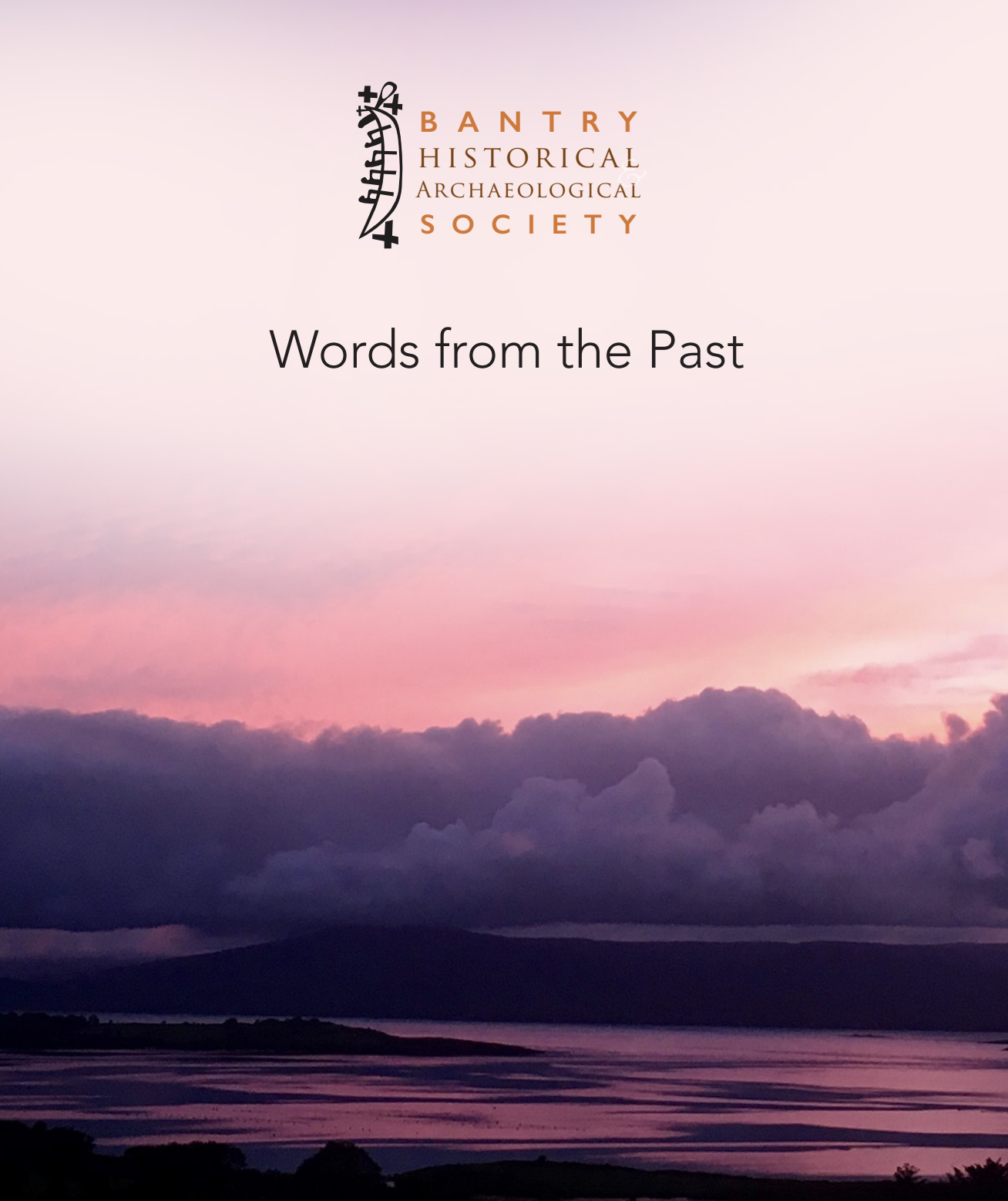




Words from the Past





Dan Reagh O'Sullivan grew up at Millíni, Baurgorm, Bantry.

