



Bantry Town Commissioners /  
Bantry Town Council 1896 - 2014  
**in brief**

*Compiled Frank O'Donovan*

# 1890s

The population of the Bantry Urban District Electoral Division was approximately 3,000 in 1896.

The first elections were held on 12 August 1896 and the first meeting of Bantry Town Commissioners was held on Monday 17 August 1896 in the Grand Jury Room of the Court House, Bantry.

**Commissioners elected and present were:** George William Biggs, John Cullinane, Daniel Donovan, James Gilhooly, Joseph O'Brien, Benjamin O'Connor, William Henry O'Sullivan, Robert Swanton, William Warner. Benjamin O'Connor was elected as the first Chairman of the Town Commissioners and John O'Callaghan, a Law Clerk in Bantry, was appointed Town Clerk.

*Now we see they are 'up and running', [so to speak]  
they get down to doing work for the town.*



I was Town Engineer in Bantry from March 1987 to May 2009. I was aware that the Town Council would cease to exist after 31 May 2014 so I volunteered to do a quick summary of the Minutes of the Town Commissioners and the Town Council over its 118 year lifespan. This 'quick summary' developed into 60 pages and the full document may be viewed at <http://bmdnotices.com/Commissioners.pdf> which includes the lists of elected members and officials for the lifetime of the Body. Appreciating that many readers would like to get a quick overview of activities of the Town Commissioners and the Town Council I have produced this smaller booklet containing a varied selection of items from the life of the Body - Frank O'Donovan, 2017



They unanimously decided to light the town with 20 oil lamps, and communicate with the Constabulary and ascertain how the town was protected by police patrols at night.

The lack of a quorum was a feature even in these early days of the Body, and was not uncommon for about the first 60 years.

However, they were proceeding with enhancing the town and on 5 April 1897 they agreed to erect 49 enamelled street name plates and change the name of *The Square* to *Egerton Square*.

In April 1899 a resolution was unanimously adopted that *Egerton Square* be named *Wolfe Tone Square*.

**THE SQUARE**



**EGERTON SQUARE**



**CEARNÓS bhoLF ceom  
WOLFE TONE SQUARE**

There was concern over the “disgraceful state of the streets” and members complained about sheep and straw on footpaths on fair days. Indeed we see these type of comments repeated throughout the life of the Body.

Expenditure from 12 August 1896 to 31 December 1897 was £230 16s 9d.

In their first year we can see that they were active and progressive.







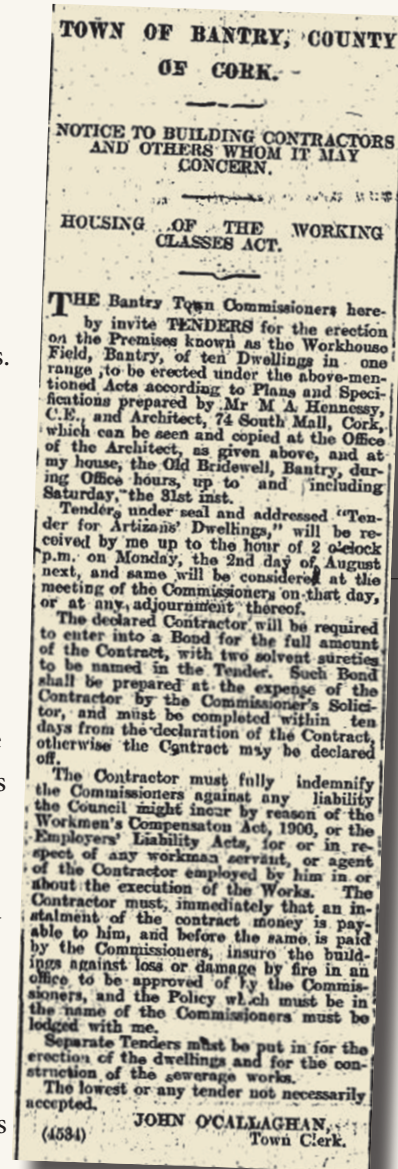
# Early 1900s

During the next few years some other activities included appointing a night watchman, seeking public urinals and a public water supply for Bantry.

