

## NOTE

### A Note on Limerick Jostle Stones

Conservation and restoration work carried out in the 1980s on Merchants' Quay and the Potato Market prompts one to recognise Limerick's concern for its heritage and the preservation thereof. For example, the renovated east entrance to the Potato Market with its Greek Revival columns presents a context for my comment. The entrance is a formidable structure consisting of columns with shafts that are decorated with a uniquely provincial variation on a Greek Key pattern.

Above the shafts are friezes that are adorned with a classic Greek Key motif and the friezes culminate in triangular capitals with 'cat ear' corners. In addition, the columns support impressively large ornate cast iron gates which swing inwards and when fully open, rest beside octagonal limestone bollards to which they can be tethered to secure their position safely when necessary.

In addition, each column, forming the entrance to the Potato Market from Merchants' Quay, (east end), is protected by a single jostle stone at its base that lies in a lean-to or semi recumbent manner against the column it protects. Its function is to divert a rotating carriage wheel that rolls over it away from the column and back on to the road again. It does this because the wheel slides down the circular inclined jostle stone while continuing to rotate and complete the turn it is making without damaging the column (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1** Jostle stones at Potato Market entrance.

On the footpath opposite the Potato Market entrance is a cluster of free standing jostle stones and octagonal bollards which function as items of street furniture. They also are a tribute to the stonemasons who worked for the Limerick Corporation in the mid-nineteenth century. The overall morphology of the jostle stones can be determined but not their exact height as a section of the stone is beneath ground level.



A jostle stone consists of a slightly tapered circular shaft that terminates in a cylindrical head. A 'V' notch features on the stone to facilitate its attachment to the corner it protects. The Jostle stones in the clusters surveyed measure from 27 to 30 inches in height above ground level, and are c.33 inches in circumference. The jostle stone clusters share design features in common, which distinguishes them from jostle stones found elsewhere in the city. In fact it suggests they were fashioned from a standard model or plan. The octagonal bollards included in the stone clusters are also of uniform design but their function is to regulate traffic movement as opposed to protecting architectural structures. They exhibit fine craftsmanship in stone cutting.

In addition to Merchants' Quay, a cluster of seven limestone jostle stones has been conserved on the boundary between Strandville Gardens and Clanmorris Avenue (Fig. 2). They are reminiscent of the standing stones found in pre-historic archaeological sites. However, in this instance, the jostle stones function as bollards, which prevent traffic accessing Clanmorris Avenue from Strandville Gardens off O'Callaghan Strand. Since the Potato Market gates on Merchants' Quay feature limestone jostle stones and octagonal bollards similar to those in the satellite clusters it can be assumed they are all of the same vintage.



**Fig. 2** Jostle stones at Clanmorris Avenue / Strandville Gardens.

In 1843, William Henshaw Owen, Board of Works representative in the city, prepared plans for the construction of a walled and railed market enclosure that is now the Potato Market. The entrances are contemporary with the construction of the enclosure and the jostle stones and bollards included in the design share a striking resemblance to those forming the cluster on Merchants' Quay and the cluster between Strandville Gardens and Clanmorris Avenue. For this reason a production date of pre-1850 is very likely. In addition, the jostle stone protecting the east gate, right hand side as you enter the Potato Market, clearly reveals that the 'V' notch feature fastens it to the base of the column, thus suggesting it is contemporary with the design of those in the satellite clusters.

In conclusion, it seems that all the free-standing, satellite stone clusters were surplus to the requirements of Limerick Corporation for many years until eventually designated for use as street furniture for conservation reasons. The Merchants' Quay cluster functions gratuitously as street furniture. On the other hand, the formidable line of seven jostle stones separating Strandville Gardens from Clanmorris Avenue function as bollards which continue to wield the influence of nineteenth-century stonemasons on traffic regulation in the city to this day, while never really fashioned for such a function.

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