

SOME ANCIENT AND SOME  
LESSER KNOWN SACRED PLACES

**British Isles**

# Sites in the U.K. and Ireland

- Carved crosses ,stone circles and other reminders.



# United Kingdom



# Glastonbury Tor, Somerset England, is topped with the roofless St Michael's tower.

- The Tor is mentioned in Celtic mythology, particularly in myths linked to King Arthur, and has a number of other enduring mythological and spiritual associations.



# Unexplained feature.

- The slopes of the hill are terraced, but the method by which they were formed remains unexplained.



# Originally an island amidst wetlands.

- Artefacts from human visitation have been found, dating from the Iron Age to Roman eras.
- The conical hill of clay and blue limestone rises from the Somerset Levels (ex-swampy ground).
- It was formed when surrounding softer deposits were eroded, leaving the hard cap of sandstone exposed.

Ruins of St Michael's Church on Glastonbury Tor.



# Encouraging conservation.

- The last few yards of the walk up the Tor.
- The concrete path encourages visitors to avoid the steeper, more direct, routes, and thus minimizes the possibility of erosion.



# Interior of the tower.

- There are a number of legends associated with the area.
- The Tor is believed by some, including the 12th and 13th-century writer Gerald of Wales, to be the Avalon of Arthurian legend.
- There are other geographic features, with legends attached, in the area.





# Legends of Christianity are associated with The Glastonbury Thorn Tree.

- Legends about Joseph of Arimathea and the arrival of Christianity in Britain, have appeared in written texts since the medieval period.
- The "original" Glastonbury Thorn was cut down and burned as a relic of superstition during the English Civil War, and the one planted on **Wearyall Hill** in 1951 to replace it had its branches cut off in 2010.
- Glastonbury Thorn at Glastonbury Abbey, 1984.
- **This tree died in 1991 and was removed in 1992.**



# The thorn on Wearyall Hill (Tor in the far background).

- The Glastonbury Thorn is a form of Common Hawthorn, that flowers twice a year; the first time in winter and the second time in spring.

The thorn on Wearyall Hill which had its branches cut off in 2010. Glastonbury Tor is in the background. The legend says that Joseph drove his staff into the ground and it grew into the sacred Glastonbury Thorn.



# The Chalice Well legend.

- The Chalice Well, also known as the Red Spring, is a well situated at the foot of Glastonbury Tor.
- Joseph of Arimathea is alleged to have hidden the Holy Grail at the foot of the Tor, and from it the waters of the Chalice Well sprang.
- Holy Grail = cup used at The Last Supper.



# Why was the tower left?

- Several buildings were constructed on the summit during the Saxon and early medieval periods; they have been interpreted as an early church and monks' hermitage.
- The original wooden church was destroyed by an earthquake in 1275, and the stone Church of St Michael built on the site in the 14th century.
- St Michael's Church survived until the Dissolution of the Monasteries, by Henry VIII, in 1539 when, except for the tower, it was demolished.



# Glastonbury.

- View of Glastonbury from the Tor.
- Glastonbury is the site of what was one of the richest and most powerful Monasteries in C14 England.



# Ruins of Glastonbury Abbey.

- Destroyed in 1539, during Henry VIII's reign, following the execution of the abbot on charges of treason.
- The abbot, Richard Whiting, was hanged, drawn and quartered as a traitor on **Glastonbury Tor** in 1539.



# A nice tourist attraction.

- The abbey was founded in the 7th century and enlarged in the 10th.
- From at least the 12th century the Glastonbury area has been associated with the legend of King Arthur, a connection promoted by medieval monks who asserted that Glastonbury was Avalon.



