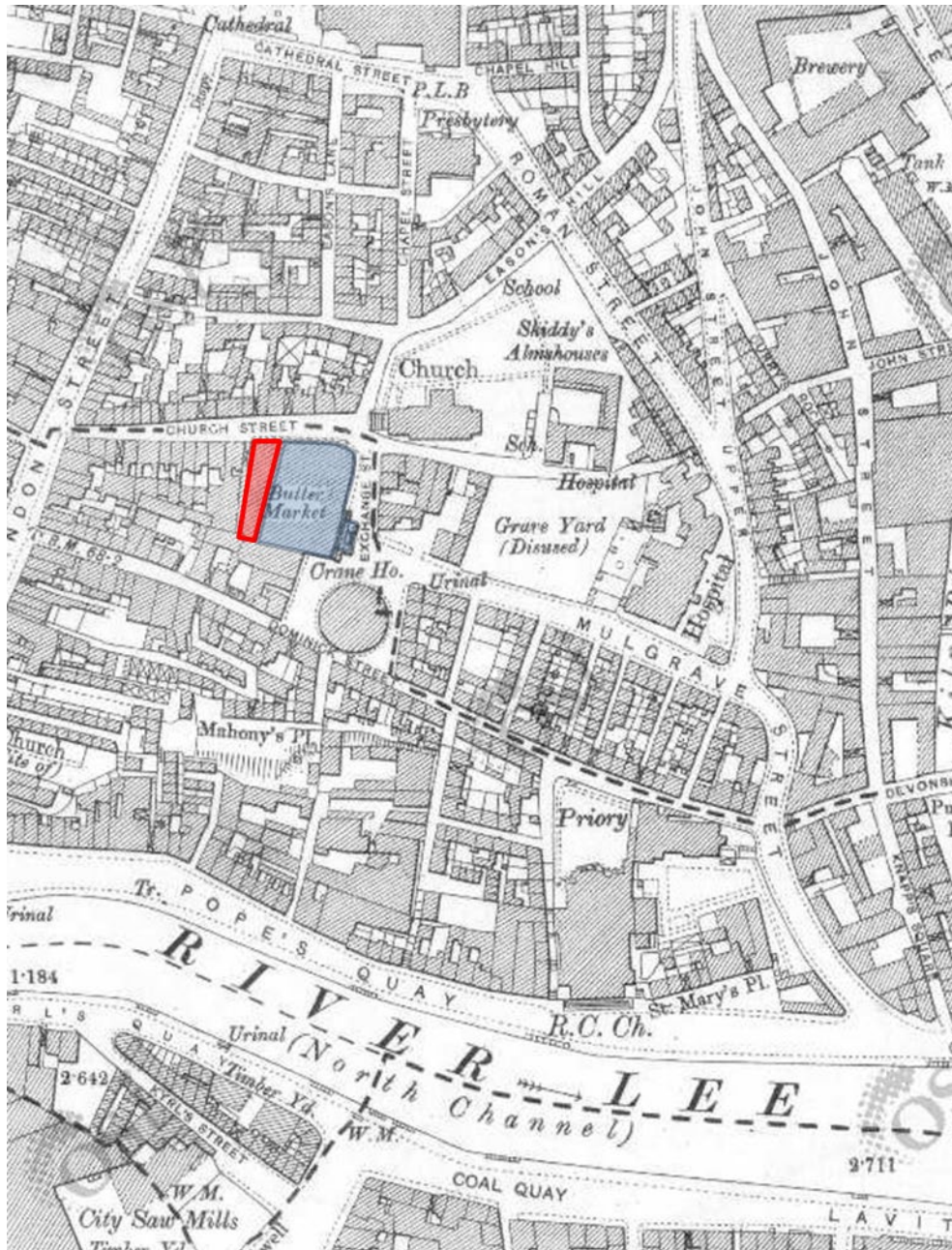


Fig. 3: Historic Map 25 inch (1888-1913) identifying the Weighmaster's House (red) and the Butter Market (blue).

Brief Historical Context

Cork's Butter Market was established at the end of the eighteenth century - around the same time that Cork became Ireland's major Atlantic trading port. There is a record of a 'North Weigh House' on the site in 1721 and this is possibly the reason that the Butter Market evolved on this site.

The Butter Market in Shandon grew to become the largest in the world and a major centre of butter distribution on the international market. The Butter Market Exchange opened its doors in 1770.

