

# A CORPORATION minute BOOK - 1769-1796

Limerick City Library has in its possession the copy of a minute book of the Corporation of Limerick from 1769 to 1796. In a preface to the volume the following note is written:

**I Certify that the following Transcript is a full and true copy of the original Council Book deposited amongst the Records of the Corporation of Limerick in its present state and condition, and that the said original Book is much mutilated by neglect and decay and was so mutilated when it first came into my possession as Town Clerk of the Borough of Limerick.**

**Dated 10th March, 1846**

**John T. Raleigh,  
Town Clerk.**

It appears that some of the pages were in such a bad state that it was not always possible to read certain phrases and words and that these blanks were filled up by John Raleigh with what he conjectured to be the illegible words. All such conjectures are shown with brackets surrounding them. In any direct quotations from the book I have followed the same procedure.

On 30 September 1769, it was decided that the mayoral salary should be three hundred and sixty-five pounds per annum and that the city carts should go about on Monday, Thursday and Sunday in order to clean the streets.

The sergeants-at-mace had many functions in the eighteenth century. One was to 'execute the process of the Tholsel Court (except on the river) and that of the Mayor's Court or Court of Conscience. They attended the mayor and assisted him as constables in the discharge of his official functions. (1) On the 30th September, 1771 it was decided that these sergeants-at-mace were no longer to be issued with their cloaks and hats by the Corporation; instead £4 was to be allowed to each of them and from this money they were to buy their own official necessities.

The farming out of the Ingate Customs of the city took place on 17 October 1771. John's Gate was awarded to a person named Sullivan for a sum that seems to be £50; Thomondgate

*by Charlotte Murphy*

went to John Donnellan for £174; Quay Gate was awarded for £87 and the market toll was granted for £287. All of these sums covered a yearly period.

A humble request was made by the Corporation to the city's two parliamentary representatives, Edmond Sexton Pery and Thomas Smyth. It was for permission to have their portraits painted and hung in the Council Chambers.

The Corporation was concerned in September 1781 that revenue from fairs held on that section of Gallows Green set aside for such purposes was decreasing because 'great encroachments have been made and still continue to be made upon the fair place'. To cope with the problem the following order was made:

**therefore your Law Agent be immediately directed to inspect into such Encroachments if found as represented, that he be ordered to pursue proper Measures to remove same.**

On the same date (27 September) one Richard Rice claimed five pounds as payment for attending to the Corporation gallery in St. Mary's Church (I presume this refers to the Cathedral). However, his claim was rejected because nobody seemed to know when or by whom he was appointed. A similar petition was submitted by a Joseph Street, who was the Exchange keeper, (The Exchange was the Town Hall of seventeenth and eighteenth century Limerick). Street had requested a sum of forty shillings for his work over a period of three years but the Committee of Accounts awarded him only twenty shillings.

The city guard-rooms came up for discussion on 7 October



The foundation stone of Quinpool Bridge.

1782. The Council was 'of opinion that the Guard Rooms shall be put in thorough repair immediately'. It was also decided that the completed work was to be inspected by Major Amos Vereker, John Gabbett and John Harrison before any payment was made for the work. (These men were, of course, members of the Council).

In January 1783 the Council was worried about the state of the pilotage of the Shannon; a suggestion was made that the matter be fully investigated and that licences should be granted only to skilled pilots. Under a charter granted by King James 1 on 3 March 1609 the Corporation of Limerick had an exclusive admiralty jurisdiction, both criminal and civil, over the Shannon from three miles north-east of the city to the river mouth at the sea.

At the same meeting it was ordered that the sum of two hundred pounds be granted to a fund raised by subscription, in order to buy corn for the poor.

The cleaning of the streets got its quota of attention in October 1783. It was suggested that two strong carts should be bought for this purpose; it was also proposed that the Mayor should have direct control of them.

**for the time being in order to be Employed in Cleansing the street as necessary occasion only may require and that the Mayor be accountable to your Corporation for carts and tackle at going out of office.**

In the same year 1783 (no month is mentioned in the minute book) the Corporation was worried about the 'ruinous condition of Parteen causeway' and considered its immediate repair necessary in order to keep communications open between the city and County Clare. A committee was set up to investigate the matter and it was decided that Alderman Philip Smyth and Mr. Ben White should engage contractors who would begin work 'at the small bridge and ending at the Bounds of the City Liberties'. Up to this time in order to get from Parteen to Limerick it appears that the use of a boat was necessary. In his **History** John Ferrar quotes from the Davis Manuscript for the year 1634:

**A man from Dublin came, 'twas said a Scot,  
A patent for a ferry he had got  
'Twxit Limerick and Parteen - he did demand  
So much money to be paid in hand,  
That the city with him refuses to deal,  
Resolved a causeway to make for public weal,  
Tho' Monabraher bog; 'twas this year done,  
And so the man, with his patent run,  
The disappointment operated so,  
He died by the way, no more of him I know.**

So the work of building the bridge started and its foundation stone was duly laid. A translation of the stone's Latin inscription tells us that:

**Peter Creagh, son of Andrew (Creagh), Mayor of Limerick, had this bridge and street made at the expense of the City of Limerick, the year of the Lord 1635.**

Peter (or Pierce) Creagh FitzAndrew was Mayor in 1634, not 1635 (when Thomas FitzMartin Arthur was Mayor), so clearly the date in the inscription refers to the year of the bridge's completion and official inauguration rather than that of its building.

The 'small bridge' with the above inscription still spans the Avondoun river, near the south-eastern corner of what is now the city dump at the Longpavement and is known as Quinpool Bridge.

In **The Lays and Legends of Thomond** Michael Hogan, who grew up in nearby Thomondgate and who knew the surrounding countryside well, has given a gentle description of the winding, "brown" river in his poem, **The Banks of Avondoun**.

An unspecified date in October 1785 was the third Monday of D'Oyer Hundred; this was an assembly of all the freemen of the city. The origins of the court do not seem to go back to any of the city's charters but there appears no doubt that it was a very ancient institution.

**It consists of the whole body of freemen, and meets on the day next following each of the four stated quarterly meetings of the common council. (3)**

On the same Monday the right to collect tolls at the various city gates was let at the following prices:

**Quay Gate - £61.0.0  
John's Gate - £305.0.0.  
Thomondgate - £200.0.0.  
Market House - £315.0.0.**

In 1787 (no month specified) the improvement of the streets in the parish of St. John's was aided by the Corporation's donation of £10, while the parish of St. Munchin's received £20 for the same purpose.

On 21 October 1789 the question of the tax to be imposed on corn arose again. If corn was brought into the city for the purpose of exporting it through the port of Limerick then gateage only was charged; however, if the corn was brought in with a view to its sale in the city itself then a much heavier toll was imposed. The question continued to be a vexed one into the seventeen-nineties, for in January 1792 it was recorded that a petition from the merchants and traders of the city had been addressed to the House of Commons in Dublin. In the petition the traders looked for an exemption from any charge of Corporation dues on corn brought into the city for the purpose of export. The Corporation saw this request as totally unacceptable, for it stated that the principal source of its revenues was from the dues on corn, and even these were insufficient to support the magistracy itself, on which all law and order depended.

During 1790 two dozen oak chairs and a set of fire irons for the Council Chamber and the Mayor's office were purchased. In April of the same year the sum of £141.5.2., was paid for repairs to what was known as the Long Dock (this was enclosed in 1843, for the purpose of constructing the Potato Market).

**Resolved that the thanks of this Council be given to Captain David Forbes, Commanding officer of the 34th Regt., in Garrison here for the zeal with which they have on all occasions assisted the Magistracy in the preservation of the peace and for their Conduct in General since they have been quartered in this City. (4 April, 1793).**

Soldiers were again on the minds of the Council in June of the same year, for the Chamberlain was instructed to pay to Colonel Prendergast Smyth the sum of one hundred pounds for the purpose of purchasing jackets 'trousers and other requisites for a Soldier for such men as have entered and shall enter as Volunteers to serve in the militia for the County of the City of Limerick'. The County of the City of Limerick formed a distinct county consisting of the city of Limerick, its liberties and the island of Inniscattery at the mouth of the Shannon.

Land was rented from Francis Russell in 1794, at a yearly cost of £5.13.9., for the purpose of erecting new markets at Mungret Street; the Council concluded that the amount charged was fair and reasonable. In the same year the painting and cleaning the palisades of the Exchange was begun as was work on 'whitening the Ceilings and Stairs'.

The agitation against paying toll on corn brought into the city for the purpose of exportation had succeeded, for in 1794 the Council gave directions that toll farmers, in consequence of loss sustained by them because of an order of Council in January 1792 permitting corn destined for other countries to come into the city toll free, should be allowed the following remissions: John's Gate, £47.9.9., Thomond Gate, £28.12.1., Quay Gate, £130.17.11., and Mungret Gate, £74.10.10.

#### REFERENCES

1. **Appendix to the first Report of the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations in Ireland, 1835.**
2. **History of Limerick** by John Ferrar.
3. **Appendix to the first Report of the Commissioners on Municipal Corporations in Ireland, 1835.**