# The Lady Chapel may have referred to The Virgin Mary.

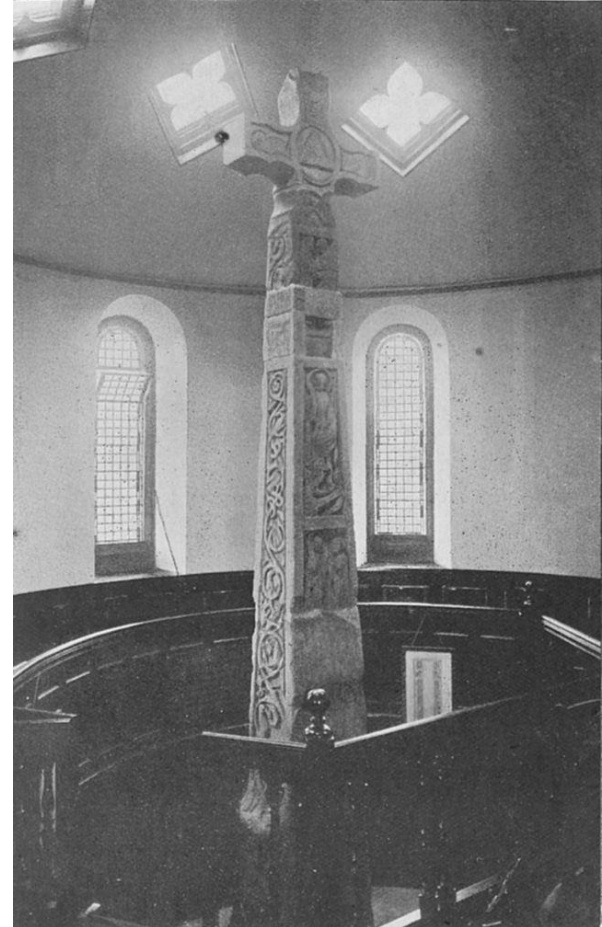
- Unrestored remains of the Lady Chapel.





# Ruthwell Cross (Ruthwell, Scotland)

- The cross was smashed by Presbyterian iconoclasts in 1642, and the pieces left in the churchyard until they were restored and re-erected in the manse garden in 1823 by Henry Duncan.
- In 1887 it was moved into its current location in Ruthwell church, Dumfriesshire, Scotland, when the apse which holds it was specially built.



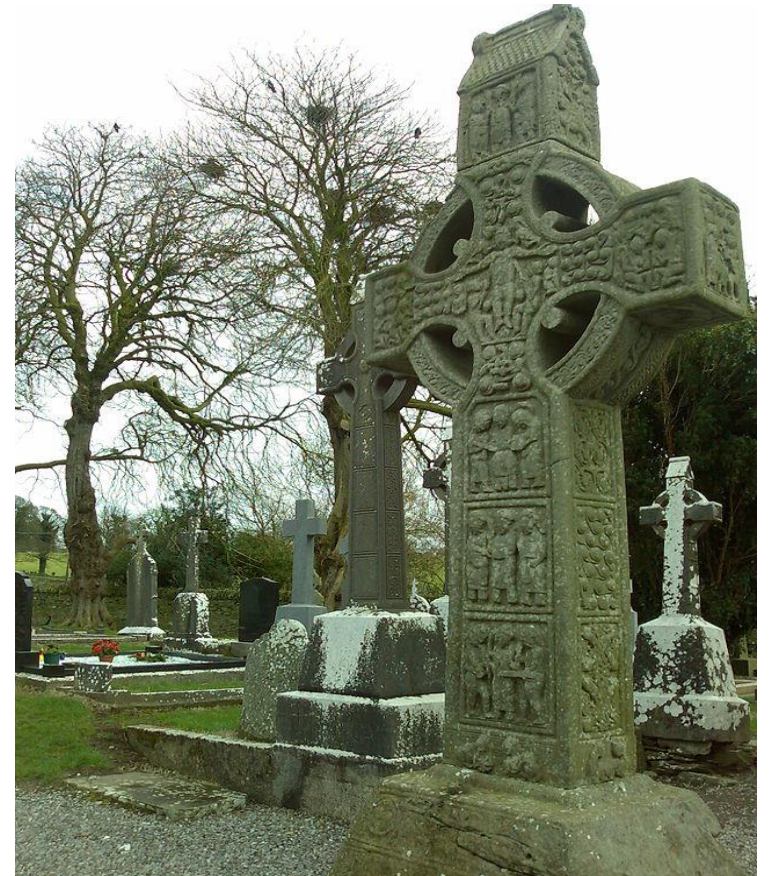
Divider slide.



Ireland

# Remnants of monasteries in Ireland

- There are many High Crosses scattered throughout Ireland.
- Muiredach's High Cross from the 10th or possibly 9th century, is located at the ruined monastic site of Monasterboice, County Louth, Ireland.



# Ireland's high crosses.

- Irish high crosses are internationally recognised icons of early medieval Ireland.
- They are usually found on early church sites and can be either plain or decorated.
- High crosses served a variety of functions including, liturgical, ceremonial, and symbolic uses.
- They were also used as markers for an area of sanctuary around a church; as well as focal points for markets, which grew around church sites.