Despite the scale and importance of its dealings, it was not until the early nineteenth century that a unified covered area was constructed. The extent of the original market building is shown on the 1st Edition of the Ordnance Survey (1842) occupying the area bounded by Church Street and Mannix Street. (See Fig. 4)

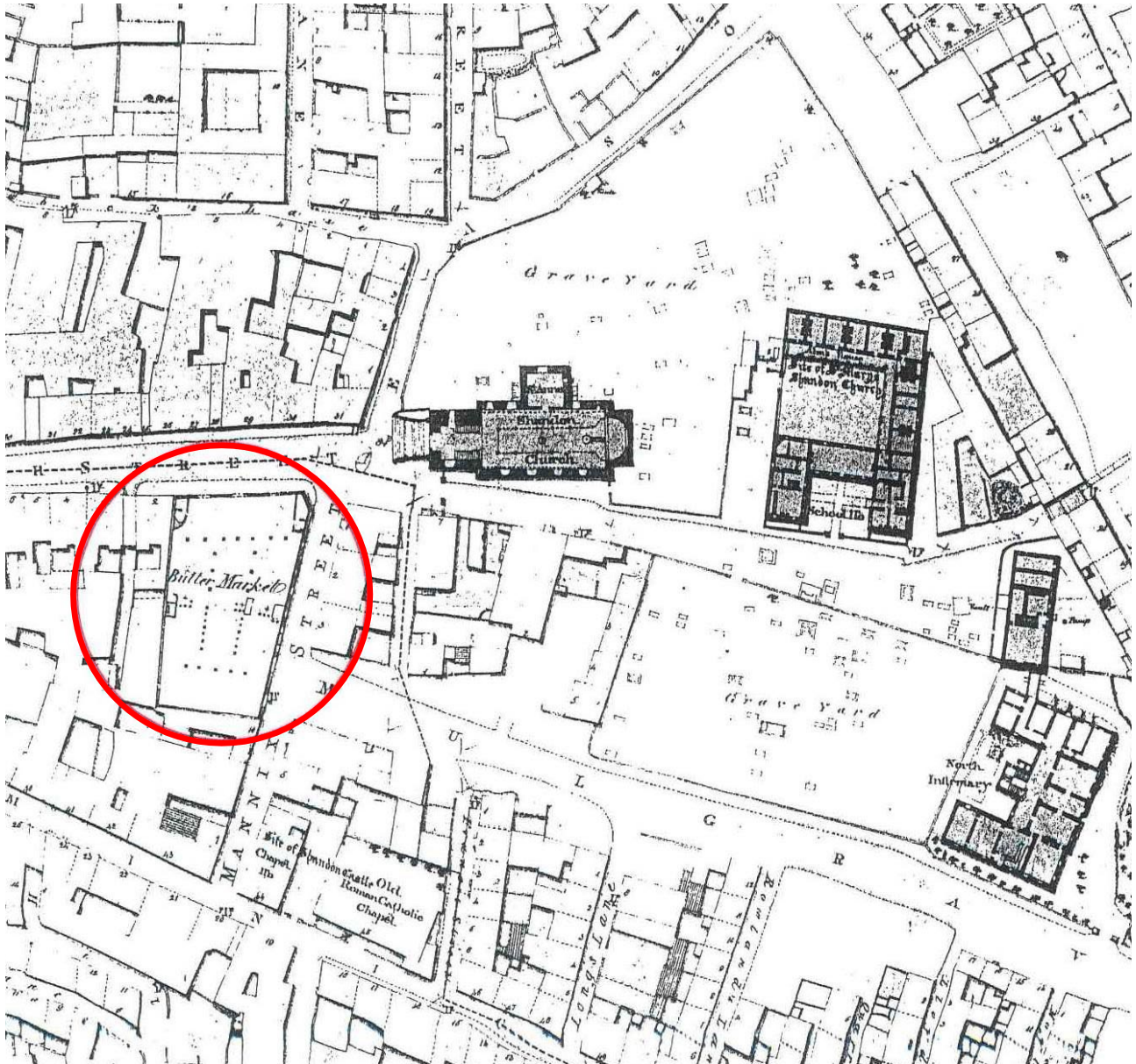


Fig. 4: OS Map Sheet No. XV highlighting the Butter Exchange Market in 1842. Three bays running north-south.