In April 1904 the Commissioners recorded their “most strenuous objection to the introduction of the Cash on Delivery Post by the Post Office Authorities” It would make trading more difficult for local shops and suppliers they claimed.

In 1905 they secured a lease of the plot of ground from the Local Government Board for the purpose of building houses on the ground where the terrace of Rock Villas now stands. Looking at the Ordnance Sheet of 1897 we note that the current road serving Rock Villas and Keyes Terrace did not exist.

In 1909 the Clerk was directed to advertise for tenders for the erection of cottages and to advertise in *Independent*, *Cork County Eagle* and *Southern Star* newspapers. At the next meeting only one tender was received for the erection of the cottages from William J Kelleher, Drinan Street, Cork for £1,360 for the dwellings alone and excluding sewerage. This was considered to be excessive so the Clerk was directed to readvertise. In September only one tender was again received from Mr Kelleher for £1,350, excluding a large sum for sewerage. A subcommittee was agreed to review the plans and reduce the costs.



Mr Hennessy, the architect, died and the Clerk was directed to advertise for qualified engineers or architects to propose or amend the plans for the erection of ten labourers cottages in Bantry. Five tenders were received and after a long discussion it was agreed to readvertise and to include that the cost of each house was not to exceed £110.

In September 1911 they decided to advertise for tenders for building artisan houses and consider the tenders at the next meeting. In October two tenders were received for building artisan dwellings, viz. W. J. Murphy & Sons, New St, Bantry for £1,480 0s 0d and Messrs Barrett Bros, Magazine Rd, Cork for £1,294 0s 0d. The latter was accepted subject to any of the joinery not being imported and that they employ local trade and labour.

From *Southern Star* dated 17 July 1909

By 1910 proposals for lighting the town with electric lamps were being considered and on the 3 July 1911 the Commissioners signed a contract with Mr Patrick Nugent to light the town. Differences of opinion with Mr Nugent were not uncommon and indeed such continued with his widow after Mr Nugent died. Clearly Mrs Nugent was a lady who was not afraid to confront this group of men. For a fuller insight into the public lighting thinking and challenges it is certainly worth referring to my long summary of the Minutes on <http://bmdnotices.com/Commissioners.pdf> for the period dealing with the public lighting stretching forward to about 1930.



*Dromore Mills, which Patrick Nugent converted to produce electricity*

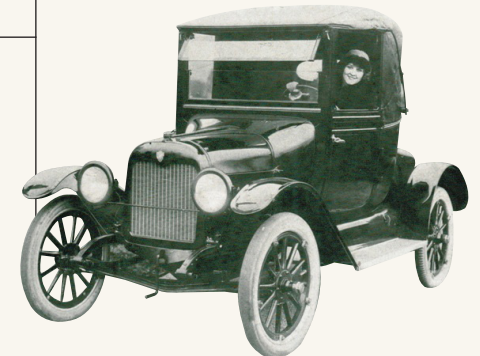
They frequently issued cheques for lesser amounts than on invoices received and as an example the Independent Newspapers refused to accept a cheque for £4 10 0d in settlement of account of £4 16s 0d. A new Paying Order was issued for the full amount, but that was not the common case.



On 7 July 1919 a deputation was received from Bantry Traders Association and a quote from the Minutes: "A deputation from Bantry Traders Association waited on the Commissioners with reference to the obstruction caused on the public streets by parties selling clothes etc thereon on Fair Days and asking the aid of the Commissioners to prevent this." The Clerk was to seek legal advice from Mr Wolfe, Solicitor.

In September 1919 the Commissioners were complaining about the late delivery of post from the Post Office; noting "the delivery to the main streets of the town is as late as 10.30am."

