

Did you notice..?

A column for the curious stroller

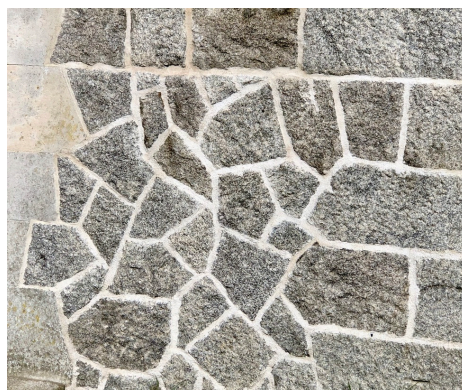
Séamus Cannon

2. Stone walls

Not all stone walls in Monkstown are the same. Superficially, some are more decorative than others. It's noticeable, for instance, that the finely finished former entrance to Salthill hotel on Old Dunleary Rd. or the granite parapet wall of Longford Terrace is of a much higher standard than the random rubble of much of the boundary wall nearby. Monkstown grew in the nineteenth century at a time when craftsmen of great skill were available due to the major construction works of the harbour and railway. What we have is a wide range of masonry styles and work of a very high standard indeed. Local stone is used, primarily granite, and limestone, frequently combined in decorative styles.

Stonework is grouped into two general categories, ashlar and rubble, within which are many variants. Ashlar describes finely finished stone, precisely cut on all sides meeting other stones and usually squared on all sides. The face of the stone may be finished in a variety of decorative ways, of which there are numerous examples in our area. This contrasts with, for instance, rubble construction which characterises many of our local walls. Rubble walls are described as random rubble or coursed.

However, the particular style which I wish to draw to your attention is an unusual style called *polygonal* of which there are many examples dotted around Monkstown. It can be seen in the lower reaches of the wall of St. John's Church in Mounttown, the ground floor of houses in Grosvenor Terrace and in the boundary walls in some parts of Seapoint Avenue and Monkstown Road.



The word means many-sided and polygonal stonework is comprised of stones that are many-sided, all of which fit in with similarly cut stone on all sides. Local masons called it 'hock and ham' stonework on account of the shape of the stones. It is a very old style and was even used by the Incas! The temple of Apollo at Delphi, in ancient Greece, dating from the 4th century BC displays a fine example of this style of masonry. Because it doesn't bind as well as coursed stonework it is generally confined to the lower reaches of buildings.

It's something to look out for when you're out on your walk!