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CELTIC CROSSES

Life Enhancing Symbols and Artefacts

by
Colin McCallien

The traditional Celtic cross embodies a spiritual message written in stone which speaks to our sub-conscious mind and which will be explored here, in the light of the ancient wisdom. The Welsh tradition, recorded in the Middle Ages and taught by contemporary druidism, provides enough clues to unravel some of the message. Though veiled, this message is as important today as it was when the first high crosses were erected twelve hundred years ago. Since the time of the renaissance, many buildings across Europe have been capped by finials looking like a modified Celtic cross and capable of the same interpretation. It should be impossible to look at a Celtic cross high on the ridge of a church or cathedral, or marking a grave, without being reminded of spiritual truths known to our ancestors.



INTRODUCTION

For some people the Celtic cross is a national emblem; to others it is a religious icon, a gravestone, or a work of art. Surprisingly, it can also be a useful artefact. Most importantly, however, it can be a sublime spiritual symbol reminding us of higher worlds and great possibilities.

Provided there is a circle and an equal-armed cross, the term Celtic cross can denote anything from a simple line drawing to an elaborate gravestone covered with intertwining serpents and pictures of Bible stories. In existence long before the Christian Church adopted it, the cross in a circle has always been a powerful spiritual symbol.



A symbol is a metaphor in the form of a picture; a metaphor is a symbol in words. In the words of Helena Blavatsky, *“A symbol is ever, for him that has eyes for it, some dimmer or clearer revelation of the God-like.”*

We can all have different interpretations of symbols particularly if they are multi-cultural. A Christian might be expected to believe that his religion has always owned the concept of a Celtic cross and therefore to view it as a man surrounded by a halo in the shape of a circle. As we shall see that view is very close to one of the ancient interpretations.

A friend once explained that the cross represents the Church of Jesus Christ covering the world depicted by the circle. Another friend, doubtless with his tongue in his cheek,

explained that in the wild Celtic areas of the author’s home land the stonemasons had trouble carving crosses whose arms would be strong enough to support themselves and so the circular arcs were added for strength.

To begin a search for possible meanings of any ancient high cross in Britain and Ireland or of any modern Celtic gravestone, we must split it into components and examine the circle and the equal-armed cross separately.

A CROSS AND CIRCLE — I

✚ A simple cross with four equal arms can be viewed as a man with arms outstretched. A circle can represent the world, the universe or even God, depending upon how grand you wish the symbol to be. Thus a cross in a circle can represent a man with arms out in loving embrace to his fellow men while surrounded by the universal love of God.

For a deeper interpretation of the four arms of a cross, we may regard the horizontal line as the surface of the earth and hence it represents earthly, physical **matter** – like a body, for instance. The vertical line represents **spirit** or divine energy descending from above and entering the body. Assuming the circle represents a container, such as the protective maternal womb, we have a symbol for the coming together of soul and body to form a human being in incarnation, the whole operation being supervised lovingly by the Mother-God.

The notion of crucifixion has not come into the discussion for the use of the simple cross in a circle as a spiritual symbol is ancient and pre-Christian. It was employed on several

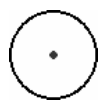
continents long before the orthodox Churches adopted the symbol of a traumatised Jesus nailed to the arms of a Roman cross (having a long leg or shaft).

A CROSS AND CIRCLE — II



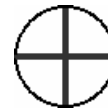
For an alternative view of the cross in a circle we start with the circle. A plain circle represents the One Life without beginning or end. That is, it represents everything, the whole universe, including all beings and all levels of life and consciousness. It is sometimes termed the *circle of infinity*

It is often regarded as a picture of the sun and therefore as a symbol of a monotheistic divinity. The sun was selected for this symbol because the sun is the most powerful object that came within the sight and understanding of ancient man. Moreover, the visible sun is essential for the maintenance of the physical body and therefore can be a symbol for the spiritual sun that is responsible for the maintenance of the spiritual body. Those ancient people, whom we call sun-worshippers, knew better than to worship the actual sun and merely used it as an appropriate symbol.



Sometimes a dot was placed at the centre generating the astronomical and astrological sign for the sun. This is a picture of a symbolic egg containing the tiny germ that turns the whole into a living entity. The dot is also the seed of the *tree of life* whose roots and branches will contain the various levels of consciousness filling the cosmos.

It was the ancient sage Hermes Trismegistus who said, “*God is a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere.*” Thus the centre is within you and the circumference is so big and far away you cannot reach it. It contains the whole universe. Paradoxically, though the centre may be within you, it is also within the next man for no individual has special privileges and all are equal. In other words, God is to be found at the centre of every human heart.



