

THE IVEAGH MARKET - A PHOTO ESSAY

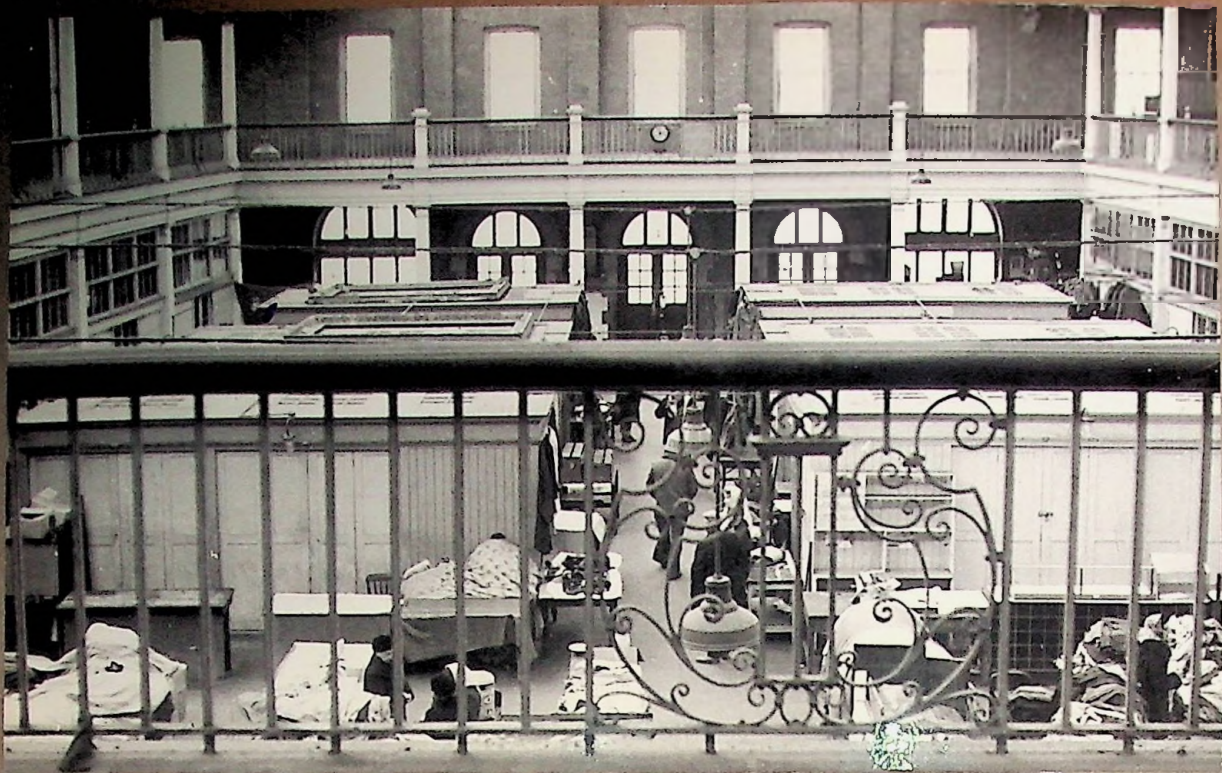
Thomas Grace, 1977

3rd Year Fine Art



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INTRODUCTION

I am presenting this thesis as a photo essay, the theme of which is one of Dublin's oldest trading markets - the Iveagh Market. I chose the Iveagh Market because it interested me as a part of old Dublin which is quite unique. It stands as a reminder to a way of life which today's children will probably never know existed, such is the extent of documented information I was able to obtain regarding the Market. Through the photographs and text I intend to try and give an objective account of the Market as it appeared over a period of 5/6 weeks. I had no previous knowledge or experience of the Market prior to starting the project.

This is my first photo essay and I set it as an exercise because I felt that a deeper involvement with the subject was imperative to the evolution of my photographic work. It is a step in a new direction for me. Up until now I have been really only involved with single images. For this project I have adapted Marc Riboud's philosophy "For me the photographer is a witness. His job is to record real events rather than to stage or create something in front of the camera". *

The first thing I had to do was to get to know as many dealers as possible. It was very important that they knew what I was doing and approved of it. It was also important that they accepted me and allowed me to come in week after week to their Market and take their photographs. I never took it for granted that I could just come and go as I pleased. The text will follow an informal pattern and will consist mainly of bits and pieces of information which I picked up during conversation with the dealers. I will also talk about feelings, reactions and observations, both my own and the dealer's, and any situations which developed during the course of the project.

