

EAST BELFAST HISTORICAL SOCIETY



THE LONG BRIDGE STONE (1841)

The famous East Belfast landmark known as the Long Bridge Stone is located on the pavement at the junction of Castlereagh Street and the Albertbridge Road. As its name suggests, it is a large piece of granite taken from the old Long Bridge which crossed the River Lagan between 1688 and 1841.

The expansion of Belfast during the early 19th century and the resulting increase in traffic, as well as damage caused to the bridge, meant that a decision was taken to demolish and replace it in 1841. The contract was given to the well-known East Belfast builder Francis Ritchie who lived at The Mount. While he was carrying out the work, Ritchie received a strange request from a friend of his, a local doctor called Alexander, who asked if he could have a piece of granite from the old bridge as a souvenir to place in his garden at the junction of Castlereagh Street and the Albertbridge Road. Ritchie duly obliged and a rather large piece of granite was sunk in his back garden sometime between 1841 and 1842 (the date, 1831, on a nearby flagstone is incorrect!). When the doctor died, his house and garden disappeared but the Long Bridge Stone remained; meanwhile the new bridge across the Lagan was renamed the Queen's Bridge in honour of the recently crowned Queen Victoria. Later a pub called McShannon's (and eventually Clancy's Tavern) was built on the site of Doctor Alexander's house just behind the stone. The pub was badly damaged during the 1941 Blitz and part of the Long Bridge Stone was also blown away.

Locals in East Belfast often referred to the stone as a "mounting stone" and a rumour spread that it was used by King William to mount his horse on his journey to the Boyne! Although a good story, it is not true. Of course, King William was in Ireland in 1690 to fight a famous battle but he wasn't anywhere near the Albertbridge Road and the stone did not appear there until 150 years later! Interestingly, however, there is a connection between the stone and Ireland's most famous battle. King William's Lieutenant, Duke Schomberg, used it to transport heavy artillery as he travelled from Groomsport, where he had landed, to the Boyne and the damage caused to the bridge eventually resulted in it having to be demolished.

HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

This famous stone, which has been in its present location for nearly 200 years, has witnessed several centuries of East Belfast's history.

Wesley Thompson