Returning to the symbolic egg containing the germ, suppose God started to activate the universe at the site of the dot. Imagine energy or life pouring out of the dot in every direction and draw four lines to indicate this. The four lines are the agents of God, the builders of the universe. They are sometimes called the Lords of karma, or the four Regents who look in every direction equally and apply the laws of nature and the spiritual laws.

In the Egyptian tradition the guardians of the cardinal points are the four sons of Horus and are the equivalent of the Lords of karma. On the *Papyrus of Hunefer*¹ they are depicted standing on a lotus growing in the primordial sea. As the soul of Hunefer proceeds down the judgement hall they represent the final testing hurdle before he can enter the duat to live for ever with Osiris, the embodiment of all good.

Put quite simply, a circle and cross form a sign for divine law and energy and therefore represent God. Here we encounter an apparent contradiction as it is already a sign representing a man. Ambiguity such as this is commonplace because, as explained earlier, a symbol can have various meanings just as a parable can have many interpretations. In this case, there is

no contradiction when we take into account the familiar statement that *man was made in the image of God*. (This statement is not to be taken literally for there is no old man with a long beard sitting on a cloud watching us. Instead we have been given freewill and the power to create the world around us, which are characteristics normally ascribed to God.)

So a circle and cross make a sign offering two interpretations and the correct one depends on the context. It is either:

1. A man with arms outstretched in service to his fellow men, all the while surrounded by the love of God, or
2. God with arms out in loving embrace of all life that fills the cosmos.

THE SUN AND CROSS



The centre from which life giving energy emerges may be drawn as a small sun-like circle to emphasise its importance. The spiritual sun is now the centre of a *sun and cross* inside the circle of infinity. The whole of this sign makes a *sun wheel* providing the frame work upon which is hung all sorts of cultural and esoteric symbols.

The four arms are the four branches of the river of life flowing in the four cardinal directions. The central dot or sun is the throne of God mentioned in a further statement attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, "*The Glory of the First Cause sat upon a Throne of Light with four rivers of flame rolling forth to the world of men.*"

The wheel shape introduces a dynamic dimension hinting at motion and perpetual change. For instance, as the wheel turns, its spokes remind us of the four seasons in a year. A vivid image of a huge celestial wheel in perpetual motion is created by St John (Rev., iv, 6-8) who describes four beasts like a lion, a calf, one with a face like a man and a flying eagle. These are the constellations of Leo, Taurus, Aquarius and Scorpio which are spaced round the zodiac at six hourly intervals and centred upon the sun which he likens to the throne of God. Each beast is full of eyes, that is stars, but as the beasts represent the four bodies of a man (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) these eyes within the man see and record his thoughts, words and deeds so that the Lords of karma can act with perfect justice. Just as the wheel turns daily, so the four beasts, our various bodies, should glorify God by day and night, saying in the words of John, "*Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.*"

CHURCH USE OF EQUAL-ARMED CROSSES



The Greek cross with four equal arms, with or without a circle, crops up regularly in Christian churches on robes, paintings and buildings. In his early days, the late Pope John Paul II, wore ceremonial robes in green and yellow with four large equal-armed crosses and four small ones. The small ones were remarkably like Templar crosses in shape widening out at the extremities, reminding us that no one owns a symbol. His vestments left no doubt that he was very much the representative of God on earth – at least in the eyes of his tailor. By contrast the

Pope's principal assistant was only given one plain straight Greek cross.

Putting the cross inside a circle is like putting God inside a container. Sometimes the container is the whole cosmos. However, when the cross in a circle is fixed to the inner wall of a church or chapel this indicates that the space contained by the wall is reserved for the agents of God – the precinct has been sanctified or consecrated. Some churches have a series of such signs around the inner wall, which are known as *Stations of the Cross*.

Fastened to the external ridge of a church roof, a cross in a circle indicates that the whole building has been set apart and is sacred. The picture shows the roof of St Thomas' Church near Warrington. There are three obvious crosses on the ridge. The two in the distance are standard Celtic crosses and the near one is an eight-armed cross with a circle.



The close-up shows the latter has four principle arms and four subsidiary arms. A wheel like this with eight arms represented the important Celtic festivals of the year and the wheel of life. There are another six crosses in circles at the top of each belfry window. The builders wanted to proclaim that this is a house of



God and were happy to use the Celtic tradition to shout this from the rooftops.

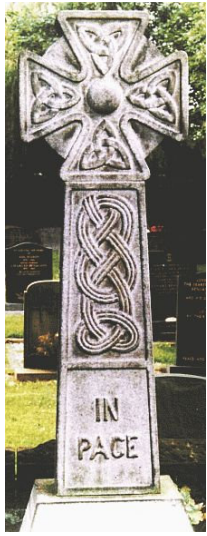
The presence of all these Celtic crosses, along with an ornamental, equal-armed cross above the main porch, should ensure that all heavenly entities like angels flying overhead know this is a sacred building. Perhaps the pagan and heretical humans in the streets below will even be attracted by these advertisements and attend the services.