In 1928 we read from the Minutes: *"A discussion took place as to the speed at which motors went through the Town when it was decided to restrict the speed to twelve miles per hour. The Clerk was directed to employ Frederick Coleman, Carpenter, to have Boards, with Notices to this effect printed thereon made, and erected on the principal entrances to the Town, viz. The Abbey Road, The Glengarriff Road, and the Quarry Road."* Obviously they maintained a wide brief to discuss any matter pertaining to the town or outside of it.





# 1930s

On 19 December 1932 the Clerk was directed to advertise for tenders for the erection of 8 dwellings in the Workhouse field.

These houses we know as *Keyes Terrace*

On 6 March 1933 two (2) tenders received for houses, viz:-

John J O'Sullivan, Reendesert, Bantry

John O'Shea, Builder & Contractor, Bantry

	MASS CONCRETE	CONCRETE BLOCKS	STONE & MORTAR
O'Sullivan	£2153.10.5	£2261.13.5	£2391.10.5
O'Shea	£2368.3.0	£2518.10.0	£2678.12.0

The tender of Mr O'Sullivan for stone and mortar walls was accepted since the Commissioners believed *"it would give more employment locally"*.

The Commissioners paid Mrs Catherine McCarthy of Rock House £20 for a plot of ground as a passageway to the artisan dwellings.



At the meeting on 6 November 1933 the Clerk resigned due to defective eyesight after 37 years service. As he could not read correspondence his resignation was accepted with regret. Miss Mary O'Callaghan, daughter of retiring Town Clerk was appointed as Town Clerk.

In October 1934 a letter from the ESB stating the Board had under investigation the possibility of making **Shannon Current** available in Bantry.

Passing of votes of sympathy and issuing paying orders were normal activities at meetings. A lot of letters from Government Departments (circulars) were also standard.



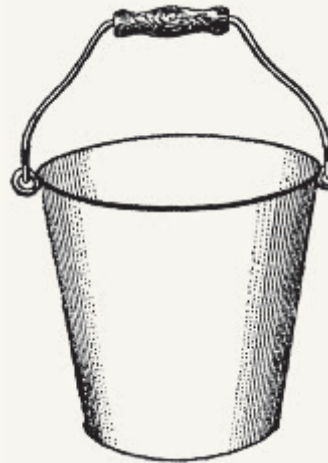
In May 1935 the following resolution to be sent to the Minister for Agriculture:  
*"That we the Bantry Town Commissioners desire to draw the attention of the Minister for Agriculture to the erection of several creameries in this district with stores attached in close proximity to the town thereby seriously interfering with the business of town traders who are already hard hit"*



As stated earlier they maintained a wide brief and on 8 March 1937 they resolved unanimously *“that we most humbly and respectfully appeal to your Holiness by the grace of God to grant the early canonisation of Blessed Oliver Plunkett, Primate of Ireland in recognition of his saintly life, and martyrdom in the cause of the Catholic faith. We pray that your health may continue to improve and that God may spare you for many years to direct and guard our Holy Church”*.

An acknowledgment was later received.

In September 1937 flooding due to heavy rain caused considerable damage to traders and householders in town and the report found that the Alley River which serves as the main sewer was filled with silt to a depth of 2½ to 3 feet.



From the Meeting on 12 August 1938 we read: *“A long discussion took place about the condition of the streets on August Bank Holiday and the preceeding Sunday, and it was emphasised that the streets of the town are not cleaned on Saturday afternoon. On that account the town presents a very dirty appearance on Sunday morning especially to visitors passing through. The Clerk was directed to write to the Minister for Local Government & Public Health requesting his sanction to the resolution to change the half holiday of the employees who clean the streets from Saturday afternoon to Wednesday afternoon which is the general half holiday with the Traders of the Town”*.

And on 31 August – Minister approved change of half holiday

The Town Clerk, Mary O’Callaghan and Edward Galvin married in Bantry on 20 April 1939 and on a record on 1 May 1939 it states that the Monthly meeting on that date did not take place due to no quorum being present and she signed herself as Mary M. Galvin (O’Callaghan). Note: she subsequently used Mary M. Galvin.