* The Concerned Photographer 2.



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THE MARKET

The Iveagh Market, situated in Dublin's Liberty area, was acquired by Lord Iveagh and turned over to Dublin Corporation in 1906. It was officially opened on 18th September, 1907. Lord Iveagh was a member of the Guinness family who monopolised the Liberties area as they do today with the Guinness brewery complex. The Market was originally a rival brewery which Guinness bought over. They were then faced with the problem of what use to put it to as they had no real need for it. Lord Iveagh decided to open a market there to remove the street traders who presented a very unpleasant sight to himself and his guests as they rode in carriages from his home in Castleknock to Patrick's Cathedral. Before the Market opened people would set up their stalls anywhere along Thomas Street, Francis Street, Meath Street and Patrick Street. Once the Market opened it was forbidden for people to sell anything on the streets which could be sold in the enclosed Iveagh Market, and offenders were prosecuted.

In its day the Market was a splendid trading area, stocked from top to bottom with bargains and packed with customers from one end of the week to the next. Joe, a dealer in the Market for the past 30 years recalls " It used to be terrific here in the old days, you couldn't get from one end of the Market to the other without having to push your way right through. It was always very popular, very lively and never slack. You could come here seven-days-a-week and it was never slack". Things were cheap then, rents were low and people did not have the worry of inflation. There seems to have been an almost carnival atmosphere to the place. "They used to auction off their stuff. They'd stand up there on their boxes and shout ' here's a bit of sugar for the bird' (loosely translated it means I bought them for nothing and I'm selling them for less - c'mon buy up). All the dealers used to go around the big houses buying clothes, they were all second hand and they got them very cheap".

Indeed one of my earliest memories of Dublin as a kid is the 'rag and bone man'. These characters, with their horse and cart or handcart, were a notable feature of the City. They regularly did the rounds of the various neighbourhoods collecting old



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clothes, crockery, antiques and furniture. They had a very simple and functional trading system which at the time worked quite well. The 'rag and bone man' would take away any old rubbish that people wanted to be rid of and in return he gave the children of the neighbourhood (who always carried out the deals) sweets, lollipops and maybe a few pence.

Ida Molloy, a trader in the Market for over 30 years explains "There was an incident here one time, I reckon it was about 20 years ago. All the dealers used to go around the big houses buying clothes. Then they'd come back with their clothes and they'd sit down and one might sell to the other as they'd be opening them up. In the course, there were four women over there and one had bought the clothes, this is facts now, she came back and when she was opening them Nellie Ferris said to her what's them in the bottom of the bundle. It was a load of papers and when she lifted them out, onw I'm going back 20 years, times has changed, there were all Communist papers. Now she was after buying the clothes somewhere in Mount Street and they went down and they were saying the rosary for three days outside of Mount Street. They gave her the clothes for nothing but they also gave her the Communist literature to bring in here. She didn't know what they were, she couldn't read nor write, a more well-meaning woman lifted them up. It caused a terrible commotion 'cause they were all very religious, in their own way like". Indeed they are still, as they have always been. Quite a few stalls in the Market still display regillious pictures and statues.

So the dealers when they had collected their goods would sort them out in the Market and swop and sell among themselves before they went before the general public. When the Corporation took the Market over they put out a set of strict bye-laws by which the Market should be run. One of the bye-laws concerned cleanliness of clothes being sold. Bye-law No. 27 : *

"No old clothes shall not be sold within the Market unless and until the same shall have been disinfected in the Disinfecting Chambre attached to the Market to the satisfaction of the officer or other person appointed by the Corporation to superintend the disinfection of old clothes."

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* Corporation of Dublin Bye Laws.



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For cleaning purposes the Corporation provided a wash house along the north wing of the Market. This was equipped with three heavy disinfecting machines. The only snag being that if woollens, tweeds, overcoats, shoes etc. went through the machine they shrank, so they catered only for a limited amount of wares sold in the Market. However, it appears that wash-boards and tubs were used extensively in the wash house so possibly the tenants of the Market took to washing their articles by hand. I have also been told that everybody in the Liberties used the wash house. So remembering that people in tenement houses would not have had washing facilities - never mind washing machines - it is quite possible that the Market wash house became a communal wash room where the women of the area would gather on their traditional washing day to do the family laundry. If this is so it would enhance the value and importance of the Market to the community as a shopping cum recreational complex.