CELTIC-STYLE TOMBSTONES

A study of the design and ornamentation of tombstones could begin in almost any graveyard. Here are two fairly modern examples in a typical cemetery in Cheshire (St Wilfred's, Grappenhall). The first stone is quite simple and dates from 1920. It stands on a pyramidal base; there is a shaft; and at the top is a circle holding an equal-armed cross. Note that it is similar to a Greek cross and not a Roman cross that would incorporate the shaft as part of the cross. Here the shaft merely serves to hold the cross and circle up in the air. The decoration is simple. There is a spiral in the centre, four roses, and a hint of endless tracery or lacework round the circle.



The second stone from the same period is different although it maintains the same general form. The pyramidal base can just be seen at the bottom of the photo. The shaft is decorated



but once again the cross is seen to be equal-armed. There is a large boss at the centre of the cross and circle. This is usually assumed to be a picture of the sun and therefore a symbol for God. In this case the arms widen making a Maltese cross illustrating the notion that the power of the Sun, that is of God, spreads out from the central source in every direction – not just in the four cardinal directions.

Each of these gravestones can be regarded as a complete symbol with a message to convey.

Let us assume that the sturdy base with four corners represents something solid such as the physical world or even the earth on which we live. The shaft represents the consciousness climbing upwards to a higher world in the circle. Since this circle contains a cross it must be a godly or heavenly realm. The importance of such a message should not be underestimated: the body of the deceased may be rotting in the ground but his essence, his soul or his consciousness still exists in a higher world. Here the equal-armed cross can represent the ascended or risen man.

LACEWORK

Some old high crosses carry a mixture of Christian and Viking mythological symbols. In West Cumbria for instance, the Irton Church cross and one of the Waberthwaite crosses have long panels of leaf-scroll representing the Norse vine or tree of life climbing to heaven. They also have panels of intricate plaiting of the kind that often appears on crosses and

tombstones and it is possible that pictures of winding vine branches were beginning to evolve into plaiting.

Such lacework, knotwork, or cablework as it is sometimes called, of inter-twining strands is common in Celtic art



generally not just on crosses and tombstones. In many cases the plaiting is a beautiful expression of mathematical perfection. When the strands have no beginning or end they provide a wonderful way in which to represent the infinite and eternal. God is often described as a circle, infinite and eternal, with no beginning or end and the knotwork makes God a trifle more interesting

whilst remaining infinite, eternal and perfect, of course.

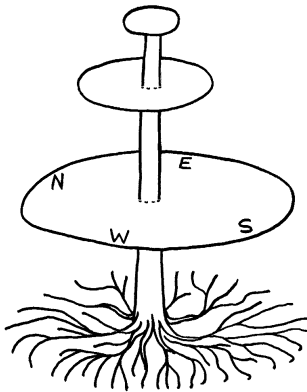
A simple example can be seen on the second 1920 stone shown at the end of the previous section. On that example the lacework seems to have a very deliberate and special shape. It consists of two knots one above the other. Let us suppose the continuous rope represents the One Life, with no beginning and no end, which fills every corner of the universe. The two knots are then two worlds – an upper and a lower world. The two are evidently linked so that the soul can travel in consciousness from one to the other.

THE TREE OF LIFE

According to the traditional Welsh bardic belief there are several worlds discussed in detail by Nigel Pennick.² These are linked by *Yggdrasil*, the *tree of life*, sometimes known as the *world tree*, the *world axis* or even the *cosmic axis*. In the illustration the tree or axis symbolizes the ascending

consciousness. The tree is rooted in the *underworld*. Half way up, in the branches so to speak, is *middle earth* where we are now. This is shown as a white disc with the cardinal directions indicated. Higher still is the *upper world*. Finally at the very top is the *ineffable world of the deity*.

Thus there are three main planes of consciousness broadly similar to the Christian notions of hell, earth and heaven though one would visit different levels of the tree many times as one re-incarnated. Another difference arises since the underworld is more like the Greek Hades than hell, for it is not a place of everlasting punishment through fire and brimstone, but a gloomy abode where life is maintained with little real activity. In modern Jungian psychological terms the three main levels can be conceived as the sub-conscious, normal consciousness and super-consciousness.



The form of a Celtic gravestone can be viewed as a reminder of the tree of life. The shaft may well have been wooden in olden times and corresponds to the trunk of the tree. It provides a path for the soul rising or falling in awareness. The corpse lies rotting amongst the roots in the *underworld*. The pyramidal base with four corners is the solid earth with four main compass directions and therefore is the worldly level of consciousness, the *middle earth*. The circle on a gravestone corresponds to the second circle in the diagram which is the heavenly *upper world* or, using modern language, the spirit world. Finally, in Ireland the masons

would sometimes actually perch a little house for the saints at the top of a monument corresponding to the ineffable world of the deity in the upper circle. Thus a Celt might have seen such a gravestone as an illustration of the journey of the deceased in life and death.