By the mid 1800's there was need for expansion and the Butter Market was extensively remodelled and extended to the designs of Sir John Benson in 1849, with the classical façade and portico added. The building now known as the Weighmaster's House, located to the east of the Butter Market on Church Street, was incorporated into the markets at this time. It is possible that an existing house on the street was adapted as part of this expansion and therefore the Weighmaster's House may retain earlier building fabric.

At the time of the expansion and the incorporation of the Weighmaster's House the butter exchange functioned 24 hours a day and almost half a million firkins were traded each year. The exchange had

a weighmaster who checked the weights and measures to ensure they were being honestly traded and he lived in the house which formed part of the butter exchange. The accommodation appears to have been located to the first and second floors and had an internal bay window which overlooked the interior of the Butter Market. The extent of Benson designed complex is highlighted in red on the extract from the 1870 Ordnance Survey below. (See Fig. 5)

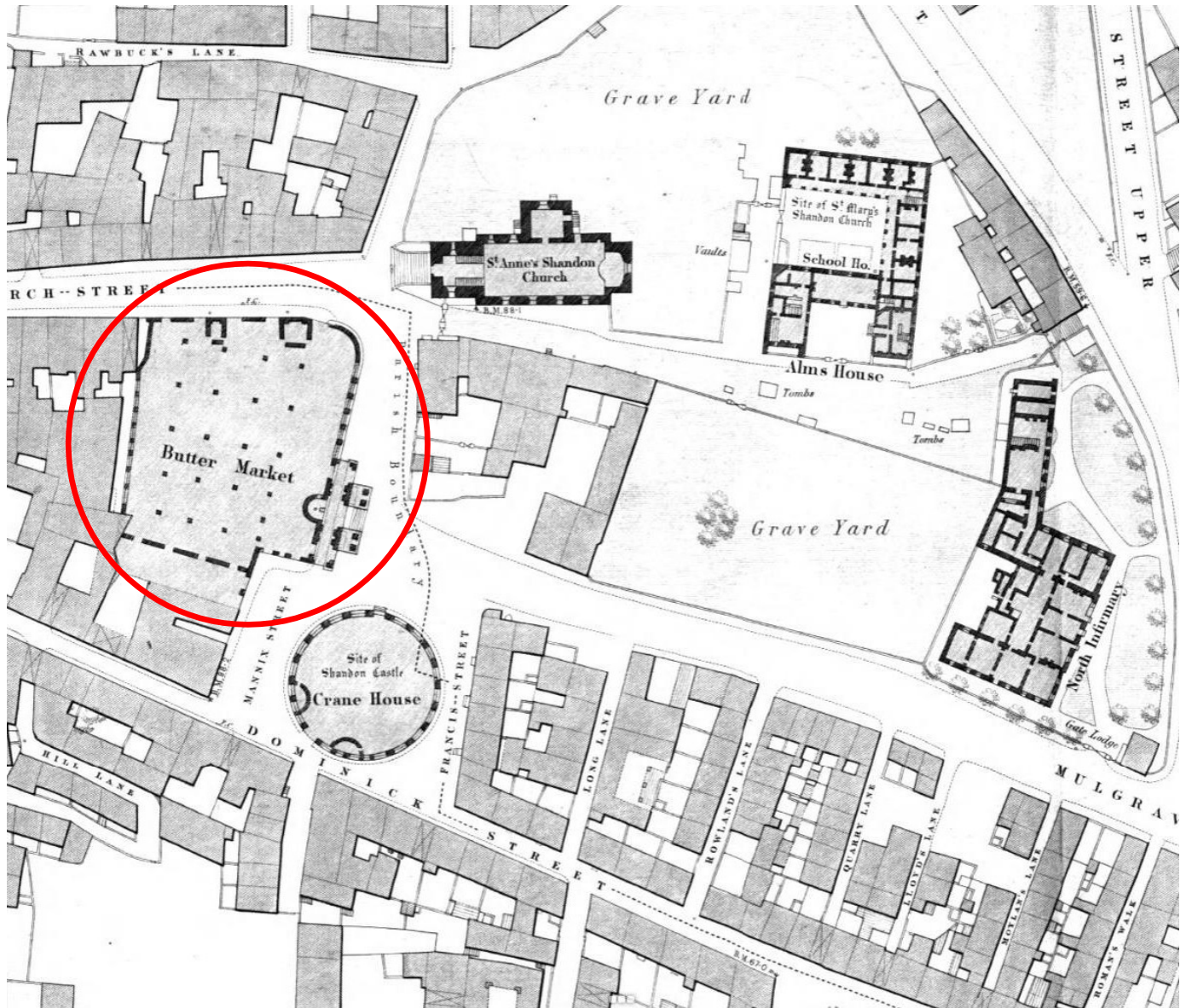


Fig. 5: Extract from OS Sheet No. LXXIV highlighting the Butter Market in 1870. It expanded east and west and had five bays running north-south.