# 1940s

We now are entering the era when  
Managers were appointed



Number 12 of 1940.

COUNTY MANAGEMENT ACT, 1940.

In September 1942 in the Minutes we read:  
*“A letter dated 3rd September 1942 was read from J. F. Wrenne, Esq, County Manager, in which he intimated that in virtue of the powers vested in him as Cork County Manager, he had made an Order on the 2nd inst. Under the terms of Section 13 of the County Management Act 1940 delegating to Mr James O’Mahony, Assistant County Manager, his powers, functions and duties for the Town Commissioners of Bantry”.*



James O'Mahony

Mr O’Mahony, who lived in Bandon, wrote that he would attend the Town Commissioners offices on Friday 11th inst at 10.00am for the purpose of carrying out the executive functions.

Meeting on 7 December 1942 and Mr James O’Mahony, ACM, attended the monthly meeting and it appears that little business was transacted. Paying orders were no longer being dealt with directly by the Commissioners and we don’t see any further evidence of less than the full amount invoiced being paid. Clearly the Commissioners powers were greatly reduced. Officialdom was creeping into Local Government.

On 14 October they decided to establish a volunteer Fire Service in Bantry and names of volunteers to be submitted to the Clerk.

As a sample of happenings at meetings, in July 1945 the following items were discussed:

- Request to County Council to speed up the erection of public conveniences.
- Decided to change the day for holding the monthly meeting from the First Monday to the First Tuesday.
- Again promoting Bantry as a sea plane/airplane base and stating that *“Bantry Bay is remarkable for its freedom from fog.”*



On 5th September 1945 there was a Special Meeting and James O'Mahony, Manager also attended. It was resolved *"That the Manager acting for and on behalf of Bantry Town Commissioners accept from the Bantry Development Association the gift of a plot of ground at Church Road, Bantry containing approx ½ acre for the erection of a handball court thereon and that steps be taken by him to have the necessary transfer executed."*



A letter in December 1948 from Council Engineer W.J. Geraghty B.E. with a map showing the suggested site for a public sanitary convenience was considered and the proposed site was not acceptable. They suggested a location *"opposite Tom's Lane on the Sand Quay, the property of the Council"*

1949 and we read in the Minutes: Bantry Sanitary Convenience: A letter was received from Mr W.J. Geraghty B.E., Clonakilty *"stating that under no circumstances would sanction be given for a site further from the town than the site of the existing convenience"*. Mr James O'Mahony who attended the meeting said *"he would visit both sites when the meeting was over and see what could be done"*.

In August 1949 the Commissioners decided to become a member of The Association of Municipal Authorities and the Annual contribution was £2.2.0.



From the Southern Star

In September 1948 the Commissioners agreed to erect speed signs at Newtown and the Old Pier – *"20 miles per hour"*

