

## HIDDEN GEMS AND FORGOTTEN PEOPLE

### NAAS LOCAL HISTORY GROUP



### PUNCHESTOWN STANDING STONE

Outside Naas, Punchestown Racecourse sits serenely among the sandy hills of East Kildare bringing back memories of the great days of the Kildare Hunt meetings. These were the days of the bank jump, the double bank, the stone wall and the “privee hedge”. However what the visitor would most likely miss is the solitary stone standing alone in a nearby field. Known locally as the “Longstone of Punchestown Great”, it stands seven metres (27 ft.) high and weighs about nine tons.

This makes it one of the tallest Irish standing stones and arguably the most elegant. It has an almost square base with a circumference of 3.3 metres (11ft.) that gradually turns wedge shaped as it rises. This tall granite stone was originally set tilted but fell down in 1931 and was re-erected in 1934. At the base there was a small stone “cist” which was a Bronze Age burial site. This was empty and without any grave goods. These stones performed various functions, including road markers, boundary limits, burial locations and often were erected to commemorate people or events.

It would appear that the “Beaker” people of the Eastern Province erected this and many more standing stones in the same area. (In the south-west of Ireland there are about 600 examples.). The Irish name for these monuments is “Gallan” or “Dallan” though there are many local variations. The Punchestown Stone is not the only Megalithic Monument in the area. Craddockstown West, another tilted stone is not far away, as well as the impressive stone at Forenaughts Great.

There is also another four metre long Megalith lying in a recumbent position in the townland of Longstone. There are many traditions associated with the stones and none more interesting than the following. It is told that the legendary Fionn Mac Cumhaill hurled them from the Hill of Allen in a test of strength or that he threw them at his wife who was at Punchestown. Next time you are at the races, have a look and take a wish. It might just bring you a little luck.