The following poem was written by Dan while being shelled during the battle of Pont Mousson, France - Sept 1918 (WW1)

Poem presented here with kind permission of family.

From The Trenches

by Dan Reagh O'Sullivan

When you crawl into a shell hole
While the battle rages round.
and wonder if, when over,
will your corpse be ever found.
Though your best anticipations.
With few pleasantries abound,
Yet you are immensely grateful,
For the shell-hole in the ground,
For a shell in this country,

They have christened 'no man's land'
Often all that separates you;
From that other fiery furnace
Where the KAISER'S great forefather
BEELZEBUB is in command.
Of the hottest brimstone regions
Ever Kings or Devils planned.

As the shells come flying over.
Like the Seargeants flock to mess,
You shrink up, sink down and flatten.
Like a flounder in distress.
And as you shake and shudder
You endeavour to suppress
Gloomy thoughts of wooden crosses
From your next change of address.

So you hug the ground still closer
With a zeal that is no sham.
All you senses are confounded,
In a most conflicting jam,
Which despite your lion's courage,
Leaves you helpless as a lamb
And you fell just like a lobster,
Though you wish you were a clam,

So that you could sink deeper in
your muddy shell hole bed.
Until the Armistice is signed up,
Or all the Huns are dead,
This clammy wish grows closer
as you strive to keep your head,
Safe midway between damnation
and old PRITZI'S flying lead .
Your head goes down-ward, up-ward,
back-ward and side-ways, Like a rookie'
execution of his first neck exercise.
And when a dud lights near you
knocking dirt into your eyes,
You increase your cadence faster than a
Burro fighting flies,

Ruth Padel is an award-winning British poet, author, wildlife conservationist and musician. She has published twelve poetry collections, shortlisted for major UK prizes, a novel featuring wildlife conservation and eight books of non-fiction. She is Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and Professor of Poetry at King's College London. She is great great granddaughter of the famous Charles Darwin.

Her poem Mill Wheel at Bantry was written in memory of JG Farrell, Novelist, who tragically lost his life at age 44 on Sheeps Head Peninsula when he was swept off the rocks by a freak wave. Mill Wheel at Bantry has been published in her book 'Learning to Make an Oud in Nazareth' (chatto & windus 2014). Poem re-produced here with kind permission of author.



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Mill-Wheel at Bantry

by Ruth Padel

This twelve-foot torque is the iron ghost
of an ancient wheel, turning rivetted slats
back and up. Now stuck, now moving again
scattering jewels through bright air
from a twist-stream bucketing
over slimed rock by the Library,
combing tangled grass to emerald hair.

This gash at the top of town, with its whiff
of Hades, is where we catch our glimpse
of what's below. From here on down, we join
the hectic flow to the ordinary: tarmac, the Spar
and chip-shops, the cafés and whispering
silver-and-isinglass mud of Bantry Bay.
But churning or still, fortune's wheel

sets the pace. And this wet rock, grey
as a sea-lion taking a dive into the dark,
plus this pour-down of spark-froth entering town
by way of the burying-ground, run under it all:
under Vickery's and the famine graves,
under the boarded-up House of Elegance,
the fire station and two-room museum

offering memorabilia of martyrs, butter-making,
caring for sheep; photos of where we are
as it used to be; reports of sea-wrecks
and sea-rescue; the resin replica of a cross
describing the quest of St. Brendan
for Isles of the Blest. There's been so much
I haven't attended to. So much I didn't see.

The town-clock in the church tower

by Frank McCarthy

Elevated here to begin with
 At the high watermark of ascendancy fervour,
 My weather-tempered irides
 In their prim, black dials
 Survey two fronts at once but
 Countenance divergent times:

One eye fixed tellingly
 On the chatter-boxed Square's diffused minutiae,
 The other, unobserved, takes wary
 Cognisance of the slithery
 Surge and stealthier withdrawal
 Of the ocean-canted currents
 Perpetually eluding the stiff-armed embrace
 Of the twice daily pebble-dashed'
 Salt-annexed harbour wall.

