

# THE CROW'S FOOT TRAIL OF WESTPORT



*Created by the  
4th & 5th class children  
of Holy Trinity  
National School, Westport*

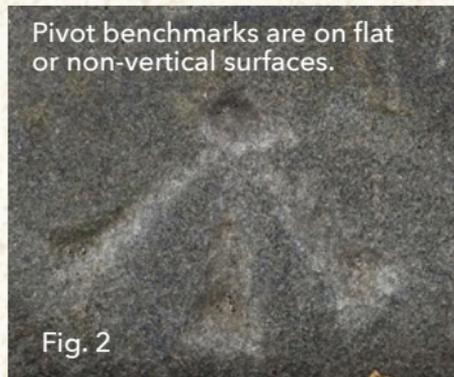
**Can you find  
them all?**

## What are Crows' Feet?

You may think crows' feet are wrinkles around the eyes of older people.... But we found one on our school building! That's what set us on this trail. Crows' feet are benchmarks engraved on old stone buildings, walls and bridges throughout Ireland. They record height above sea level\* and were put there by army surveyors mapping the country between 1824 and 1846.

The maps they made were the most advanced and accurate in the world at the time. They were made by army engineers and surveyors lead by Lt Thomas Colby who set up the Ordnance Survey in Ireland in 1824. The maps were extremely detailed, as the government wanted to value the land for taxation. Perhaps this is how the benchmarks earned the nicknames sapper's mark (soldier's mark) and devil's mark. Other names they are known by are trig mark or point and three-legged stool.

Crows' feet can be found on the historic 25" and 6" maps which are easily accessed on [www.heritagemaps.ie](http://www.heritagemaps.ie). We used these maps to hunt for the crows' feet in Westport. We found two different kinds around the town; cut benchmarks (fig. 1) and pivot benchmarks (fig. 2).



We didn't find all the benchmarks that are shown on the maps because some have been plastered over or the building has been demolished. We've written clues to guide you to the ones we did find. And maybe if you are really eagle-eyed you will discover some others along the way. We hope you enjoy exploring our town along The Crow's Foot Trail.

And if you do, crows' feet were marked on buildings all around Ireland, you could look up the historic maps of your own area on [www.heritagemaps.ie](http://www.heritagemaps.ie) and hunt for some more closer to home.

*\* Benchmarks relating to the historic maps show height above sea level as measured from a point called Ordnance Datum (zero) at low tide at Poolbeg Lighthouse in Dublin. The crow's foot on our school marks a height of 53 feet 2 inches above sea level. Nowadays Ordnance Datum (OD) is measured at Malin Head in Co. Donegal, and is 2.7 metres higher than the one in Poolbeg which explains the difference in heights recorded for landmarks on modern maps when compared with historic ones - cartographers are not bad at maths nor is the island sinking!*

## The Customs House



The Quay at Westport was a busy port in the 18th and 19th centuries. There was a busy trade in export of flax, linen, grains and building materials such as slate. The main import was timber. The Customs House was the office for the government officials who collected duty on imports. They were also in charge of stopping smugglers of tobacco and illegal alcohol

known as Geneva. The Customs House is now an art gallery and a nice place to visit. On Culture Night they have print workshops for children. PK and ZBP



Illustration: ED

## The Octagon



At the Octagon, St Patrick stands 2.4m high on a column above an octagonal plinth. But when the monument was first erected between 1843-1845 "Big George" was on top. It was first built in memory of George Glenden-

ning. He was an agent for the Browne family of Westport House, and he was also a successful banker who encouraged the development of the town. During the Civil War (1923) Free State troops who were in the Town Hall used "Big George" as target practice and shot off his head. In 1943, a hundred years after his death, the Town Council removed his statue. Eventually in 1990 the monument was restored with a statue of St.Patrick on top.



*"We like the Octagon because it's a landmark in the town and a great meeting point. We also like it because we can enjoy an ice-cream and watch people go by."* LJ and LK

## The Lake at Westport House



Where Westport House is now, Gráinne Mhaol had a castle in the 1500s. The remains of her castle can still be seen in the dungeons of Westport House. She would have sailed up to the castle as the tide went all the in to there at that time. The lake is manmade and was added later when the Browne family developed the house and grounds. The Carrowbeg River flows into the lake and a dam has been built at the Quay to separate it from the sea. There is a sluice gate further up from the dam that

lets the water out so the water level is always right.

