



A Brief History of the Celtic Cross

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The use of a memorial as a measure of reverence for the deceased has been a long-adhered to tradition. Often times, one can find insight into a person's character, strength, beliefs, and family structure with a causal inspection of the words and symbols.

Most importantly, memorials create a permanent record of a person's cycle of life on earth. Many of these memorials have a special meaning; one that especially evokes this is the Celtic Cross.

Predating the 5th Century in its use, the Celtic Cross has a story that is long and varied. A commonly cited origin centers around the conversion of Pagan Kings by St. Patrick. As Christianity was spreading, St. Patrick needed a symbol that would recognize the past beliefs and future hope that Christianity would bring. With this depiction at the core, the hope and light of Christ eternal outshines the embodiment of the sun (Invictas) or moon (Luna) god that Pagan's often cited (denoted by the circular center). Therefore, the cross became a visual reminder of a new existence to the Pagan convert- a symbol of transition. This story also overlays the commonly cited Christian origin of the Celtic Cross. The encircling pattern at the center of the cross serves as a reminder of the never-ending love of Christ.

Before its use as a grave marker, the Celtic Cross commonly denoted a place of spiritual significance or a boundary. Celtic Crosses used in this manner are known as the Irish High Cross. Monks often forged religious scenes into them as a religious educational tool. They are a rare find on the European landscape today.

In 1857, *Illustrations of the Most Interesting of the Sculpted Crosses of Ancient Ireland* was published by Henry O'Neill. A noted Irish artist and antiquarian, his writing spurred widespread interest in the Celtic cross as a symbol of Irish culture. From Ireland, a revival of the culture spread into many parts of the country, leading to a widespread use of the cross in grave marker form.

Spiral and key patterns that are often incorporated into the designs of the cross originated from patterns used in Celtic metalwork. The type of artwork that the knot patterns produce is known as insular art, often characterized by looped, braided, and knotted lines which form complex geometric patterns providing rich depth in art.

The next time you visit Cave Hill Cemetery, take a look around the landscape to see how many Celtic Crosses you can find. Special thanks to Lou Tingle for the photographs:



Mapother Lot- Section 11



Muldoon Lot- Section 1



May Lot- Section 11