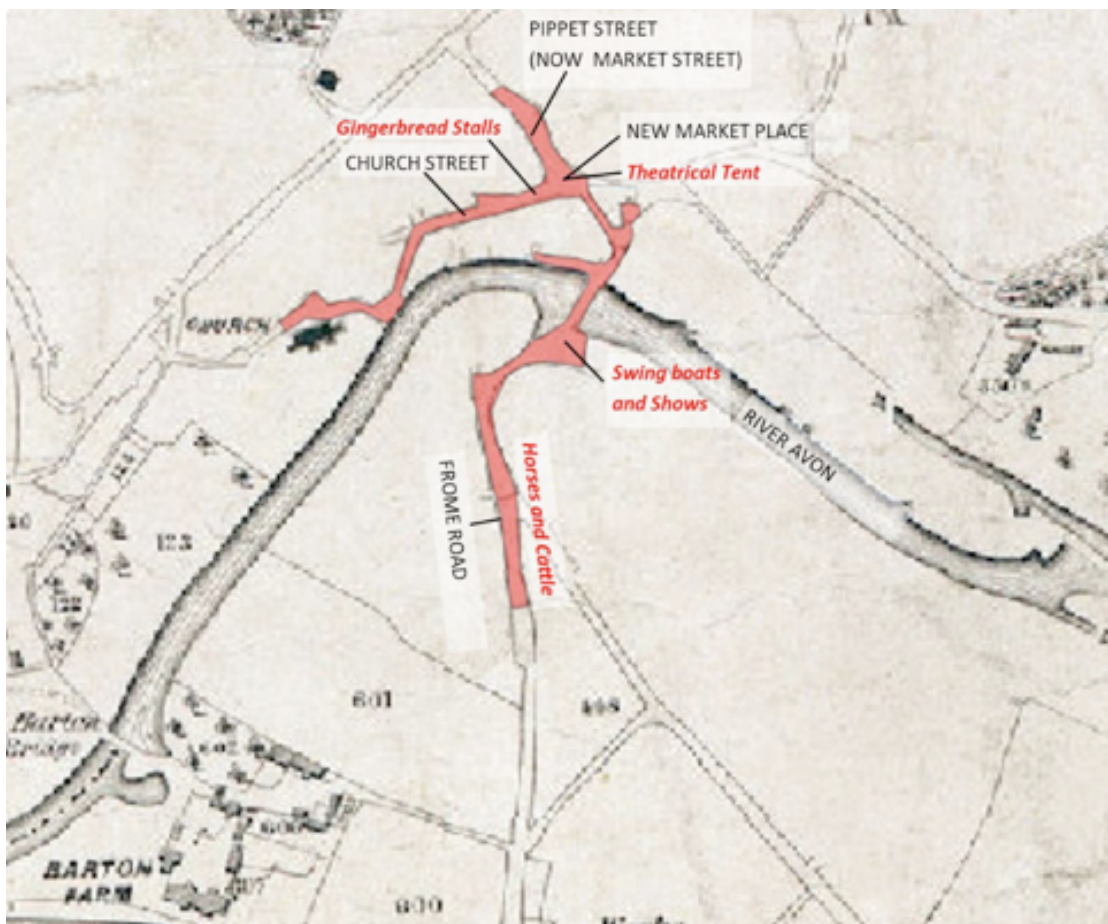


# BRADFORD ON AVON TRINITY FAIR

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Bradford on Avon had two fairs, Trinity Fair dating from the medieval period, and Bradford Leigh Fair which was began life in 1752. Bradford Leigh Fair grew to become one of the biggest fairs in Wiltshire, eclipsing its medieval counterpart, and is the subject of a Museum booklet. Trinity Fair, on the other hand, was a much more local affair, with its size restricted by Bradford's narrow streets.