Only in the small hours
 When my windstrewn chimes vibrate

Draughtily in that empty-bodied
 Auditorium of suspended commerce
 And unsold allotments of second-hand cars
 Does the dour paintwork of my tell-tale visage
 Relax visibly into the more benign
 Appurtenances of a child's sketched caricature
 Of a human face:

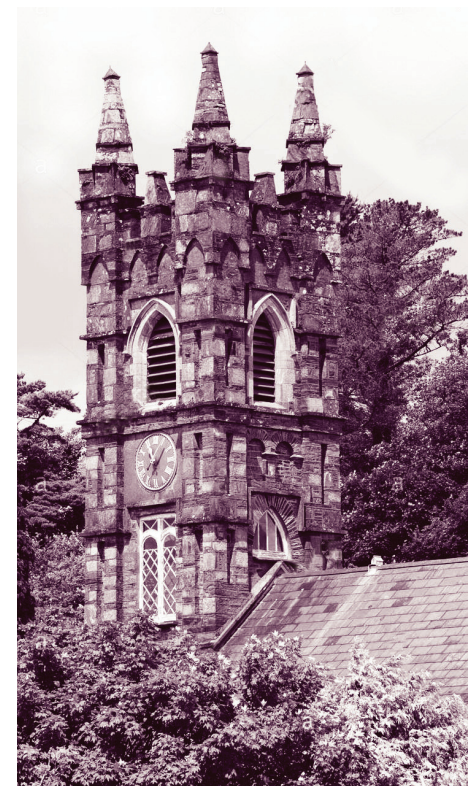
A drunk found blissfully dead in a drain
 One black night the year before last
 And re-discovered now
 As he threads his wayward path home
 Across the Square for the second time this week
 Pulls himself together for just long enough
 To salute me smartly. Nobody
 Will ever believe that I appeared to register
 My approval. He swears I blinked once
 In a kind of royal assent.
 All my eye, of course.

Frank McCarthy was a well-known businessman in Bantry. He wrote several poems, and much of his work was published in a New Writers Section in The Irish Press. He won prizes for many of his poems, including the following, which is dedicated to the Clock atop St Brendan's Church, Wolfe Tone Square, Bantry.

His poem pre-dates the naming of the church. Frank usually wrote under the pen-name of his father Patrick McCarthy.

Poem presented here with kind permission of family.

photo: Public Domain



Our Lady of Trawlebawn

by Norrie O'Mahony



The following two poems are taken from 'Tis As It Was', a Memoir with poetry and prose written by Norrie O'Mahony, a West Cork woman who lived all her adult life in Bantry. Her Memoir was published in 2010. These two poems are reproduced here with kind permission of family.

There's a Grotto near the roadside,
In a place called Trawlebawn.
Do not pass it in your hurry,
Spare a moment for to pray.
You will find you can cope better,
With the pressures of your day.
In that luxury of silence,
You will find another way.
Any worries will seem lighter,
And your frustations cease,
Amid the rugged rocks and heather,
She will give to you Her peace,
The peace that comes from Heaven,
That the world does not know,
Will be with you as you go.

Retirement

by Norrie O'Mahony

I've had my day, it's come and gone,
And now with life I carry on.
No hours to watch, nor time to keep,
The future lost in mystery deep,
But now there's time to look and see,
Nature's wonders all for free.
I watched a snail go ambling by,
Its movements slow, the same as I.

Its little house was on its back,
Upon the moss, a silver track,
No rent to pay, nor ESB,
From all those overheads it's free.
The little birds that fly about,
You never hear them scream and shout,
Still happy though cold winters nigh,
Their song is always full of Joy.

And then of course the busy bee,
All work no play, it's plain to see.
Happily flitting from hour to hour,
Gathering nectar from each flower.
The butterflies, the ladybirds
The grasshoppers so gay,
All add their special little touch,
To everything in May.
Relaxed, no pressures now, that's me,
But at times I envy that busy bee.