An alternative to the tree of life is the *vine of life*, which can be seen, for example, decorating the Apprentice Pillar in Rosslyn Chapel near Edinburgh.^{3,4} This has four branches spiralling up round the pillar. Nature is used here as a metaphor to indicate that all individuals are connected through nature to each other and to the universal life force. There are many individual lives but they are all interdependent and mutually supportive and, in reality, are all One Life. Just as the vine has many branches, only some of which will bear fruit, so it is that the One Life has many components and if one individual does not evolve fully to his maximum potential no harm comes to the whole.

At the foot of the pillar is a ring of eight serpents. From their mouths the vine emerges before winding itself round the pillar. Since Sir William St Clair, who built the Chapel, was the Prince of Orkney, there is likely to be a link to Scandinavian mythology in which the eight dragons of Neifelheim are said to lie at the foot of the great ash tree, which binds heaven, earth and hell. This tree was *Yggdrasil*, the tree of life. The eight serpents form a cyclic ring round the pillar indicating that events and time itself are periodically recurring like the seasons or reincarnation.

HIGH CROSSES

Some of the *high crosses* are over 10 feet high, hence their name. In exceptional cases they were made from a single stone but frequently they were assembled from several stones. They are usually decorated along their length. As a rule there are some biblical scenes but there may also be secular scenes commemorating a king or the man who originally commissioned and paid for the monument. The rest of the stone is likely to be covered in various symbols such as filigree, bosses, serpents, the tree of life and so on.

A few high crosses are to be found in central England but most of them are in the Celtic fringe of Ireland, Scotland, Cumbria, Wales and Cornwall. The first examples shown are the little known **Saxon crosses**⁵ in the small town of Sandbach, Cheshire. Erected in 653 AD or thereabouts, they stand side by side at the top of three steps in the centre of the market square.



The great cross (16 feet) carries illustrations of the life of Jesus and would have been used as a teaching aid during sermons in the market place before the church was erected. The small cross (11 feet) illustrates the conversion of the son of the king of Mercia.

At its top, one has lost most of a wheel shaped stone that may have contained a cross and the other has lost most of a Maltese cross. This damage may have occurred when the

crosses were dismantled in the time of Cromwell and the constituent stones dispersed and used for other purposes. They were re-erected in 1816.

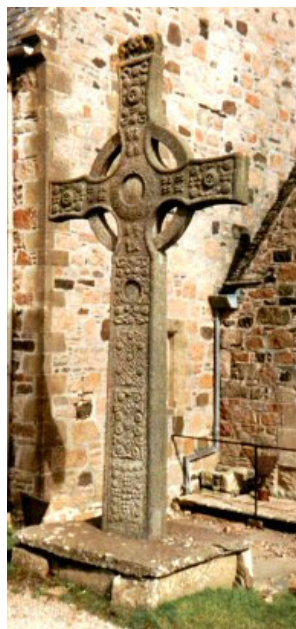
SCOTTISH CROSSES

There are three, 8th century, high crosses on the Isle of Iona of which **St Martin's cross**⁶ is the only one intact. The east face, shown in the drawing, is mainly covered by abstract designs including a set of five bosses, a large one in the centre of the cross and four on the arms. The west face has the virgin and child in the centre with some other biblical scenes, some animals and a few abstract symbols. Here is a wonderful example of duality. On approaching the Abbey you see the biblical stories to get you in the mood; whilst in the Abbey you can look out at the bosses and meditate upon another world.



The central boss is the sun of a *sun and cross* whilst the circular arcs make the *circle of infinity*. The other four bosses could be regarded as planet earth orbiting the sun and taking up different positions. In the case of the Kilree cross, County Kilkenny, Jacob Streit⁷ shows by interpreting spiral ornamentation round the four bosses that each represents the sun whose radiation affects the earth differently each season. The lowest boss, for example, represents the winter sun. In other times and at other places, the motivation behind the bosses might have been very different and later sections of

this essay will explore one possible reason for the wide spread use of bosses. It must be remembered that symbols not only change their meaning but can have more than one legitimate meaning.