# Another site.



# Newgrange, a monument of Brú na Bóinne, (Knowth and Dowth are other examples).

- It is a prehistoric monument in County Meath, Ireland, located about one kilometre north of the River Boyne.



# Front of mound.

- The mound has a retaining wall at the front and is ringed by engraved kerbstones.





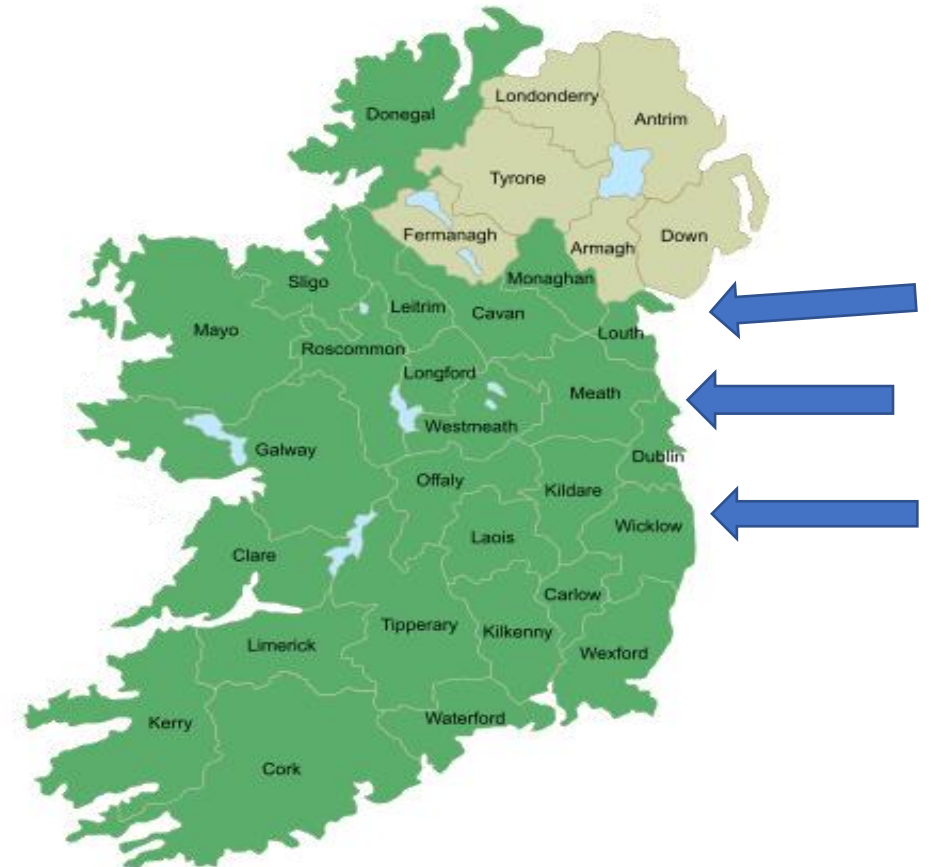
# Stones transported across land (next slide)

- Excavations showed that white quartz stones from quartz veins in Co Wicklow and round granite boulders from the Mourne and Carlingford areas were used to build the revetment wall above the kerb along the front or south side of the mound.



# Granite from Carlingford and quartz from Wicklow, transported to Meath.

- Approximate locations.