And then of course at that time the Market also opened on Sundays, people would go down on Sunday morning and buy their Sunday dinner. They could get anything they wanted in the Market then, there was no need to stock up on Saturday for the weekend. But apparently the Church had the Market closed on Sundays. It seems people were not going to Mass and the pubs around the Market were packed all day Sunday, so the Bishop insisted that the Market be closed down on Sundays.

Nellie Ferris explains "The women used to come in here of a Saturday and Sunday after having a few drinks. Now if they didn't want their husbands to know they were drinking they'd lie down on the benches and we'd cover them with our clothes until they'd sleep it off".

This gives some idea of the Market as it was, always packed with customers, bustling, alive and colourful in both its characters and its wares. However, today the Market is only a shadow of its former self, although it has undergone very few changes since its establishment. The goods sold have not changed much although there is very little furniture sold there today. Now most of the stalls are under second hand clothes, though

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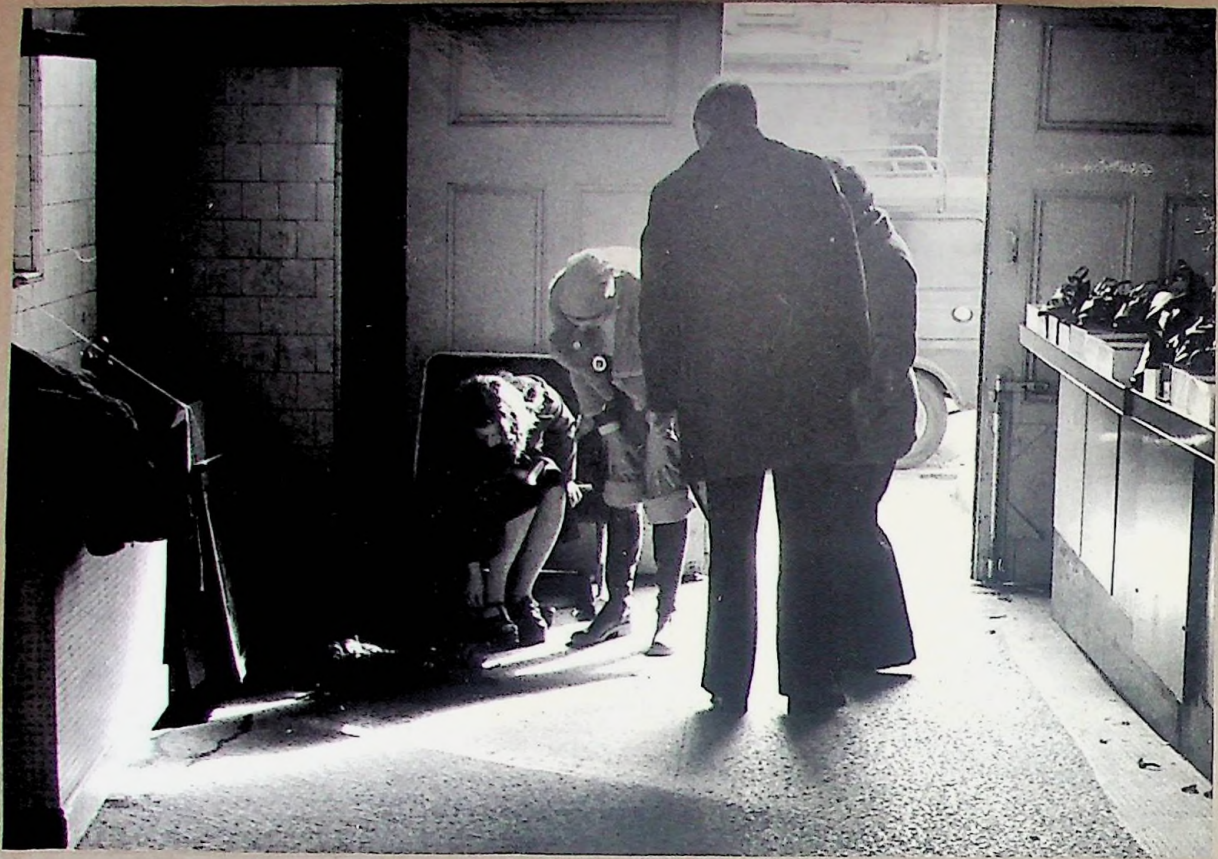
there are still one or two stalls dealing in antiques and bits and pieces. For those who have the time to spend browsing around the Market there are lots of bargains waiting to be rooted out from the mounds which cover the stalls. The goods range from second hand shoes and socks to suits and overcoats, from knives and forks to wardrobes.

