

Early Medieval Ireland

Over 1500 years ago, Irish people began to learn about God and became Christians. Some people became priests and monks and built monasteries and churches for people to come and pray at. At these early church sites, you can also find Ogham Stones. These are large stones engraved with the earliest known writing in Ireland.

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Ogham Code

Did you know?

Most Ogham stones can still be seen in their original location today. Why not check out your local area and see if there are any Ogham stones that you can visit? Find out more at <https://ogham.celt.dias.ie/>

Can you see lines etched
into this stone?

Ogham stone from Monataggart,
Co. Cork, on display at the National
Museum of Ireland - Archaeology



museum

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Ard-Mhúsaem na hÉireann

What are Ogham Stones?

Ogham stones are standing stones that are engraved with the earliest known form of writing in Ireland. Each of the letters, or characters, represent a sound in the early Irish language. Many of them date to between the 4th and 6th century AD and they are mainly found in counties Kerry, Cork, and Waterford.

How are letters written in Ogham?

Each letter is made etching a line across a central line. When they were carved on a standing stone, the edge of the stone acted as the central line for each letter. Most Ogham Stones have the names of people and their parents and were used to remember or commemorate a person. To read an Ogham Stone, start at the bottom at the left-hand side and read up, around, and down the other side.


Ogham stone from Colbinstown,
Co. Kildare on display at the National
Museum of Ireland – Archaeology



Here is a Task!

Using the Ogham Code, can you write something in Ogham on the stone? You might like to try your name or a message.

	R		N
	Z		S
	NG		V
	G		L
	M		B
	Q		I
	C		E
	T		U
	D		O
	H		A



Be careful, not all the letters that are used in the English alphabet are there! Why not try to make your own ogham character if you are missing a letter.

A Special Brooch

Although Ogham was mainly written on stone, it also appears on a brooch from Ballyspellan, Co. Kilkenny. This silver brooch was made between the 9th and 10th century. On the back, there are four names written in Ogham, thought to be the names of each of the people that owned the brooch. This tells us that Ogham could have been used on other materials too, such as wood to send messages.



Can you see
the ogham
markings on this
brooch?

