

## Handout

### Exploring Your Ancestor's Parish Church and Churchyard.

A Talk by Celia Heritage

[www.chfh.co.uk](http://www.chfh.co.uk)

*I hope you enjoyed my talk. This handout aims to add a little extra information that I did not have time to impart in the talk.*

#### Meanings of Symbols Found in Churches and on Gravestones

**Ape or monkey:** represents lust

**Bear:** Evil power

**Butterfly:** the Resurrection

**Circle or equilateral triangle** or three identical images woven together: The Trinity

**Crane:** Vigilance

**Dog:** faithfulness

**Dove:** the Holy Spirit or peace.

**Dragon:** Satan

**Eagle:** Divine inspiration. Used to represent St John the Evangelist

**Fish:** Jesus Three interwoven fishes shows the Trinity.

**Hand** emerging from a cloud or a halo of light: God's presence.

**Lamb:** Jesus.

**Oak:** faith, strength and durability

**Owl:** Wisdom (often associated with St Jerome). Sometimes however it was used to represent evil because of its association with the night.

**Peacock:** In medieval times it was believed that the peacock did not decay after it had died and it came to represent immortality.

**Pelican:** The pelican was thought to feed its young with its own blood and is used to represent Jesus' sacrifice on the cross

**Phoenix:** The resurrection.

**Rabbit** or hare: Lust

**Rose:** purity. Also the sign for the Virgin Mary

**Serpent** encircling its own tail: eternity

**Star of David:** Two interwoven triangles creating a six pointed star represents The Creation and also the Trinity, which was present at the Creation.

**Thistles:** hardship or sin

**Unicorn:** Purity and strength. Likened to God's incarnation in Jesus.

Three interwoven symbols will usually represent the Trinity.

## **Organizations.**

### **The Churches Conservation Trust**

The Trust cares for redundant churches that are of historical significance and encourages their use by the local community. They are always on the lookout for volunteers to help care for churches and raise the profile of the Trust. If you don't have time to volunteer take a look at their website for a list of local churches to visit.

<http://www.visitchurches.org.uk/>

### **Online Databases of burials and gravestones**

[www.worldburialindex.com](http://www.worldburialindex.com) Thousands of inscriptions and images from gravestones in the UK and overseas.

[www.gravestonephotos.com](http://www.gravestonephotos.com) Free site.

[www.billiongraves.com](http://www.billiongraves.com) Bias is heavily American.

[www.deceasedonline.com](http://www.deceasedonline.com) Growing Centralised database of statutory burial and cremation registers for the UK and Republic of Ireland. Coverage is not yet complete but covers many UK cemeteries and crematoria and very helpful for London research.

The National Burial Index is available at [www.findmypast.com](http://www.findmypast.com) as part of its 'Parish Records Collection'.

[www.findagrave.com](http://www.findagrave.com) Details and images of gravestones in cemeteries from around the world

Ancestorsatrest.com Mainly graves from USA and Canada but a number of Irish cemeteries are covered and a few from England and Scotland.

The Canadian Headstone Photo Project [www.canadianheadstones.com](http://www.canadianheadstones.com) Free site. Contains records of some 300,000 records of gravestones in Canada and these are also indexed on Ancestry.

[www.namesinstone.com](http://www.namesinstone.com) Free site offering Canadian and American gravestone details. It includes an estimated 900,000 records.

[www.nmm.ac.uk/memorials](http://www.nmm.ac.uk/memorials) Transcriptions of monuments commemorating British people with maritime related work or careers and the victims of disaster at sea.

<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk> (Kent Archaeological Society) Wonderful collection of nineteenth century Kent churchyard inscriptions.

[www.bacsa.org.uk](http://www.bacsa.org.uk) (The British Association for Cemeteries in South Asia) British cemeteries and isolated graves and memorials in South Asia.

### **Further Reading.**

Celia Heritage *Tracing Your Ancestors Through Death Records* Pen and Sword 2<sup>nd</sup> edition 2013 [click here](#)

More on Incised-cross Markers (discoids) <https://www.chfh.co.uk/blog/>

Richard Taylor *How to Read a Church*

Roy Strong *A Little History of the English country church*

Alec Clifton-Taylor *English Parish Churches*

Early Christian Crosses: <http://www.buildingconservation.com/articles/stone-crosses/stone-crosses.htm>

*Hatchments in Britain* edited by Peter Summers and John Titterton (Phillimore 1974 - 2001)

**Celia Heritage**

[www.chfh.co.uk](http://www.chfh.co.uk)

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