The dealers have apparently changed very little, but then the Market is very like a family business. Ninety-nine per cent of the present dealers have inherited their stalls from parents and grand-parents although one or two of the original members remain. So it is a very closely knit community. The atmosphere in the market is relaxed and quite pleasant, there is no apparent competition. The dealers can converse from one end of the Market to the other by having messages carried or by shouting which is the normal procedure. They can leave their stalls unattended knowing that the next dealer will look after it.

The one big change in the Market has been the decline of custom over the years. Its drawing power seems to extend now only to a very small section of the working class and the down-and-outs of Dublin. Although occasionally the Market is used by theatre people looking for costume material and props and also young people looking for old fashions to keep up with new trends.

On weekends Friday and Saturday business is not too bad, but during the week it is so bad that most of the dealers do not bother to go in. "An awful lot of dealers has taken now to going to the country during the week, cos the money is not here. They bring their wares down to the fairs and they only come here of a Friday and Saturday, with the result that it has become a weekend market." Dealers do not take away their goods when they have finished trading, they cover them over with sheets. It is very strange to walk into the Market in mid-week and see the rows and rows of heap-up stalls covered in sheets, maybe two or three lonely dealers with their stalls open for business and rarely a customer in sight. It is very eerie and quite sad indeed to think that such an

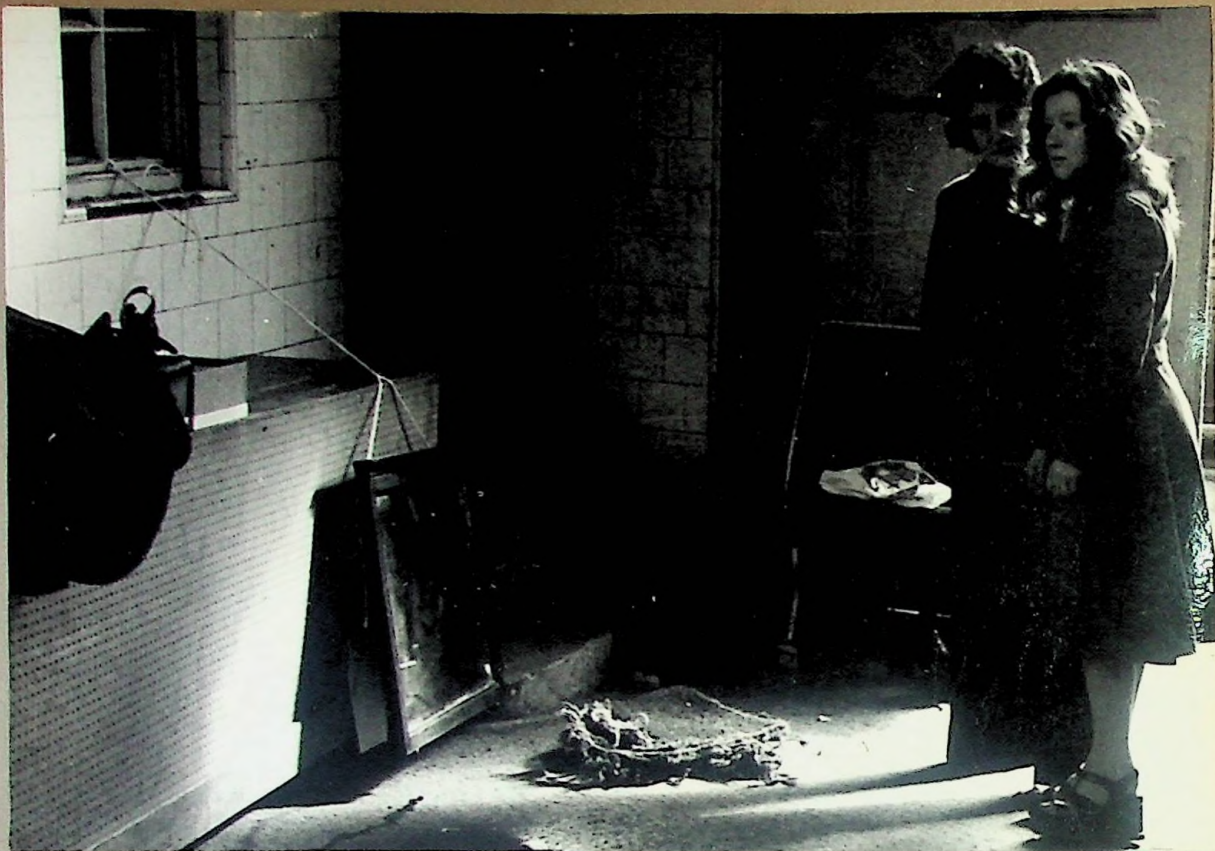
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old tradition is dying. The Market preserves a concept of humanity which the modern shopping complex deprives us of. The system has not changed, barter and bargaining are still notable features of the Market and reflect a social attitude which has not changed since the establishment of markets.