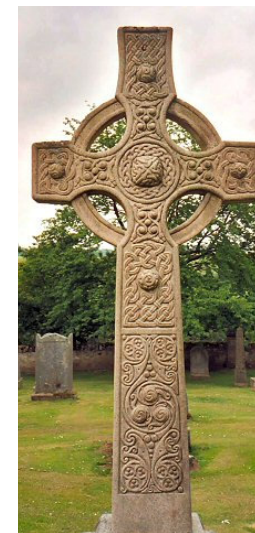


A second cross in the grounds of Iona Abbey is a concrete replica of **St John's cross**.⁸ The original blew down several times over the centuries and broke. Those fragments that survived were used to make the mould for the replica. Both faces are covered with abstract symbols with five bosses dominating. The original being over 7ft wide was one of the broadest crosses in the British Isles, perhaps explaining why it blew over.

The Iona crosses are much loved by visitors but another little known example from this period is the **Kildalton cross**⁹ on the Isle of Islay not far south of Iona. It bears a definite resemblance to St John's cross in both shape and decoration. The same workmen probably carved it and the Iona crosses all being about 1200 years old. On the west face there are five conspicuous bosses but, just to drive the point home, a smaller pattern of five circles is repeated twice on the lower part of the shaft. The other face carries some biblical scenes and curiously has an almost square central boss, the other four bosses having been omitted.

The **Crichton Church cross**,¹⁰ near Gorebridge in Midlothian and situated just a few miles from Old Temple

and Rosslyn Chapel, bears a strong resemblance to St John's cross and particularly to the Kildalton cross. It is in good condition and was erected in the 15th century (the era of the building of Rosslyn Chapel). The five bosses, of which the central one is nearly square, are so prominent they form the most conspicuous part of the decoration. The similarities in design show, perhaps, close links between the Mystery traditions of both the 8th century Celts of the Western Isles and the 15th century people of East Scotland.



IRISH CROSSES



This magnificent, 9-10th century, 16 feet high monument in the cemetery at Monasterbois is **Muiredach's cross**.¹¹ The large central scene on the west face shows the crucifixion so Christ is positioned where the sun might be expected. The lower shaft has three panels with biblical pictures. The rear face shows Christ, again positioned in the middle of the circle, presiding over the last judgement. The faithful face him in worship while the disbelievers are marched in droves to hell, pushed along by the devil with a three-pronged fork.

Beneath Christ a pair of scales is used to weigh each soul.

This is a typical example of a scriptural cross although not all are so large or in such good condition. The crucifixion is normally on the west face turned towards the dying sun at the end of the day whereas the ascended God appears on the east face turned towards the ascending morning sun. The position of Jesus, on both sides of the cross right in the middle where the sun should be, eloquently expresses the Church teaching that he is both man and God.

There are no bosses on this cross but note there is a capstone in the form of a house, the house of God. Since there are figures carved on the walls of this little house we may conjecture that the saints and angels are permitted to live there. Thus the symbolism is complete. The body of the deceased rots in the ground but his soul flies up the connecting shaft to the celestial world represented by the circle. Here the quality of the life just concluded is judged and if found deserving, the successful soul ascends to live with the deity. The death of the physical body is not the end of life for that soul but is a transition and marks the beginning of a new chapter.

The second example of a 9-10th century Irish high cross shows the west face of the **Cross of the Scriptures**¹² at Clonmacnois monastery. Two soldiers in the bottom scene guard the empty tomb. The crucified Christ is shown in



the centre of a circle decorated with four bosses. Once again the **Son** has replaced the **Sun** where a fifth boss should be in the centre. A capstone representing God's house sits on top of the whole assembly. On the side of the house there are five tiny bosses reminding us that there should really be five bosses in or on the main circle. The other face depicts the last judgment and once again has four of five possible bosses.

The carving of these and other high crosses in Ireland was so good that travellers in the 19th century thought they had been imported from Italy but now it is accepted that this art form reached its pinnacle in Ireland long before the Italian renaissance and has never been bettered.

The biblical scenes have been studied by scholars and are well understood.¹³ The reason for four or five bosses on so many monuments is no longer obvious and will be discussed further in the next section. As mentioned, the whole shape conveys a subliminal message of a spiritual nature concerning other worlds that can still be appreciated.

There was an ideal plan for the layout of an Irish monastery which is described by Streit.¹⁴ There are no surviving examples so we cannot tell if this plan was ever actually implemented. The living quarters and the sanctified areas were all to be enclosed by a circular wall. Outside the wall, the four cardinal points were to be marked by high crosses dedicated to the four evangelists. Smaller crosses dedicated to the four great prophets Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel were to be placed midway between the four large ones. Ignoring the small crosses, the plan took the form of a Celtic cross, or rather sun wheel, whose arms met in the

centre, probably at the position of the chapel. If all the crosses are taken into consideration the wheel would have eight spokes corresponding to the eight main festivals of the Celtic year.

