

Headstone Symbols

The various headstone symbols and motifs which are found throughout graveyards, such as Babell, can be used to show changing styles over time. Sites like this are time capsules which preserve the culture of that period – they are very important.

Originally, more pessimistic imagery was the most popular. This would include symbols relating directly to death, such as skulls and messages from the grave. Moving into the Victorian period, and the larger graveyards many of us are familiar with, there are more positive and varied designs of flowers and cherubs.

You can also see a change from the more standardised designs, which are commonly found in many other graveyards, to a wider variety of individual designs. These were often better crafted and led to more unusual and defined headstones which can still be interpreted today.

Memento Mori

In the 14th and 18th Centuries, when Memento Mori was common, death was part of everyday life. Mortality rates were higher and a lack of knowledge around diseases meant anyone could suffer ill health at any time. Memento Mori served as a reminder that death would come to everyone, sometimes unexpectedly.

Memento Mori also aimed to remind the viewer that the best way to prepare for a 'good death' was to lead a good life. This would ensure that they would reach Heaven. By placing symbols and reminders on their headstones, individuals hoped to ensure that family members and loved ones would follow this advice. The most common images used were of a skull or a skull and crossbones, accompanied by the words '*Here lies the body of*' and the person's name. The vision of the skull and the word '*body*' summed up the expression that we are born to live and then to die.

In the Victorian era, and moving into the modern period, this more gruesome imagery has been replaced with more aesthetic symbols such as draped urns, angels and flowers.

Plants and flowers

During the 19th century, flowers became one of the most common images on Victorian headstones. But many of them are not just put there simply as a decorative feature. These flowers have symbolic meanings to represent the deceased's life, age, occupation and beliefs. Each country has some of its own symbolism for plants and flowers, so many found in Babel are specific to Wales.

One of the difficulties deciphering flowers on gravestones is identifying the species of plant. For example, the lack of colour prevents the most obvious way of distinguishing flowers. Moreover, as artistic styles changed, the standard image of each flower also changed. Simpler images used in the 18th Century evolved into lifelike forms in the Victorian era, which then changed again to the most stylistic images in the Art Deco period.



This is an ornamented standing stone cross, which is known as a High Cross. Many examples are depicted with a circle.

The most common Christian interpretations of the ring include:

- A symbol of eternity that emphasizes the everlasting life in heaven for those who accept Christ
- The world, for which Christ died and the everlasting love of God, as shown through Christ's Crucifixion.

This particular grave symbol may be familiar to you, as it is the inspiration behind The Babel Graveyard Project's logo!

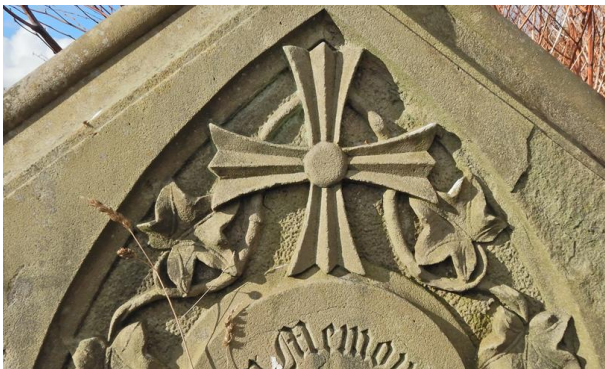
Headstone Images



This headstone motif is very common, there are a number of this kind at Babell. If a married couple are buried there it can represent the partner who passed first guiding their loved one to the afterlife. It can also symbolise a farewell to Earth and God's welcome to Heaven.



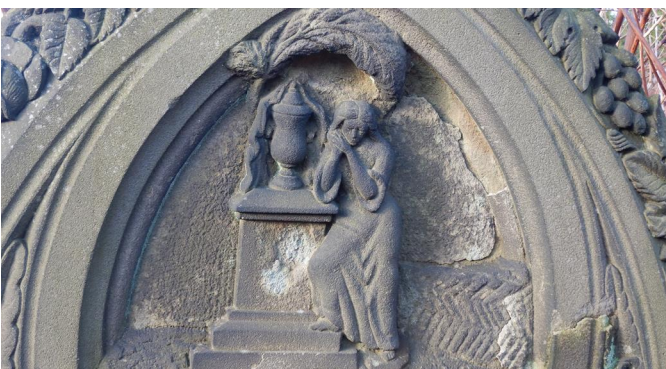
This is one of the most distinctive headstones at Babell. The baton alludes to the deceased's profession as a conductor, which also relates to the musical notes above the text.



The Patonce Cross is any form of cross which has expanded ends. As a Christian symbol, it is representative of the crucifixion and the three petals represent the Trinity.



This book is likely to be the Bible, which represents learning and faith. The crown above represents the Crown of Life.



This headstone shows a similar image of a covered urn. The urn itself represents death and the return of the body to dust. The woman in the photo stands for sorrow, grief and mourning, while the palm branch stands for victory over death.



Drapery seen on headstones usually depicts the veil between life and death. To others it can symbolise God's protection until Resurrection. It is often seen covering urns, as it is here.



The face on the side of this grave is likely to be the face of an angel. They are often symbols of religious devotion and links to heaven. Cherubs specifically represent innocence and are usually on children's graves.



The trumpet depicted on this headstone relates to the individual's occupation during WW1, as he was a trumpeter.



This is likely to be an anemone flower. It is often linked to the death of a loved one and symbolises protection against evil and ill wishes.



The middle section of this headstone depicts a Rose. The rose itself symbolizes love, hope and beauty, and two roses joined together signifies a strong bond when found on the grave of a couple.



A selection of fruits represents the gifts of the holy spirit, based on a quote from Galatians 5:22+23: 'But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance'.



This is a morning glory flower, which is known as a flower of duality. The Victorian meaning of morning glory is either love or mortality or love in vain.