The Butter Market finally closed in 1924 and sometime after, the western bay (the location of the Weighmaster's House) was walled off from the rest of the market.

In the 1930's Sunbeam Wolsey occupied the former Butter Market building making woollen clothes and later T. O'Gorman and Sons, making hats and caps under the 'Shandon' brand, until it was destroyed by the fire of 1976. The Entrance Portico with its East boundary wall and the western bay, including the Weighmaster's House, survived the fire.



Fig. 6: Church Street, Cork showing Weighmaster's House on the right with Canopy. (Robert French, Lawrence Collection).

The Weighmaster's House and the westernmost bay of the Butter Market survived the fire and appears to have been used by various businesses between circa 1945 and 1974 such as Deasy's (soft drinks) and later by Harrington's Bakery. The premises was later used as a dance studio with further internal modifications made at this time including the insertion of a mezzanine floor. There was a proposal in 1999 to convert the building to provide a home for Graffiti theatre, but the premises has been vacant since the late 1990's and considerable water ingress has destroyed much of the original Butter Market roof to the rear.

The Weighmaster's House itself is substantially intact but has also suffered from water ingress on its rear roof.

In 1980 Cork Corporation purchased the adjoining ruins of the Butter Exchange in order to secure the preservation of the remaining elevations and Portico. The site was developed into a new Craft Centre with the assistance of the Industrial Development Authority in 1984. The Shandon Craft Centre remained open until 2008. Planning Permission for an enterprise centre 'innovation hub' was granted to Recreate Shandon CLG (a social enterprise) in 2022 (Ref. No: 22/41009) which has not yet commenced. The proposal is to substantially retain the existing 1980's structure and to add some new interventions while maintaining the 19th century portico and eastern wall, in addition to the existing outdoor courtyard.

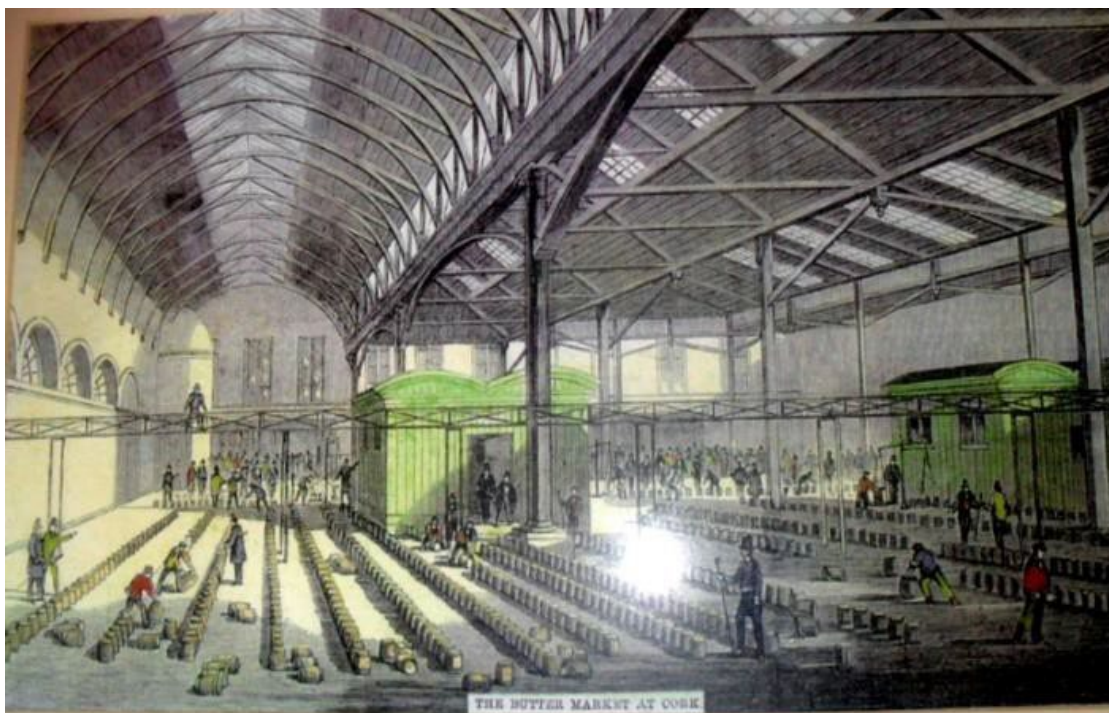


Fig. 7: Interior of Cork Butter Exchange (Illustrated London News, Vol.34, 2 April 1859, p.324).