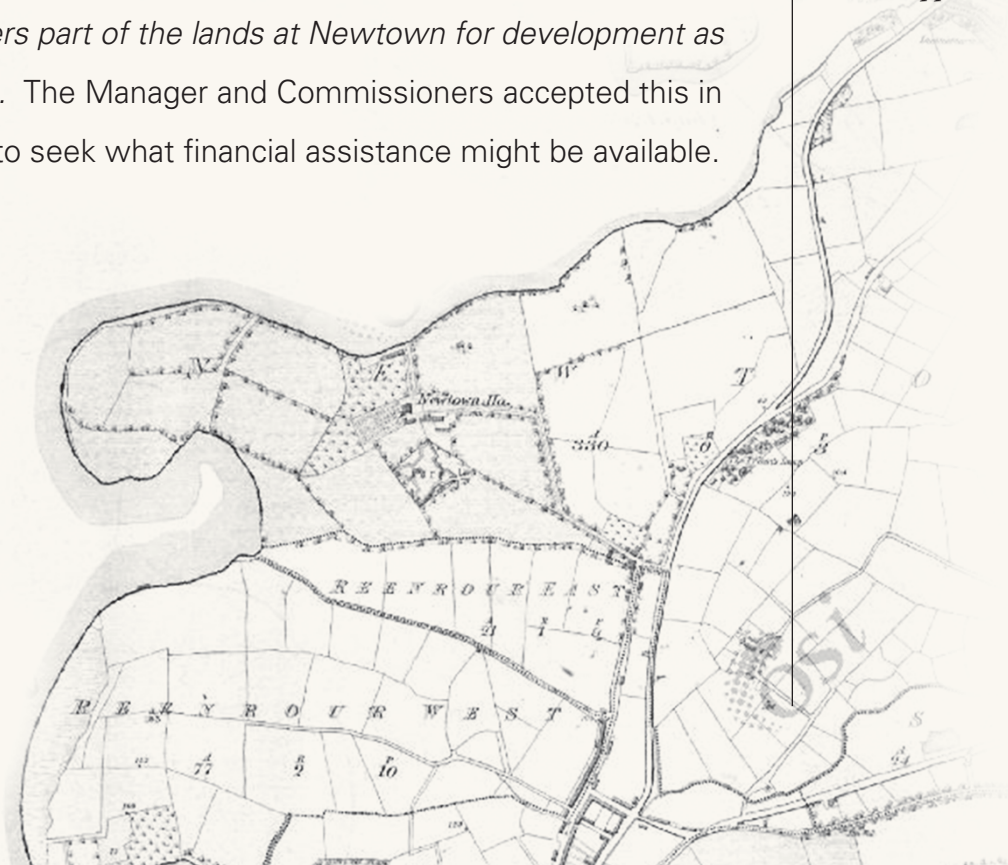


In December 1945 *"The Clerk was directed to write to the Manager, Stella Cinema and to request him to have the National Anthem played in full after each performance and to keep the doors closed until same was finished."*  
How thinking has changed!

# 1950s

On 1 December 1950 we read: *"A deputation as follows Messrs Raphael P. Keyes, Timothy Deasy and Sylvester Cotter came before the meeting from the Bantry Development Association with the proposal that they hand over to the Town Commissioners part of the lands at Newtown for development as a Town Park"*. The Manager and Commissioners accepted this in principal and to seek what financial assistance might be available.

In March 1953 the Commissioners resolved to "apply to the Heraldic Office, Dublin for a Grant of Arms for the town of Bantry". The Grant of Arms was formally made on 1 April by the Chief Herald of Ireland, Edward MacLysaght. The Official declaration is as follows: *"Whereas application hath been made unto me by the BANTRY TOWN COMMISSIONERS setting forth that it is desired that certain amorial bearings should be ratified by lawful authority unto the TOWN OF BANTRY. I do hereby certify and declare that the Arms following, that is to say:- azure on a bend sinister argent between in chief on ancient stone passion cross or in base a boar passant proper there antique ships sable with the motto 'Ná cluinter claoiteact oraib', as in the margin hereof more clearly depicted, do of right belong and appertain to that town"*.



# 1960s

At the Meeting on 2 May 1960 the sale of property at Newtown for industrial purposes was discussed. *"The Manager reported that he had sold a portion of land of approximately two acres to Mr A.J. Flatley for the sum of £350 and he now asked for the approval of the Commissioners"* This was unanimously agreed.

As we saw earlier they maintained a wide brief and the meeting of 4 June 1963 was adjourned as a mark of respect to late Pope John XXIII. The Pope had died the previous day.

Tidy Towns result for 1969 and Bantry got 94 marks out of 150, an increase of 6 on last year

In November there was a discussion on setting up a Harbour Authority or similar Body.

This is interesting and certainly leaves one to ponder on!

In February 1966 a letter was read from N.J. Downes & Co., Solicitors, Mullingar *"stating they had an enquiry from a foreign Industrial Firm who may be interested to set up a chemical factory in or near Bantry and they would be very interested to know what amenities are available as regards the port and available labour and they would be obliged for any information they could get on the matter"*

The Clerk was directed to acknowledge the letter and invite the interested parties to come to Bantry and the Commissioners will give them whatever information they require.

