



**Iconic
Irish Jewellery**
the Celtic Cross,
the Claddagh Ring,
the Trinity Knot

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Iconic Irish Jewellery

Many pieces of fine jewellery are associated with Ireland and being Irish – here we explore three of the most well-known pieces.

The Claddagh Ring

The Claddagh ring originates from the fishing village of Claddagh, located just outside of Galway City. The name Claddagh comes from the Irish word ‘*cladach*’ which describes a flat stony beach or shore.

One legend tells how Richard Joyce, a fisherman from Galway, crafted the first Claddagh ring around the 17th century. It recounts the story of pirates abducting the fishermen of the Joyce family whilst sailing near the West Indies. It is said that the men were sold into slavery in Africa and Richard Joyce was made to work for a goldsmith. It was during this time that he took a small piece of gold each day and eventually used them to create the first Claddagh ring.

Joyce designed a simple ring with two clasped hands holding a heart and topped with a crown. These symbols were said to represent Joyce’s hope that his loved ones would remain loyal while he was away. Upon his return to Ireland, Joyce gave the ring to his sweetheart, who wore it to symbolise their everlasting love.

Over the years, each component of this ring has taken on a specific meaning. The two hands on the Claddagh ring represent friendship. The heart signifies love and the crown a symbol of loyalty. It is these virtues which are said to form the perfect relationship, one based on friendship, love and loyalty.

Depending on the message people would like to share, the ring can be worn on the left or right hand. Wearing it on your left hand with the heart facing outward, is a sign that you are engaged. When the heart faces inward on this hand the ring indicates that you are married. If you wear the ring on your right hand with the heart facing outward, it will indicate that you are single and looking for love. Wearing the ring on your right hand and facing inwards indicates that you are in a committed relationship.

Some Irish families have a tradition of passing a Claddagh ring from mother to daughter, as a family heirloom through the generations.

You may receive the ring as a symbol of friendship, true love or loyalty but some say it is bad luck to buy a Claddagh ring for yourself.

This superstition is fading fast with anyone purchasing a Claddagh ring for themselves or others. The ring still remains an iconic piece of Irish jewellery.

The Celtic Cross

Another recognisable piece of jewellery in Ireland is the Celtic Cross. It features a traditional cross accentuated with a circle around the intersection of the arms and stem. There are many different interpretations of the Celtic Cross, one of which is said to be a representation of knowledge, strength and compassion. The four arms of the Celtic Cross are thought to be representative of the four elements of Fire, Earth, Air and Water and as a representation of our mind, soul, body and heart. The centre ring of the Celtic Cross is said to be evocative of the Celtic symbol for infinite love, with no beginning and no end. It is said to be a symbol of God’s endless love with many believing that it is also a depiction of the halo of Christ.

The Trinity Knot or Triquetra

The Trinity Knot or Triquetra is one of the most common of the Celtic Knots used in Irish jewellery. Derived from the Latin, ‘*triquetra*’, it translates as ‘three cornered’. It is known to many as a Celtic Trinity Knot or Celtic Triangle.

Although there are many theories as to the definition of the design, each one mentions the significance of the three intersecting loops which, depending on your beliefs, can be interpreted in a number of ways such as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, Mother, Crone and Maiden or mind, body and spirit.

As with the Claddagh ring the number three represented in the Trinity Knot holds a special connotation with Celtic symbols. The trinity knot or triquetra is sometimes interlaced with a circle surrounding the three intersecting arcs, this circle is said to symbolise spiritual unity, as a circle has no beginning and no end, thus signifying the eternity of faith.

Resources:
irishfamilyhistorycentre.com
Blarney.com



The Celtic Cross, the Claddagh ring and the Trinity Knot jewellery pieces
 (Images from MyIrishJeweler.com)