Site Location

The site is located at no. 2 Church Street in Shandon, Cork city.

The main elevation of the Weighmaster's House fronts onto Church Street to the north and is bounded by the main Butter Exchange building to the east side to the south is a small yard which separates the building from the Butter Museum. An apartment building (currently under construction - Ref. No: 22/41265) backs onto the premises on the south side. To the west the Weighmaster's House is bounded by an apartment scheme at No. 3 Church Street.

Protected Structure Status

The building known as the Weighmaster's House is a protected structure on the current Cork City Development Plan 2022-2028 as part of the Former Butter Market, Protected Structure Reference 077 and is also included on the National Inventory of Architectural Heritage (Reg. No. 20512009). The protected structure listing for the Butter Market includes the whole site, comprising the Butter Exchange (the former Craft Centre), its Entrance Portico and boundary wall and the Weighmaster's House.

The Weighmaster's House is located in the Shandon Architectural Conservation Area, as identified in the current Development Plan 2022-2028. The former Butter market complex, of which the Weighmaster's house forms part, is identified as one of the monumental historic buildings which give the area its unique identity.

- Close proximity to services and amenities

Located within a Cultural Precinct with Dance Studios, Museum, Religious establishments, Art Studio, Parks, Hotel and tourist attractions.

Within walking distance of Shandon Street which has many amenities and close to the city centre.

- Street and utility infrastructure already in place

Services on Church Street (see Proposed Ground Floor Plan)

- Located on a bus route

The 202 / 202A bus route has a bus stop on John Redmond Street.

Site Characteristics

- Part of a well-defined street with terraces giving continual frontage.
- Local Typology: Church Street: 2 and 3-storey town houses dating from 19th and 20th century with living accommodation on upper levels and most ground floor levels where previously occupied by shops.
- Local medieval street pattern.
- Pedestrian friendly public realm although motorised traffic throughout the area can create congestion.
- Settled older community and transient younger population.
- Pocket parks in former graveyards

Proposed Development

The proposal is to refurbish the existing 'Weighmaster's House' in line with best conservation practise to transform it into a versatile and multifunctional but purposeful and accessible community and creative space.

This will link with and compliment the permitted enterprise centre for the Butter Exchange. This would become a significant community resource that would act as a hub for innovation and creative activity associated with potential co-benefits in terms of the educational technology environment, which could take a number of forms. It is intended to ensure flexibility in the design within the overall design of the Weighmaster's House to maximise the opportunities for integration with the Butter Exchange as well as independent usage and operation by a range of users.

With regard to the space layout the proposal includes the following:

- Large multi-use flexible space 'market hall'
- Entrance foyer and café
- 1st floor open plan desk space
- Office spaces/focussed workspaces
- Male female and universal WCs
- Ancillary services

The uses do and may include creative space, recording studios, work desks, meetings, events, exhibitions. The design ensures the ground floor is predominantly a larger more flexible space.

Conservation Approach

The architectural significance of the surviving western bay of the Butter Market, and the Weighmaster's House fronting Church Street, is recognised. Although the building is now in poor repair, a number of laminated curved roof trusses original to the John Benson scheme survive and will be used as templates to allow for the faithful restoration of the roof (located to the rear of the Weighmaster's House). Extensive research has provided information on the historic form and materials of the roof which will be restored to best conservation practice, including the slate covering and clerestory glazing. Blocked lunette windows to the western wall of this former Butter Market area will also be reopened and reinstated.

The Weighmaster's House, when constructed, offered a lively frontage to Church Street and its social significance as the residence of the weighmaster of the Butter Market is also relevant. For these reasons, it is proposed to retain and restore the weighmaster's House, including its slate roof and small pane sash windows to the upper floors. The staircase, floor plans of the upper floors and any salvageable surviving historic fabric (such as floor joists, floorboards and joinery items) will also be retained. The chimney to the Church Street elevation will be reinstated to restore the 19th century character of the house.