Old Ireland, being divided on the map into four provinces Ulster, Munster, Leinster and Connacht round Meath, at the druid centre of Uisneach, looked like a sun wheel. In addition, the monasteries were evidently supposed to look like sun wheels and the high crosses also took the form of sun wheels. All these sun wheels were reflections down here on earth of the celestial sun wheel described by St John. It is small wonder that even to this day the Celtic cross is a popular Irish icon.

The intention, presumably, was to reproduce the harmonious patterns of heaven in Ireland in accordance with the maxim *as above so below*. The Irish monks were thinking along the same lines as their English brothers who constructed St Mary's Chapel, Glastonbury, and surrounding settlements using the same proportions as those given for New Jerusalem by St John (Rev., xxi).¹⁵ Inescapable symbolism on this scale served as a constant reminder of how important it is to imitate the heavenly quality of perfection in this earthly life.

NAVIGATIONAL TOOLS

Recent research by Crichton Miller¹⁶ suggests that the ancients used an instrument, that may well have looked like a Celtic cross, for surveying, navigating, and for tasks such as laying out buildings. Indeed instruments known as *astrolabes* were used in the Islamic world from 400AD onwards. The

picture shows an astrolabe that is round but with four cut away holes to reduce its weight and wind resistance. There is an arm, pivoted at the centre, which is used for sighting such objects as the sun and stars. The angle of elevation of the object would be read from a scale round the circle and would enable the operator to calculate items such as his latitude. It is believed that Ribero, the royal cartographer of Spain, used astrolabes to produce the World Chart of 1529.



Miller also believes that, long before the introduction of metal astrolabes, cartographers were using wooden instruments to measure angles. Of course, most if not all such instruments have probably rotted away by now leaving little evidence of their existence. To demonstrate the feasibility of navigation with the aid of such wooden artefacts he has made several. One of his experimental or working crosses is shown in the photo. A hand is just visible gripping the shaft of a cross, which is connected by a pivot to a circle like an astrolabe with four cut away apertures. This circle can spin freely but is weighted so that its four arms are always horizontal or vertical. The long arm that the hand is holding would be tilted so that the object being sighted could be viewed along the two short arms. Then the angle of elevation would be read through any of the four little holes cut for that purpose in the arms of the cross.



The next picture shows Miller actually using another of his instruments in the field and it is clear that because the long shaft rests on the ground he can take a sighting without assistance. He claims his later and better instruments gave an accuracy of one tenth of a degree, leading to accuracy on the ground better than five nautical miles (a N.M. is 6080 feet).



In the first of these instruments shown above, the four little holes, scarcely discernable in the picture, that allow the scale to be read are a vital part of the design. They bear an uncanny resemblance to the four outer bosses on the arms of an archetypal Celtic gravestone. The central pivot can also be equated with the central boss. Perhaps it is pushing this analogy too far but the square central boss of some Scottish crosses could be likened to a central bolt with a square head.

It is one thing to show how to make a cheap but accurate instrument from wood but quite another thing to show that ancient people actually did so. Miller devotes much of his book to this question citing carvings in the Yucatan, for example, that show objects looking like astrolabes. He also discusses the function of an artefact found in the southern shaft of the Queen's chamber in the Great Pyramid. It had been carefully dismantled and placed in the shaft during the construction of the pyramid. Analysis suggests it was intended to function in a manner similar to Miller's instruments and was probably used to align the foundations and set the slopes of the internal passages. However, his most

important evidence lies in front of us every time we look at a map of the world's principal ancient monuments.

Stonehenge, Avebury and the Great Pyramid are all said to date from around 2000 BC although there are commentators who think that 7000 BC would be more realistic. The latitudes and longitudes of these three monuments are related mathematically. They are also related to fractions of complete circles, which include a twelfth, a thirtieth, a seventh and a seventeenth. The last two fractions are so unusual that they cannot be accidental. Whoever sited these monuments must have possessed accurate instruments to determine both latitude and longitude. It is also of interest that the distance between Stonehenge and Avebury Sanctuary, the latter being due N of the former, is 44,000 sacred cubits each of 25 inches so it would seem that the sacred cubit was defined in terms of the length of a great circle. David Alan Ritchie examines other examples that go far beyond the realms of chance or coincidence in a section¹⁷ of Miller's book and is to publish further discoveries in a book of his own.

A reasonable conclusion is that our ancestors possessed accurate surveying tools. These were probably quite different from modern theodolites and sextants but could well have been similar to Miller's homemade working crosses, accurate to a few minutes of arc. Quite apart from positioning monuments on the ground, Miller also contends that the Templars, Scandinavians and other Europeans were regularly navigating boats across the Atlantic long before Columbus' famous journey. He suggests that the Scottish Templars may have used Crinan in Argyle as an embarkation point for North

America. This explains, for him, the numerous Celtic crosses in neighbouring places such as Kilmartin, Iona and Islay. The Dingle peninsula, SW Ireland, would also have been a good departure point for the legendary explorer St Brendan¹⁸ (born c484) and there is a similar concentration of Celtic crosses in that area.