# Associated Myth.

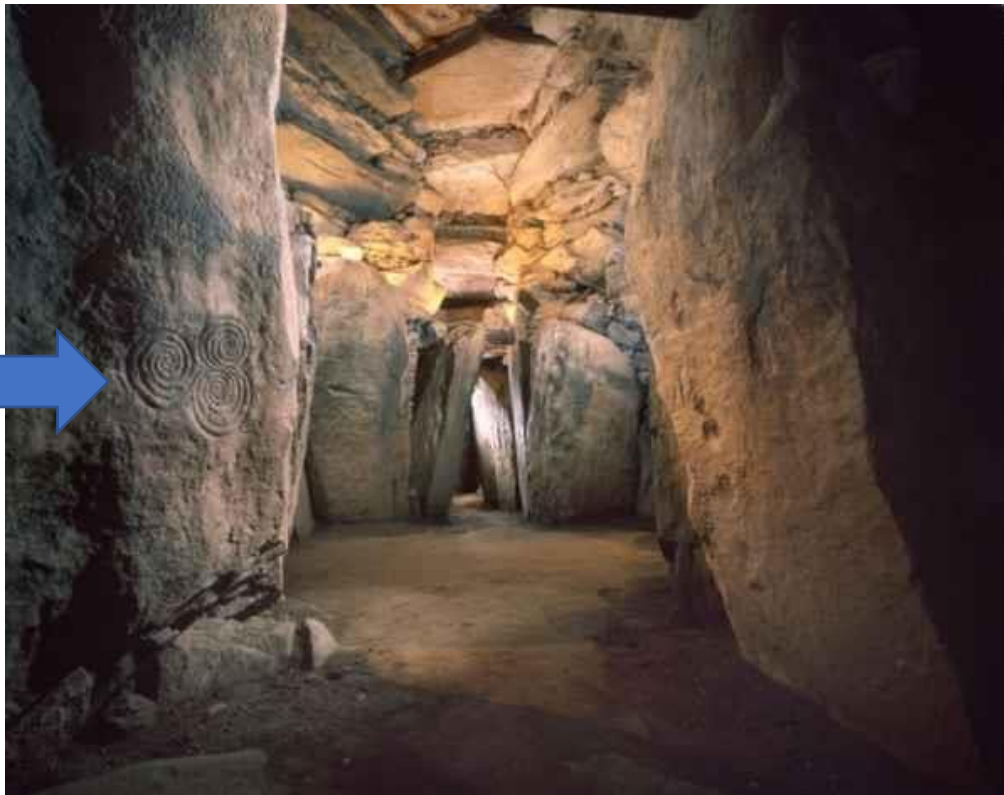
- There are many references to the monuments of Brú na Bóinne (The Palace or Mansion of the Boyne) in Early Irish literature and tradition.
- They are associated with the Tuatha Dé Danaan, the People of the Goddess Danu, a race of super-natural beings, who, according to tradition, ruled Ireland before the coming of the Celts and afterwards retreated into the fairy mounds and forts.



# Chamber and view of passage from the chamber.

- The site consists of a large circular mound with a stone passageway and a cross-shaped chamber

Tri spiral.



# Stone Age tomb.

- Newgrange is the best known Irish passage tomb and dates to about 3,200BCE.
- The large mound is approximately 80m in diameter and is surrounded at its base by a kerb of 97 stones.
- The most impressive of these stones is the highly decorated Entrance Stone.(next slide)



# Entrance stone and roof box.

- Spirals and lozenges.



# A grandiose grave.

- The flat-topped cairn is almost 0.5 hectares in extent.
- It is roughly circular and is estimated to weigh 200,000 tonnes in total.
- It is made up of water-rolled stones from the terraces of the River Boyne.



Roof is made from overlapping stones capped by a single stone.

- Corbelled(overlapping stones) roof of the chamber.





# Basin stones.

- These basins which are on the floor of each of the recesses held the remains of the dead.
- The remains of at least five people were recovered during excavation, although originally much more bone may have been placed there.
- Most of the bones found were cremated, although small amounts were unburned.
- Grave goods of chalk and bone beads and pendants as well as some polished stone balls were placed with the dead.



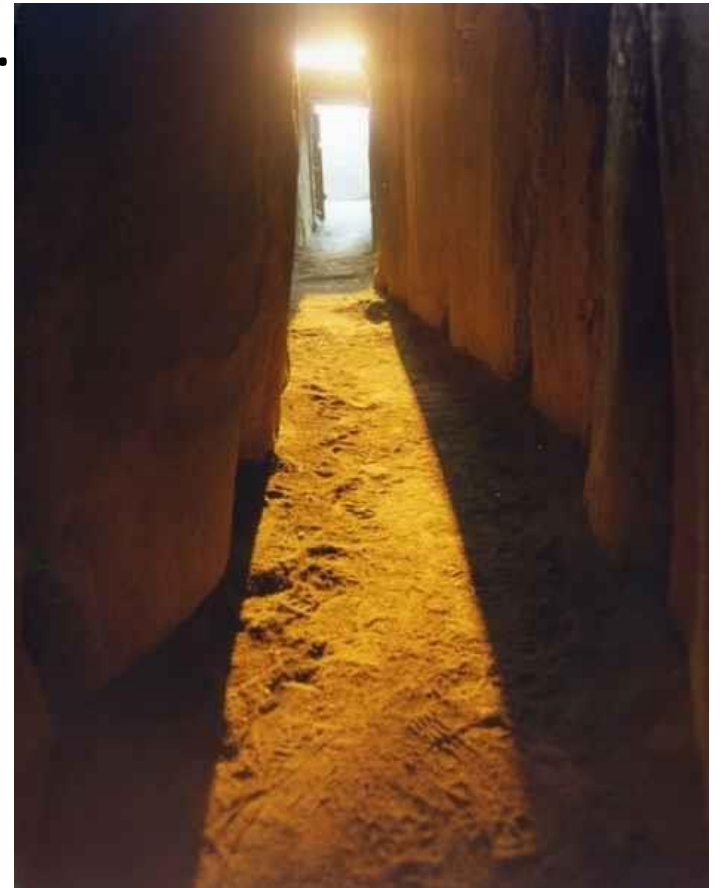
# Passage 19<sup>th</sup> orthostat(stone column).