The solicitors responded acknowledging the Commissioners letter and stating that it *"is of no help to us whatsoever"*.

To get a flavour of the nature of letters being written by the Commissioners we have the following from the meeting of 3 January 1961 - Letters written to:

- Write again to Cork County Council, Clonakilty re public light at Union Hill
- Write again to Cork County Council re dangerous condition of bridge at entrance to County Hospital
- Write to Cork County Council re repairs to footpaths at Abbey
- Write to Cork County Council, Clonakilty asking when works would commence on the stream at Bridge St and Chapel St and what would be the nature of the works
- Write to Health Authority, Cork asking if Old Age Pensioners with Medical Cards are entitled to free treatment in hospital
- Write to ACM asking if 'Free Fuel' was administered in Bantry area
- Votes of sympathy (4).





## ✿ 1970s ✿

Mr Matson attended the meeting on 5 May 1970 where we read: *"The bad condition of the footpaths and watertables was discussed with the Engineer. He informed the Commissioners that on account of the cement strike no repairs or improvements could be carried out at present but he stated that when the cement strike was over he would have the repairs and improvements done"*

Later that year in September the following resolution was passed: *"That we in the Bantry Town Commissioners protest in the strongest possible manner to the proposed increase in travelling expenses to Teachtaí Dála who are more than adequately paid"*.  
Copy to An Taoiseach and all Local Authorities.

In 1977 there were ongoing discussions with the IDA re promoting the Bantry area and in February 1981 frustration was expressed that the IDA was not delivering, and some Commissioners considered resigning; others felt that was pointless. In March of that year it was announced that the IDA was to develop an industrial site and the Commissioners were pleased. Various communications between the Commissioners and the IDA and leaping forward to 10 March 1994 when a Special meeting was arranged with Barry Condron, Manager, of IDA Cork we read that Commissioners John O'Shea and John J Connolly turned up as did Humphery Desmond, Town Clerk. Barry Condron, Regional Manager IDA was also present. No others turned up so the meeting *"was abandoned by the Chairman"*.

Referring back to August 1979 and we note the new handwriting of the Minutes so we assume the Town Clerk changed to Breda Dwyer from Mary Galvin. However there is no comment or welcome in the minutes.

So John O'Callaghan served for 37 years as Town Clerk and was followed by his daughter, Mary, who served for 46 years. Between father and daughter they served as Town Clerk for Bantry Town Commissioners for a total of 83 years. Is this a national record?



# 1980s



1986 provides an example of how the Commissioners commented on National item is when they were complaining *"that Aer Rianta are advertising foreign whiskeys at the airport and not Irish. It was decided to enquire if there was a reason for this"*

Frank O'Donovan, Assistant County Engineer, attended the meeting of 10 March 1986 and he was welcomed as was Commissioner Michael Milner. It was the first meeting for both Michael and Frank. The Chairman then invited questions for the engineer.



*The first meeting of the Town Commissioners held on 8 February 1983 in their new meeting room in Aras Beantraí.*

*from left to right: Neill Clarke, James J. Crowley, James O'Shea, Breda Dwyer (Town Clerk), Donal McCarthy (Chairman), Justin McCarthy, Thomas Holland, Cornelius Kelly, Michael Murphy (Area Engineer), Ted Murphy (Chief Assistant Engineer).*

*Photos courtesy of John and Noreen McCarthy*

# 1990s

In February 1990 there was pollution of Bantry Bay by M.V. Tribulus and the clean-up was being coordinated by Dept of Marine Inspector, Seamus McLoughlin. This resulted in a proposal for a Harbour Authority being discussed.

A report stated that the culvert through the Square was in bad condition and in danger of collapsing.

The County Council informed the Commissioners that the old Courthouse, which was in a poor state of repair, could possibly be used as a Tourist Office and discussions were taking place with Cork Kerry Tourism. The latter body took over the building and spent a substantial sum on essential repairs. Further refurbishment was later carried out.