What could be more natural than to commemorate the valuable implement, on which the safe return of ship and crew depended, by carving a replica in stone? What could be simpler or more convenient than an icon that simultaneously represented two forms of existence: one on earth navigating the oceans; and the other in a higher world navigating heaven? If a cross in a circle can have two meanings then a full archetypal Celtic tombstone also merits two meanings.

HEAVEN ON EARTH

By its form and its artistic embellishments, a Celtic gravestone is telling us several things about our ancestors and about ourselves. In the first place it tells us what its makers could do. It is the five bosses that indicate that those ancient people could navigate oceans using the sun and stars to guide them. There may have been many occasions when the ability to navigate has saved lives. For instance the Templars may well have fled not just to Portugal and Scotland to escape persecution but may have fled as far as the Americas and returned when it was safe. Perhaps some crosses were erected to commemorate a safe homecoming of this kind.

Secondly, a Celtic gravestone tells us something about ourselves that is immensely important. While the corpse lies

rotting in the ground its owner has moved on to a higher world. His consciousness, or soul, has not ceased to exist but has moved through a transition and is still conscious in the world from which he came in the first place. You could say the deceased has finally navigated his way from this world to the next.

Thus the circle with the bosses reminds us that our forerunners could navigate the oceans and survey the sky. At the same time, the overall shape of an archetypal gravestone reminds us that they navigated the spiritual worlds. These are two completely different abilities but both are life enhancing. Here is a good example of a contrasting duality, physical versus spiritual. There are actually two physical worlds: – the world upon which one is navigating and the sky, which one uses as a navigational aid. Similarly there are two main homes for the consciousness: – first in a material body and secondly in the spiritual realms. It follows that a gravestone can represent a duality in which each aspect is another duality.

Rather like a gravestone, we are dual beings. Basically we are spirits living in a physical body. Our consciousness can change from the normal everyday consciousness of this world into the higher consciousness of the spirit world. This can happen while we are asleep or during meditation. You do it deliberately if you let your mind climb the shaft of the cross to reach the celestial circle. You do not have to stop there for you can rise further into the little house on top of the gravestone and live with the Saints in the very presence of God.

The question is, “What will you do with the knowledge that every Celtic tombstone is bringing to your attention?” Will you wait until you retire before you study the matter? Will you wait until you die and can confirm that there really is an after-life? Will you wait for another incarnation in a thousand years time when it is more convenient to explore the needs of your spirit?

Perhaps you do not feel you are good enough to live in the house of God at the top of an Irish high cross and so will not attempt to climb the shaft until you are worthy of your place in heaven. If that is what you think, then you are accepting the truth in principle but not living it. You are failing to see that no time will ever be better than "now" for embracing and living the truth.

At this stage in our world’s story, a rise in consciousness and the accompanying spiritual advancement for each of us as individuals and for humanity as a whole could not be more important. Mankind is at a cross-road and is faced by many major concerns of environmental and social origins. To cope with global warming, aids, the wide spread poverty of whole continents, the mass movement of displaced people, terrorist networks and the growing number of nuclear states will require a universal change of attitude and behaviour. Rather than indulge in more of the same behaviour with more environmental destruction, more wars, more domination of the weak by the strong, more financial manipulation by the wealthy, we must learn to tolerate other cultures and to cooperate with them whilst living in harmony with nature. That is the way forward with a general shift in consciousness.

The remedy lies in a change at the heart level and must start with each individual.

Spiritual development of the individual begins with true aspiration – you must want to change and be prepared for some work and commitment. Of course, there are many ways to do this just as there are many roads to the top of a mountain. One suggestion is that you might meditate regularly on the cross within a circle for in time this will lead you to a growing awareness of the brotherhood of all life – the brotherhood of all forms and planes of life from the celestial and angelic to the human, animal and plant kingdoms. With such awareness in your mind and head, your heart will fill with kindness and compassion for all whom you meet. When asked what the principal commandments were, Jesus replied, “*Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy might; and thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.*” To love thy neighbour to this degree is the same as living in a state of brotherhood which is one of the objects of the Theosophical Society. The problems created by mankind in the last few centuries must be solved – can be solved by a change of heart.

FINIALS ARE CROSSES

The final group of pictures show that the underlying subconscious message hidden in a Celtic cross is also to be found in full view, once you know what to look for, on many of the most prominent buildings in the land.