What is the reason for the lack of trade ? "The Corporation are ruining the Market", a trader complains, "they are sending people out to live in Coolock and Ballyfermot and sure then they don't bother to come in, it's too far." Well the Corporation will make no apologies for re-housing people even if it does interfere with the Market. The Market dealers consider their main rivals to be the street traders who still line Thomas Street and the other markets which have opened up recently in the immediate area - the Meath Street, Liberty and Dandelion Markets. It seems strange that the Iveagh Market was set up to remove street trading, which then became illegal, and yet the Corporation now issue people with licences to trade on the streets. This causes grave concern to the people of the Iveagh Market especially as their rent is far higher than the licence fee. So what do they get for their rent besides a place to sell their goods ? Well, the Corporation must have had plans to provide the stall holders with adequate facilities because one of the bye-laws of 1907 states "The tenant of every shop, stall, standing compartment or space shall extinguish, or cause to be extinguished the fire and light in the same, and stop or cause to be effectually stopped, the water and gas pipes in or connect with same, previous to the use of same being discontinued for the day." No such facilities exist today, "the place is like a fridge, there is a breeze comes through here and it would cut you in two. They wouldn't give us a plug in case we'd get a bit of heat". People complain about the fact that cracked and broken windows have not been repaired and so cause draughts. One woman who occupies one of the enclosed huts complained "do you know they charge me £16.00 a week for this and they wouldn't even clean me windows for me. It is disgraceful, three years I've been after them to clean me windows". The lights are on a time switch which goes on at about 4.30 p.m. which is little or no use as the building is nearly always fairly dark.

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The Corporation came in for a lot of criticism from the traders so I tried to get their side of the story but I found it very difficult to get any information from them. After being sent around various departments, all of which were said by the other to have some dealings with the Market and drawing a blank at every one, I was finally put in touch with the Market Superintendent. He, as a Corporation spokesman, denied the allegations made by the dealers that the Corporation neglected the maintenance of the Market. He alleged that the windows were being smashed by the dealers own children and that it was costing the Corporation far too much replacing them. "So we put in a perspex type glass over the existing ones and now there is not a single pane in need of repair. And besides we can't get near half of them because they have so much old clothes and stuff in the way". What about rents ? "Well the Market is not making a profit for the Corporation, we have to keep the rent in line with the cost of running it. It just about breaks even now, if it began to get too expensive to run they would make no bones about closing it down as they did with the abbatoir and cattle market." On the question of heating the Market he replied "if we put heat in the place we'd have to close it down immediately, the cost would be far too great. And besides the doors are wide open all the time, sure they'd have to be otherwise the smell from the old clothes would be unbearable." In actual fact the doors are not left open and there is no noticable smell from the clothes. Does the Corporation have any plans for the future of the Market ? "The Corporation has no obligations toward the traders. The Market is running on a day to day basis, they could close it down at anytime.

I think we must look beyond the traders complaints to find reasons for the lack of trade. I do not think that the street traders interfere with the Market because nearly all of Dublin's street traders sell food. The other markets sell clothes amongst other things but very few second hand clothes. And the clothes are much more fashionable and cater more for the teenager. I think as far as second hand goods are concerned their main rivals are the various charity shops which have opened up in the last couple of years - Simon Community, Gorta and Old Folks Aid. I do not think that the general public



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take the second hand trade as seriously as they used to as it is now not as essential as it was. It is more of a novelty now so people are more inclined to give and buy from charitable organisations. However, if these shops were to close down I doubt very much if it would mean an increase in trade for the Market. There is not a big demand for second hand clothes. People will avail of them while they are there but I believe that there is no real need for second hand clothes anymore. Synthetic clothing can be produced and distributed so cheaply now that people who once carried the second hand stigma now no longer have to. And in our disposable society clothing no longer has the durability it once had. It seems now that even natural fibres and threads are treated with chemicals to ensure they do not last too long and so bring down demand.