Trinity Fair is first recorded in 1280/1 when it was held by the Abbess of Shaftesbury by prescriptive right. In medieval times it was held on the vigil (the day before) and on the feast (the day) of Holy Trinity which is the first Sunday after Pentecost so that the date varied each year in line with Easter. It had moved to Trinity Monday by the 18th century. It is likely to have been held in the churchyard before it moved to Church Street and Pippet (now Market) Street when markets and fairs were forbidden to be held on sacred ground by Edward I (reigned 1272 to 1307). Indeed, the name Pippet (with its earlier spellings of Peput and Pepud) may well be the only surviving reminder of the fair. Canon Jones, who identified the lost Saxon church of St. Lawrence, believed it was so named because of the Piepowder courts which were associated with fairs. Piepowder is a contraction of the French *pied-poudreux*, literally dusty feet. These courts had jurisdiction over disputes at the fair as well as the arcane rights of picage (breaking the ground for a support post) and stallage (payment for erecting a stall). In the 1830s the horses and cattle at the fair extended from St Margaret's car park up to where the railway bridge is now on the Frome road.



*The known extent of Trinity Fair in the 1830s*

Base map © WSHC TA Bradford-on-Avon

Newspaper reports tell us what was being sold at the fair. The earliest, from 1769, concerns a labourer from Kingsdown who sold a horse, which was paid for by a bank note which turned out to be 'fictitious'. In 1838 there was a push to attract more cheese to the fair with a reward of £5 to be paid to both the seller and buyer of the most cheese. In 1840 the fair was '*fully supplied with cattle, sheep and pigs*' and in 1847 it was '*well supplied with horses and horned cattle*' (figure 2). 1854 was a slow year for stock sales '*There were some very fine cart horses for sale but the trade was inactive and very few changed hands*'. In 1863 there were '*a very large number of horses, besides other stock which changed hands at good prices. A better fair, we are told, has not been held in Bradford this ten years*'. Only in 1868, when the fair is described as '*thinly attended*' is the actual number of animals for sale given '*about 30 head of horned stock, 100 sheep, a few pigs and horses*'. Trade was slack and only a few animals changed hands. In 1881 some animals were being sold by auction in contrast to the system of private barter used previously.



*Longhorn cattle would have been a common sight on Bradford's streets on Fair days*

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Fairs were usually known for selling particular types of goods in addition to livestock, and these were advertised in annual lists of fairs. In 1816 Owens New Book of Fairs describes the fair as being for cattle and millinery goods and an 1855 Directory lists cattle, horses and pedlary. The 1830s seem to have been good years for the pleasure fair with gingerbread stalls in Church Street, a theatrical performance in the New Market-Place and menageries such as Wombwell's or Atkins' with '*blaring bands, roaring beasts and flaring canvas pictures*'. In 1845 the Bradford Correspondent commented that as the fair closely followed the Whitsun holiday most people had little money left to spend at the pleasure fair. Attractions at the pleasure fair in 1876 were limited to penny shots in a solitary shooting gallery and a roundabout with a fairground organ, and this was contrasted with previous years when there had been shows and exhibitions with such wonders as the Last of the Mohicans, a Hottentot Venus, the learned pig, the living skeleton, the wonderful dwarf and performing dogs. Shows and swing boats near the bridge were still creating congestion in 1882.





Wombwell's Menagerie came to Bradford  
in the 1830s

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Fairs were regarded with suspicion because they were often the cause of drunkenness and criminality and society turned against them in the Victorian era. The Markets and Fairs Clauses Act of 1847 gave powers to magistrates to impose fines of up to 40s for obstructing the highway or evading tolls. The Fairs Act passed in 1871 allowed the abolition of fairs regarded as a nuisance. *The 1876 Trinity Fair was reported as presenting 'a poor and meagre spectacle' and this is followed by an editorial comment which reflected the prevailing mood, 'The fact of the matter is that with few exceptions fairs are felt to be a nuisance and the sooner they are abolished or die a natural death, the better.'*

In 1882 Bradford's Board of Town Commissioners borrowed £250 to purchase the ownership of the market and fairs from the lord of the manor Sir Charles Parry Hobhouse. The Fairs Acts had given powers to Town Commissioners to control fairs which were not available to the lord of the manor. The Commissioners were responding to public concern about the market and fair with *'many people complaining that they could not allow their wives and families to pass along the street where the stalls were and that the standings near the bridge had become a regular nuisance.'*

Trinity Fair was not abolished but it appears to have died a natural death with the last entry in Kelly's Directory appearing in 1903. When John Beddoe brought the Reverend Jones' History of Bradford on Avon up to date in 1907 he declared that *'This fair is now obsolete.'*

## Sources

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