In 1995 the Bantry Town Commissioners under the chairmanship of Sean Baker sought a new plan for the Square. His plan was prepared by Gerard O'Callaghan, Cork County Architect, in consultation with John Deasy, Cork Assistant County Manager and Manager of Bantry Town Commissioners.

The project involved the provision of a raised plaza in the Square with traffic flows on the outside of the plaza. The architect recommended a light-coloured stone as he considered the use of grey brick or stone would be very drab given the large size of the Square and the dull, damp Irish weather. A fountain with coloured lighting was a central feature and the plaza also incorporated the St Brendan statue.

On the proposal of Vivian O'Callaghan, seconded by Donal Casey, the Town Commissioners adopted the plan, and work commenced in November 1995. The main contractor was Bantry-based Murnane & O'Shea Ltd. Terry Roberts was the Clerk of Works for Cork County Council. The cost of the project was estimated at £360,000. It was funded by the National Roads Authority for N71 improvements and money from the Urban and Village Renewal Schemes over two years, with the balance coming from Cork County Council.



*Working on the square redevelopment are Paddy Harrington, Derry O'Brien, Denis Cronin, and Denis Harrington*

*Black and white photos credit: Ian Vickery*



SEAN BAKER CHAIRMAN  
BANTRY TOWN COMMISSIONERS.  
JOHN DEASY ASSISTANT COUNTY MANAGER.  
GERARD O'CALLAGHAN COUNTY ARCHITECT.  
T. C. U. MURCHADHA DIVISIONAL ENGINEER.  
FRANK O'DONOVAN TOWN ENGINEER.  
MARY FITZGERALD TOWN CLERK.  
TERRY ROBERTS CLERK OF WORKS.  
SURVEYORS: B. OWENS, F. GOOD, A. POWER.  
MAIN CONTRACTORS  
MURNANE & O'SHEA LTD. BANTRY.

*Plaque erected on square with names of those involved in redevelopment  
Photo credit: Frank O'Donovan*

In February 1997 a delegation was received from the GAA querying if the Commissioners would sell the Town Park to the GAA. And in February the Commissioners agreed to sell most of the Town Park to the GAA for £75,500 excluding a portion abutting the N71 to be kept for a playground. The money from the sale was to be used to buy playground equipment.

In June of that year a lease was signed with Community Association for use of their property as public car park.



# 2000 onwards

Change in name in 2002 and the former Bantry Town Commissioners were now called Bantry Town Council.

In the Census of 2011 the returns show Bantry having a population of 3,348 which was a small increase in the population since the establishment of the Town Commissioners.

2014 – the final year. The assets of the Town Council were listed for transfer to Cork County Council.

The final meeting of Bantry Town Council was held in Aras Beantraí on 20 May 2014. So real local government was abolished in reality favouring a more centralised and anonymous system.

Former town clerks: Niall O'Keeffe, Noreen McCarthy, Breda Dwyer, Deirdre Collins and Dave Campbell



Eugene Cronin and Mary Hegarty

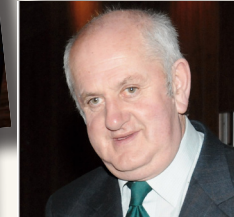


Photo credit: Tony McElhinney



Thomas Barry

Kathleen Tessyman



John J Connolly



Mayor Aiden McCarthy signs attendance book watched by his brother, Diarmuid

On Saturday 26 April a function was held in the Maritime Hotel, Bantry to mark the end of Bantry Town Council. This was co-ordinated by the Mayor, Aiden McCarthy. It afforded an opportunity to look back over the years at changes in the town using photographs and video footage. Many former Town Commissioners and descendants of Commissioners spoke briefly at the function recalling times past.

Members hoped that in the future there would be a Town Council in Bantry again.





This summary of the Minutes of the Bantry Town Commissioners and Bantry Town Council has been taken from a 60 page document compiled Frank O'Donovan, former Town Engineer. The full document may be viewed at <http://bmdnotices.com/Commissioners.pdf>