In all fairness I do not think the Corporation can be blamed for lack of trade and I believe that a lot of criticism levelled at it is not justified. Because trade is bad the dealers need to blame somebody so the Corporation is the obvious target. But the Corporation have a responsibility to the taxpayer and it would cost far too much of the taxpayer's money to heat and light the place adequately and to carry out all necessary repairs. Rents are in fact very low, most people pay under £3.00 per week depending on how many stalls or compartments they have. There is a full time caretaker employed to look after the place and it is swept out daily. All the Corporation can do is allow the dealers to remain in the Market as long as it breaks even but when it starts to cost the taxpayer money then they cannot be justified in keeping it open.



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Reactions of people to being photographed :

Reactions were very mixed and not all favourable. When I went down first people were very cautious, even when I explained what I was doing they were suspicious of my motives. I suppose it is very understandable because they have lots of people going in at various times taking photographs for different reasons. However, when I went down for the second time I brought copies of the photographs of the first visit and gave them out. The reaction then was tremendous, the people were really delighted with the photographs and with the fact that I had actually come back with them. One dealer explained "do you know son, of all the people who come in here and take photographs you are the only one who has bothered to come back and show us them. Nobody ever has taken such an interest in us before". The dealers came from all over the Market to see the photographs leaving their stalls unattended. They wanted to pay me and could not understand when I would not accept money. I explained that the only repayment I wanted was to be allowed to come in and take more photographs. "Anytime son, you're more than welcome". Everybody was not quite so enthusiastic, one group of women complained "you should not be allowed to take photos of people without asking their permission, we object very strongly to this". Another old lady told me to "get away out of that, and me trying to make a livin' ". In both cases I apologised and explained what I was doing and that I had not meant to offend them and assured them that it would not happen again. Some of the dealers became interested in the project, some would do anything to get into the photographs while others did everything they could to stay out of them, they seemed to have a fear of being photographed. The main fear was of appearing in the newspapers and I gather it was to do with tax and insurance. One man tried to convince me that nearby Meath Street Market would be a better subject for the project. I discovered later that he knew a man who sold in some market and whose photograph was published in a newspaper. As a result of this he was fined £250 for defrauding social welfare benefits. So I had to explain to some people in great depth what I was doing. Some people came to regard me as a resident photographer to be availed of when the need arose.



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CONCLUSION

When I started work on this project I felt very self-conscious about walking about the Market photographing people. I felt I was taking all the time and giving nothing. Maybe this is what prompted me to see myself and this project in a different context. From being around the Market and talking to dealers it began to appear as if the Market was being killed off by lack of interest on behalf of the public, and, mismanagement on behalf of Dublin Corporation.

This stirred a new interest in me, the project could have some social value. I thought in terms of presenting it to the Corporation as a form of protest, and using it to bring the Market once again to the attention of the general public with the hope of renewing interest in it. I then set about getting people's opinions on what was wrong and who was to blame and recording their complaints. My photographs at that stage were very general documentary photographs. I tended to stand back trying to give an overall impression of the place. Through those early photographs I tried to show the physical condition of the Market and to emphasize the lack of customers.

My enthusiasm soon turned to frustration when it became apparent that although the dealers complained about their conditions, they had taken no action to improve things and had obviously no intention of taking any. One dealer who was feeling the pinch shared my feeling of frustration "Look at them they're only a bunch of owl women, they'll just sit there and take what they're given and not lift a finger. If it was men now it would be different, they wouldn't put up with what we have to take.

My frustration eventually turned to disillusionment when through subsequent investigation I discovered that most of the complaints were without any real foundation - as I have discussed in the preceding text. I realised that the Market was not being killed off but was merely fading and I do not think there is anything that can be done to halt the decline. As I have said earlier the Market is only a shadow of its former self, the real Market lives only in the memories of the dealers.

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Another thing I realised was that at one stage I almost became obsessed with the idea of trying to revive interest in the Market. What could I do for the Market ? The answer, of course, was nothing, except to record and document impressions and information on the Market which I accumulated during my visits. This brings me back to Riboud's philosophy

"For me the photographer is a witness. His job is to record real events rather than to stage or create something in front of the camera."

and my original objective. Through the photographs I have made a record of the Market as it appeared at a given time. I hope this thesis will be of some anthropological value.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Street Map showing location of Market.
2. The Iveagh Market.
3. View from the balcony I.
4. View from the balcony II.
5. Clothes Stall.
6. Crockery Display.
7. Sitting and waiting.
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19. Old friends and dealers.
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- 23. Old regulars and child I.
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- 25. Shopping Spectre.
- 26. Look in the mirror.
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