

Did you notice?

A column for the curious stroller

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16. Benchmarks

I came across a fascinating detail recently, and all due to the slanting winter sun. It is an unusual benchmark at the junction of Longford Terrace with Pakenham Rd.



Now, the term 'benchmark' is in common usage in business, but the term originated in relation to land surveying and is particularly associated with the Ordnance Survey of Ireland. This spectacular project began in the late 1820s and continued until 1846 producing marvellously detailed maps of the entire island to a scale of 6 inches to the mile with greater detail for urban areas. The maps were revised periodically and they make for a fascinating study. Ireland was the first country in the world to be mapped with such accuracy, not least because it was the most turbulent part of the United Kingdom. It is worth noting that it was the military that conducted the survey!

A benchmark created by the Ordnance Survey was usually a horizontal line carved into a vertical stone. An arrow was carved underneath to mark the point. There would have been several in Monkstown, some of which have disappeared. The one I spotted is unusual in that it is on a horizontal surface and is so weathered that it is not normally visible, except that on the morning I spotted it, a very bright sun, low in the sky, threw the arrow into relief. There are several

more to be seen in Monkstown, including one on the Parish Church Cof I and St. Patrick's RC church

Benchmarks were used to mark the elevation of a point above a fixed standard, the low-water mark at the spring tide on Poolbeg lighthouse. This mark is 44.3 feet above that point. Surveying in our area began in 1837 and was eventually published with revisions in 1843.

As well as mapping the country, the Ordnance Survey was also charged with assigning fixed names to places. It was the time when the Irish language names were given fixed English forms, a process vividly evoked in the play *Translations* by Brian Friel, when *Baile Beag* became Ballybeg. Placenames in the Monkstown area had of course been anglicised much earlier, but that's for another day!

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