*"We enjoy walking our dogs down at the Quay and watching the wildlife on the lake."* LB and MC

## The Quay Wall



The Quay Wall is nearly 300 years old. It is as old as Westport House. It was a boundary wall to keep animals in and poachers out. It's about 900 metres long, going from Church Lane near the playground in Westport to the main entrance of Westport House at the Quay. It was built with random rubble stone quarried from the Westport Estate. It is now a listed national monument because it's a good example of 18th century engineering.

*"We think it's cool that this big wall was made from a whole lot of random rubble and it's still standing today. Children used to call the grounds inside 'Bluebell Land' in springtime!" CPH, HC and HF*



## Holy Trinity NS



Holy Trinity is one of the oldest schools in Connacht, and is one to be proud of. The school is located across the road from the Church of Ireland's Holy Trinity church. Holy Trinity school is in fact older than the present church which was built in 1872.

Records weren't kept as well in the past as they are today so we do not know the exact date when the school was built. But we do know that it was first used as a cholera hospital when still in an unfinished state. We know from a stone plaque on the building that it first became part of the National Schools system in 1831.

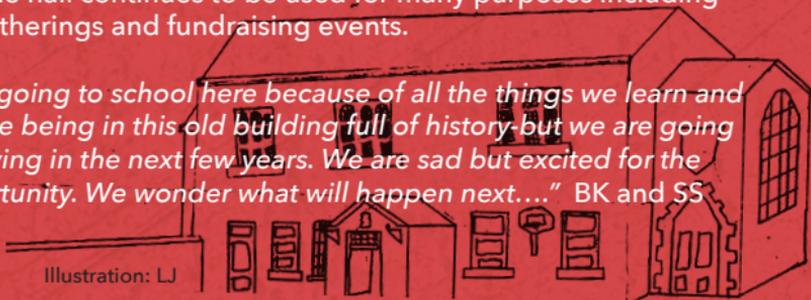
Originally it had two classrooms and an apartment for the master downstairs. Upstairs was all one room used as an infants' school, for meetings and for lectures and at one time for church service. It was known as the Lecture Hall.

In 1851 there were forty boys and forty girls on the roll, but the average attendance was only twenty two boys and twenty seven girls. There are accounts from children in the 1940s of playing in the children's garden inside the high walls. We think this is where the rectory now stands.



The Lecture Hall has had many uses including public dances in the 1930s and more recently as a Scout den, for yoga classes and as a venue for shows. It is now divided into two rooms, one is our classroom and the other is the hall where we do Irish dancing, and Drama. The hall continues to be used for many purposes including church gatherings and fundraising events.

*"We love going to school here because of all the things we learn and do. We like being in this old building full of history-but we are going to be moving in the next few years. We are sad but excited for the big opportunity. We wonder what will happen next..."* BK and SS



## Westport Train Station



The train station in Westport was opened on 28th of January 1866 linking Westport to Dublin by rail. There was a track running from the town at the Quay, to transport goods to and from the busy port. The Goods Store at the train station would have been used at this time. In the 1890s a new line was built linking Westport to Achill. The first stage of the line went to Newport and opened in 1894. We found where someone called E

McDonnell carved their name and the date 1894, on the railway bridge where the train to Newport crossed over Altamont St. (Had he built the bridge and wanted to be remembered or was he a train driver, or a bored teenager? 19th century graffiti!) In 1934 the line to Achill closed, the line to the Quay stopped being used in 1941 and was permanently closed in 1978. Both of these lines are now used for Greenway cycle paths.

*"I love meeting my dad at the train station when he comes back from somewhere. I like the train because it's really comfortable and quiet and I like that so I can get a sleep in." CBT*

*"I love the train station because you get to see all the cool and different types of trains fly up and down the tracks. I love the train because I love the way it rocks up and down dum dum ddd ddummm."*

- GPO



## The Carrowbeg River



In 1800, John Dennis Browne, (Lord of Westport House) decided to reroute the Carrowbeg River in a straight line to make a mall with trees along the banks, and crossed by three stone bridges. This was a place for people to stroll around and chat, and still is. Although it's lovely to look at, when there is heavy rain the river returns to its natural route and floods the houses

and post office on the mall.

A story is told about a postman trying to deliver post to a house (on the mall) and when he pushed open the letter box a gush of water poured out at him.

*When I was younger I used to go to the mall and feed the ducks with my uncle. - A.S.*