The large opening to the ground floor which provides access off Church Street will be retained as a public entrance to the building, while the smaller doorway to the west will be retained and give access to the upper floors of the Weighmaster's House. The ground floor area of this building, which has undergone many phases of interventions since its original use, will remain as an open plan area providing an entrance lobby and café space.

The proposed project will follow best conservation practice to conserve and restore the 19th century house and the single surviving Butter Market bay located to the rear.

Design Intent

The overarching principle is to restore the building to best conservation practise while giving it a new purpose as a community and creative space.

As a significant part of the original Butter Market building which survived the fire in the late 1970s, the proposal is to refurbish the existing building to transform it into a publicly accessible community building of heritage value to provide a Creative Space, while providing additional internal usable space through careful modern interventions into the double-height space to the rear of the Weighmaster's House in the form of new mezzanine levels.

The aim is to restore the fabric of the building while adding internal, reversible interventions in order for the building to be accessible to all and to provide a sustainable use which will support the ongoing running costs and maintenance of the building into the future.

To that end, the entrance from Church Street will be reinstated allowing for a connection to the main double-height space within the building. A small café / meeting space will be provided at this ground floor entrance space.



Fig. 8: View of the interior of the Cork Butter Market Exchange showing roof and clerestory glazing. The doors at the rear open to Church Street. This area was destroyed by fire in 1976. Part of the Weighmaster's House can be seen on the left. (Photograph c.1914)

New first floor mezzanines will be added to the front and back of the main space to provide desk space overlooking the ground floor below. The strength of this space is the volume in height and length which gives it a dramatic feel. The new interventions are planned in order to maintain the generosity of this light-filled space as much as possible.

The original 'House' on the two upper floors will be fully renovated with the first floor providing smaller spaces for small groups and the second floor being used as the Manager's office.

Level access will be provided at ground floor while a new lift inserted into the plan will provide access to the levels above.

In order to provide suitable escape in the event of fire, there will be a new connection with the Butter Exchange (permitted enterprise centre) at ground floor level leading to its main entrance hall and the portico fronting onto John Redmond Street. This connection will also facilitate a social connection between the two buildings and allow interaction between the innovation hub and the community space with associated benefits.

The large space of the Weighmaster's 'market hall' will provide a venue for presentations, discussions, temporary exhibitions etc. for both the Weighmaster's and Enterprise and Technology Hub communities.

It is proposed to reduce the floor level at the entrance / café to the original street level and to reduce the main floor level in the 'market hall' by about 300mm in order to provide sufficient head height under the proposed mezzanine floor at the rear within the main space. This raised dance floor had been added at a later date and is higher than the original floor.

Roof

The existing roof will be carefully assessed and parts of the original trusses retained and repaired where possible and reconstructed where needed as exact replicas of the originals and reinstalled to provide support for the reconstructed roof which will have a slate finish.

It is proposed to reconstruct the roof lights running along both sides of the ridge with electrically operated opening sections as required.

The roof will be finished in slate and the roof lights and rainwater goods will be cast iron.

Clerestory Lighting

The high-level clerestory glazing on the eastern side of the market hall has been removed – probably when the wall was constructed between the Butter Exchange and the Weighmaster's House.

It is proposed to carefully remove the top part of this concrete wall and to reconstruct the high-level glazing using timber sections of similar size and type as was originally used throughout the market.

Conclusion

The restoration of the Weighmaster's House will be transformative to Shandon and the city by providing a publicly accessible building of heritage value in an historic neighbourhood.

Appendix A - Key Photographs.



Weighmaster's House highlighted in Red in context. Fronting onto Church Street and situated beside the Butter Exchange in Shandon, Cork city. View from St. Anne's Church Tower.



External view of Weighmaster's House (2024) from Church Street. Ground floor double-doors to Butter Market and single door to Stairs leading to Weighmaster's House on two upper levels.



Internal view of Weighmaster's House ground floor entrance area.



Internal view of Weighmaster's House ground floor 20th century servery.



Internal view (2024) of original Butter Market looking south with 1980's additions. The building has been substantially damaged by roof failure.

Internal view (2024) of original Butter Market looking north with 1980's additions. The building has been substantially damaged by roof failure. Blocked up lunettes left.



West elevation of original Butter Market with blocked up lunettes.



Interior of Weighmaster's House showing original windows at first floor level.



Interior of Weighmaster's House showing original windows at second floor stairs.

Appendix B - Drawings.