The sound of rain drumming on the pavement,
is made distant by the soft tuck of the inner door.
Safe from howling wind and careless cars

As the heat rises to meet your soaking shoes,
the librarian silently puts a warning finger to their
lips, reserving the “Sshh”, for repeat offenders.

Realising that breath makes noise, you hold it.
Which only serves to heighten the joy of the
familiar smells of unexplored territories.

Quiet is amplified, amid the slightly cross
looks, as you settle into one of the coveted
comfy chairs, from whose vantage point,

you can see people negotiating the steps,
cursing their broken umbrellas. When the silent
clock accusingly points its hands to five.

You move reluctantly towards the study area,
Where every chair’s scrape grates, making audible
your guilt, at not studying weather patterns.

*Barbara O’Donnell grew up in Bantry,
and now lives in London. During her
school days, she was a frequent visitor to
Bantry Library after school to attend to
her studies. Barbara has written several
poems, and the following poem Love
Letter to a Library was written by her in
memory of her days in Bantry. It was
published in South Bank Poetry maga-
zine and was used in 2018 by West Cork
Music in their social media.
Love Letter to a Library is re-produced
here with kind permission of author*

Love Letter to a Library

by Barbara O’Donnell



photo: Trip Advisor

Back o' Whiddy

*The following two songs are attributed to
T.D. Sullivan, (1824-1914).*

*The words have been handed down orally
through the years in the
local community.*

Off from Bantry pier we start
Sailing – or it may be rowing –
lads and lasses, light of heart,
On to fair Glengarriff going.
Oh, the harbour's smooth enough,
But some heads get queerly giddy,
Once we dip in waters rough
Round the point and back o' Whiddy.
Then there's chaffing, back o' Whiddy,
Joking, laughing, back o' Whiddy;
Fearful tales of sharks and Whales
And huge sea-serpents, back o' Whiddy.

Soon we've cause for tender cares
(Thanks, oh, thanks, sweet rolling ocean)
I And we hear delightful pray'rs
Uttered with intense emotion;
Sometimes, too, when waves and wind
Would try the temper of a "middy",
Language of another kind
Is freely spoken back o' Whiddy.
But that's no harm – when back o' Whiddy
It has a charm – when back o' Whiddy
At least I know I judged it so,
Long, long ago – when back o' Whiddy.

Sing the beauties of Glandore –
They deserve such celebration;
Say good things of Baltimore –
A safe retreat, a pleasant station;
Praise what bays and creeks there be
From Mizen Head to Ringaskiddy.
But after all, the trip for me
Is that which takes me back o' Whiddy
Oh, the long waves back o' Whiddy.
Oh, the strong waves back o' Whiddy
Oh, the joys that – girls and boys –
We knew when boating back o' Whiddy.



Bantry Bay

A 'Shanty' or boat song

Come help me, boys, to sing a song,
And lilt a lively roundelay
As fast and free we boom along,
And top the waves of Bantry Bay.

A fair wind fills our flowing sail –
But let it blow from where it may,
We'll woo the breeze or brave the gale
With joyful hearts in Bantry Bay.

Oh, there are harbours made with hands,
With sticks and stones, with mud and clay,
With piles and beams and iron bands –
We've no such things in Bantry Bay.
We've fair Glengarriff's silvery tide,
We've grand Berehaven, where to-day
The fleets of half the world might ride,
With room to swing, in Bantry Bay.

Historic scenes come into view
As on we plough our watery way;
For chieftains bold and clansmen true
Were long the lords of Bantry Bay.

And well we hope the world may see,
Ere many years have passed away,
The sons of patriot ancestry
Again hold sway by Bantry Bay.

So trim your sails, and ease your sheets,
And hoist your bunting bright and gay;
Our trip has been a bunch of sweets –
Hip! Hip Hurrah! For Bantry Bay





BANTRY
HISTORICAL
ARCHAEOLOGICAL
SOCIETY



Cork
County Council
Comhairle Contae Chorcaí

Clár Éire Ildánach
Creative Ireland
Programme
2017–2022



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