The first is Holy Trinity in the centre of Warrington. The exterior shows little trace of Celtic influence. In this respect

it is the opposite of the other Warrington church shown earlier with three rooftop crosses. However, the finial on top of the tower is like a Celtic cross in disguise. There is a pyramid, a shaft, and a golden ball, rather than a flat circle, to represent the upper world. Then comes a direction indicator, consisting of an equal-armed cross lying flat, followed by a golden weather vane. Right at the top the lightning conductor turns into a golden sun, almost too small to see, in the place where one might expect the ineffable home of the deity.



This is a good example of a type of *finial* introduced at the time of the renaissance. All the elements of an Irish high cross are there. A finial is a complete substitute for a Celtic cross and both convey the message of the bardic tree of life. Thanks to the spherical ball and the cross lying flat, a finial looks much the same from every direction. It is three-dimensional and not flat like a standard cross, so it is rather superior.

The clock section and its finial look like recent additions to the stone tower. Pre-Christian signs, such as Celtic crosses, which might be perceived as pagan, seem to have been avoided. At some stage, however, the subtle symbol of a pyramid with a shaft, a celestial sphere, a cross and a transcendent sun was added. One wonders if the builders saw it as a disguised Celtic cross or if they were merely following a tradition that was already well established.

The next picture shows Bolton war memorial looking rather like a phallic symbol topped by a golden cross. Actually the lozenge shaped lump just beneath the cross has a circle carved in the side and the whole memorial is a reasonable apology for a Celtic cross. On the right, the shop tower is surmounted by a finial topped by a flat object like an ashtray that is presumably the house of God! Thus, this one picture contains two Celtic crosses that have been disguised in different ways.



Public buildings are often capped by finials. The tower of London has four turrets each surmounted by a pointed roof, a sphere, a weather vane and finally by a small shiny object. Westminster Chapel's tower has a central pyramid-like structure and four corner turrets all topped by a pointed roof leading up to a sphere. As if it was not already high enough, Big Ben is finished with a finial. Further down river, the old Royal Observatory at Greenwich sports a massive ball on the apex of a pyramidal roof on the principal tower. The casual observer might readily dismiss this as representing the sky or celestial sphere of such great interest to the astronomers inside the building. However, with a directional indicator and weather vane, the important elements of a Celtic cross are evident.

Finials of the type described are widespread from the great Templar cathedral Santiago de Compostela in the west of Spain, through St Peters, Rome, on to Florence cathedral and then to India in the east. The picture shows a large, dominant, square gatehouse at one end of the Charles Bridge, Prague. There is a similar gatehouse at the other end of the bridge. Each has a roof like a wedge rising to two finials close together. Both finials have a shaft, a golden ball and then a sun at the very top. There are therefore two finials on two towers. Duality is the order of the day.



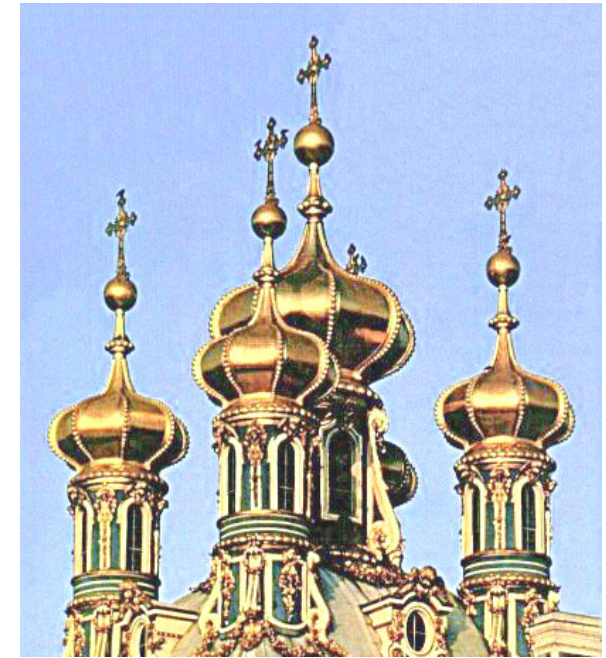
It should not be forgotten that in the Muslim world many important mosques such as the Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem, are roofed by a dome (having the same shape as the earth and therefore an even better symbol than a pyramid) surmounted by a shaft with one or more spheres culminating in a crescent rather than a sun. This is an alternative form of finial and can surely be ascribed the same interpretation as a Celtic cross or a finial on a Christian building. The lovely Taj Mahal in India is topped in the same way and its finial is shown for interest.



The final picture shows the rooftop of St Petersburg Palace, Russia, with its magnificent golden finials set against a perfect blue sky. How can anybody walk through a courtyard

and look up at these wonderful finials without being reminded that we are spirits who should be living in two worlds?

Similar finials on the roofs of palaces and public buildings echo the Celtic crosses on the ridge of many a village church and in its cemetery. They are all there to remind you of one essential truth – *You are more than just a physical body and the true home of your consciousness is in the heaven world above.*



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