- In the passage, some of the stones are beautifully carved particularly the 19th stone on the left, has a design which some visitors say reminds them of a stylised face.



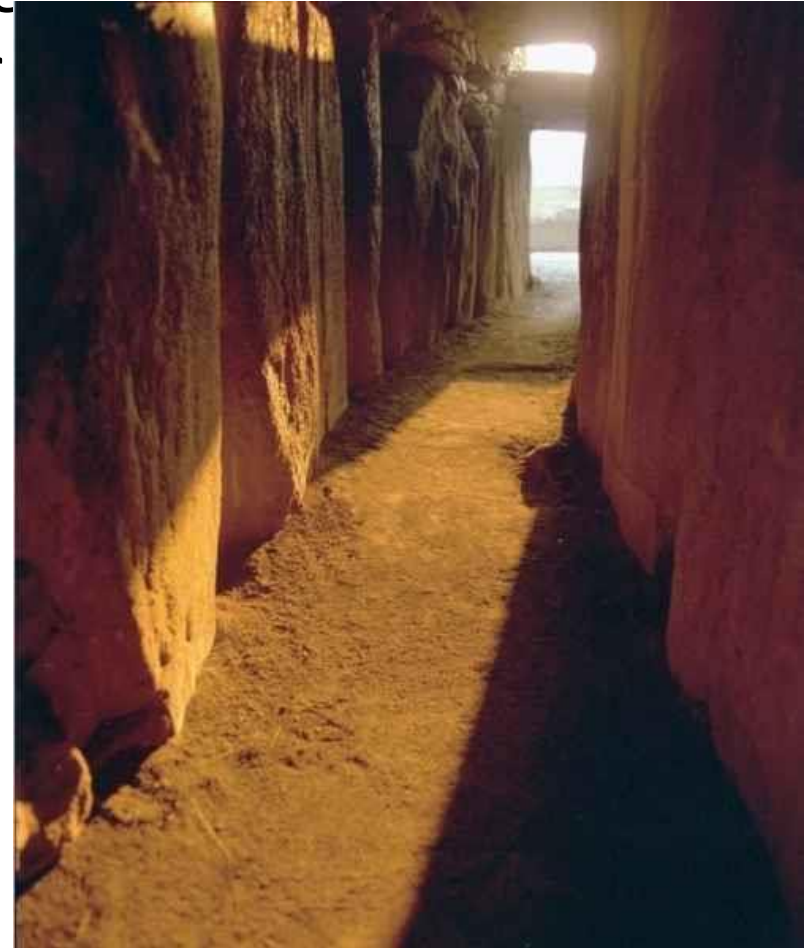
# Light unto the dead?

- There is no agreement about what the site was used for, but it has been speculated that it had religious significance.
- At dawn on the winter solstice, the shortest day of the year (December 21st) and for a number of days before and after, a shaft of sunlight enters the chamber through an opening in the roof box above the passage entrance.



# A spiritual dimension?

- To the Stone Age culture of the Boyne Valley, the winter solstice marked the start of the New Year -- a sign of nature's rebirth and promising renewed life to crops, animals and humans.
- It may also have served as a powerful symbol of the inevitable victory of life over death, perhaps promising new life to the spirits of the dead.



# Stone Circle.

A circle of standing stones also surrounds Newgrange.

Its purpose is unclear, although recent research indicates that it could have had an astronomical function.

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# Great Circle.

The Stone Circle was erected sometime after 2000BCE since excavations have shown that one of the stones of the circle lies directly on top of the Early Bronze Age Pit Circle.

Originally there may have been more stones in the circle.

Possibly some were broken up over the years.

This was the final phase of building at Newgrange.

Full moon over the great circle.

