

SURVEY

Some Surviving Jostle Stones in Limerick city

Jostle stones were placed at the corners of buildings or at entrance piers so that the wheels of carts or carriages could not inflict damage and thereby undermine the structure. Three interesting examples of these jostle stones survive in the old Irish town area of St. John's parish. One is placed at the corner of the entrance to Cross's Funeral Home, on Lower Gerald Griffin Street (Fig. 1). It is a particularly tall example, standing 37 inches (94 mm) in height. It may not have originally stood in the position it now occupies. A large 'foot' of concrete is attached to the bottom indicating that it was dug up from where it was once placed or it may have been replaced, near its original site after up-grading of the road.

Two other stones are to be found near St. John's hospital. One, 23 inches (59 mm) in height, stands outside the entrance gate to what was the convent in the hospital grounds and now gives access to the grounds leading to the A & E Department (Fig. 2). Another stone is located at the archway of what is generally known as the citadel (Fig. 3). As Brian Hodkinson has shown this structure is in fact the medieval St John's gate, which was used as the fourth side of the citadel when it was built in c.1652-3.¹ It is described in the *Civil Survey* of 1655: 'The Cytadle about St. Johns Gate contains a great stone house...'² The area where the jostle stone was erected, probably sometime in the eighteenth or nineteenth century, had been cut away by traffic before the stone was put in place to provide protection. It is 20 inches (51mm) in height. As it protects part of the only surviving medieval gate of the city it is of particular importance.

Little Glentworth Street, runs off Dominick Street and leads around to Davis Street. At the Dominick Street entrance there is a jostle stone at the left-hand corner. There is also a



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

¹ Brian Hodkinson, 'St John's Gate and the Citadel in Irishtown Limerick', *NMAJ*, vol. 46 (2006) pp 129-30.

² R.C. Simington (ed.), *The Civil Survey Vol. IV, County of Limerick* (Dublin, 1938) p. 406.

stone in the centre of the road. It seems to have been set in place in order to prevent carts driving down the road in front of houses, which, judging by their size and style, were built for middle-class people during the mid-nineteenth century. However, because there is a jostle stone at the corner, the bollard of stone must have been added later when carts were becoming a nuisance. The bollard has four sides and probably also belongs to the mid-nineteenth century. If it had been erected at a later date it would most certainly have been constructed of iron. There is a channel running the length of this street and it may have been used for the purpose of taking sewerage. The jostle stone is 31 inches in height (79 mm). The bollard is 28 inches (71mm) in height and 8 inches in width (Fig. 4).

Broad Lane, which connects Wickham Street and Upper Gerald Griffin Street, has a very large stone set into the bottom of a wall at the Wickham Street entrance. It does not look like a conventional jostle stone, which could be described as a small round pillar. This stone is 25 inches in height (63mm) and 17-18 inches (44-46 mm) at its widest point. It is a large stone with a flat side but it was probably put in place to do the work of a jostle stone. A shallow channel running the length of this lane may have been for the purpose of conducting sewerage during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (Fig. 5).

River Lane runs from Aherne's Row and connected it to Treacy's Lane and Sir Harry's Mall. Treacy's Lane no longer exists; it was demolished when the new road, connecting St. Mary's to the Abbey Bridge was constructed in the 1990s.³ At the right-hand corner of a house on Aherne's Row and River Lane, there is a jostle stone which has seen a great deal of rough usage, judging by its damaged condition. It is 18 inches (45mm) in height (Fig. 6).

The Potato Market, on Merchants' Quay, has two entrance gates. The gate on one's left-hand side as one faces the Market has two small jostle stones still in place. This market was built on the site of the Long Dock in 1843.⁴ Therefore these stones could belong to roughly that date. The stone on the right-hand side of the gate is 18 inches (46mm) in height while that on the left-hand side is 17 inches (43mm) in height. Inside the Market itself, just beyond the open gates, there are two different kinds of stones. Both are 28 inches in height (71mm) and both have eight sides. They could have served two



Fig. 4



Fig. 5

³ Eamon O'Flaherty, *Irish Historic Town Atlas No.21, Limerick* (Dublin, 2010) p. 20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 38.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

functions. They might have been used to prevent the gate from swinging in the wind or, maybe they were put in place to prevent carts turning sharp right or left and thereby damaging the gates (Fig. 7).

Two of these eight-sided stones still stand inside the gates of St. Mary's Cathedral, on Bridge Street. Both are 21 inches in height (53mm). When the gates are opened and run parallel to the entrance passage, the stones stand just where the gates end. They seem to protect the gates from carriages taking quick turns to right or left and possibly to prevent the gates swinging in a very high wind (Fig. 8).

In Merchants' Quay, opposite the Potato Market, there is an area which, according to the plaque on the wall, was reconstructed by the Limerick Civic Trust in 1993. A piece of sculpture on a pedestal is surrounded by a collection of nine jostle stones and eight-sided stones. This collection (Fig. 9) was put together from stones saved when the Potato



Fig. 8



Fig. 9



Fig. 10



Fig. 11

Market was converted to a car park and when the Hay Market in Mulgrave Street was dismantled.⁵ Another eight-sided stone (Fig. 10) is placed against the angle of a house at the junction of Upper Gerald Griffin Street and Sexton Street and is therefore clearly used as a jostle stone even though these eight-sided stone are more usually found inside gates. Only five sides are visible and it is approximately 84mm in height. The stone is now painted in an attractive high-gloss grey but it is probably limestone, as are all of the other such stones to be found in Limerick city.

On Upper Henry Street, at its junction with Windmill Street, there is a jostle stone which resembles the stone on Broad Lane. It is not the rounded dressed pillar-type stone but is a very large block of undressed limestone. It is 26 inches in height (66 mm) and 16 inches (41mm) in width (Fig. 11). Directly across from it there is another stone which is 19 inches in height (48mm) and 13 inches (33mm) in width. It is not a jostle stone because it does not stand at the corner of a building or gateway. There appears to be the remains of a step at the top of the stone. Could this possibly be the damaged remains of a mounting-block? (Fig. 12). Etienne Rynne explained that such stones were used 'by the intending horse-rider climbing the steps and on reaching the top throwing his right leg over the horse. This means that the horse had to be led up to the vertical back of the mounting-block...'⁶ Rynne is of the opinion that the Clarecastle mounting-block is the only surviving example in Ireland, if one excludes the Treaty Stone on Thomond Bridge. However, if the stone on Upper Henry Street is the remains of such a block it therefore has a certain importance as perhaps, the second surviving remains of such a stone in Ireland.



Fig. 12

Charlotte Murphy

⁵ Information from Gerry Imbusch, of the Civic Trust, in a phone conversation on 16 August 2010.

⁶ Etienne Rynne, 'The Clarecastle Mounting-Block' in *The Other Clare*, vol. 15 (1991) pp 5-6.