

## Gravestone Symbols and Their Meanings

Symbol	Meaning
Arches and gates	passage into the next life
Acorn	prosperity; power; triumph; strength; independence
Alpha and Omega	Alpha (A), the first letter of the Greek alphabet, and Omega (Ω), the last letter, are often found combined into a single symbol representing Christ.
Anchor	hope; Navy
Angels	God's messengers and guardians; dropping flowers may signify grief, mourning; pointing to heaven may signify rejoicing
Anvil and/or hammer	blacksmith
Arms outstretched	The plea for mercy.
Basket	fertility; maternal bond
Bat wings	death; misfortune
Beehive	possible membership with the Independent Order of Odd Fellows, or the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Benches	mourning; contemplation
Bible	Connotes a religious lay person or cleric.
Bird	flight of the soul
Book	often the Bible, book of life
Bone	death
Broken Pillar	A broken column indicates a life cut short, a memorial to the death of someone who died young or in the prime of life, before reaching old age.
Bugles	Resurrection; also military.
Butterfly	A butterfly symbol may represent rebirth, resurrection, or the natural cycle between birth and death. It may represent the soul and may be found on children's headstones. Also: The soul. It is symbolic of the resurrection of Christ. The meaning is derived from the three stages of the life of a butterfly—the caterpillar, the chrysalis, and the butterfly. The three stages are symbols of life, death and resurrection. Short-life.
Calla lily	A symbol reminiscent of the Victorian era, the calla lily represents majestic beauty and is often used to represent marriage or resurrection.

Candle	Candles symbolize the spirit or the soul. In Christian contexts, candles can symbolize Jesus Christ.
Celtic Cross or Irish Cross	The Celtic or Irish cross, taking the form of a cross within a circle, generally represents eternity.
Chains	Medieval thinkers sometimes held that a golden chain bound the soul to the body.
Chains, broken	In death, the chain is broken and the soul is freed.
Cherubs	Angelic; the graves of children. Divine wisdom or justice.
Chi-Rho (X-P)	The monogram that looks like a combination of a P and an X is actually the first two letters of the Greek word for Christ – Chi (X) and Rho (P). The symbol was used by early Christians and is attributed to the Roman Emperor Constantine, who used it as a military symbol. You will often see it on banners, called labarum, in ecclesiastical processions. The Chi Rho symbol is also the origin of using the abbreviation Xmas for Christmas.
Chrisma	A cross like shape formed by a combination of two Greek letters, chi (X) and rho (P) corresponding to the CH and R of the word, Christi, hence a symbol for Jesus Christ.
Church	ministry; possible pastor or minister
Circle	the symbol of eternity and never-ending existence
Clock	march of time, usually stopped at hour of death
Clouds	Veil which conceals God from His worshippers
Clover (three- or four-leafed)	Christian trinity; possible Irish ancestry or affiliation with 4H Club
Column and/or pillar (Broken)	life cut short; sudden death
Column and/or pillar (Unbroken)	a complete and full life
Corn	farming (also frequently symbolized by wheat)
Cross	Christian
Crown	Reward and glory.
Crown with Thorns	The heart will often have a crown on top of it (symbolizing victory), thorns around it (symbolizing sacrifice), and rays of light emanating from it (symbolizing love)
Daffodil	Death of youth, desire, art, grace, beauty, deep regard.
Daisy	Innocence of child, Jesus the Infant, youth, the Son of righteousness, gentleness, purity of thought.
Doors and Gates	Passage into the afterlife; Heavenly entrance.

Doves	peace; the Holy Spirit
Draped urn	After the cross, the urn is one of the most commonly used cemetery monuments. The design represents a funeral urn and is thought to symbolize immortality.
Drapery over anything	Sorrow, mourning.
Dragonflies	The dragonfly is a symbol of change and transformation, joy, and lightness
Eagle	the eagle symbolizes courage, strength and immortality, often regarded as a "king of the skies" and messenger of the Gods.
Eastern Orthodox Cross	The Eastern Orthodox Cross is distinctively different from other Christian crosses, with the addition of two extra cross beams.
Elk	possible membership with the Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks
Evergreen	faithfulness; remembrance
Eye	Often surrounded in a burst of sunlight or a triangle, an eye typically represents the all-seeing eye of God and could denote that the decedent was a Freemason.
Eye in a triangle	Eye of God in the Trinity, all seeing, all knowing.
Feathered headdress	possible membership with the Improved Order of Red Men or Degree of Pocahontas
Fern	sincerity; humility; solitude
Fish	Indicates Faith
Flame	Eternity
Fleur de lis	Flame, passion, ardor, mother.
Forefinger pointing down	God reaching down for the soul
Forefinger pointing up	soul's passage to Heaven
Fruit	eternal plenty
Grapes	Represents Christ, blood of Christ, God's care or Last Supper.
Grapes with leaves	Christian faith.
Half-carved tombstone	transition from life to death
Hands - Pointing Finger	A hand with the index finger pointing upward symbolizes the hope of heaven, while a hand with forefinger pointing down represents God reaching down for the soul.
Hands reaching up, hands reaching down	A hand with the index finger pointing upward symbolizes the hope of heaven, while a hand with forefinger pointing down represents God reaching down for the soul.
Handshake	welcoming of a soul into Heaven; bond between spouses (if hands are feminine and masculine)
Harp	worship; music to God

Heart	a blissful soul (Colonial era); romantic love (Victorian era to today)
Heart with thorns	The heart will often have a crown on top of it (symbolizing victory), thorns around it (symbolizing sacrifice), and rays of light emanating from it (symbolizing love).
Horses	courage or generosity; possible membership with the International Brotherhood of Teamsters (especially if two-headed)
Horseshoe	The horseshoe can symbolize protection from evil, but may also symbolize an individual whose profession or passion involved horses.
Hourglass or clock	the passage of time
IHS	Signifies devotion to Jesus Christ; variously interpreted as an abbreviation for His name as spelled in ancient languages.  This symbol, which looks like a dollar sign (\$), is actually the letters I, H, and S superimposed over each other. These represent the Greek letters Iota (I), Eta (H) and Sigma (Σ), which are the first three letters of Jesus in Greek. See IHS Monogram for more information.
Ivy & Vines	Ivy carved into a tombstone is said to represent friendship, fidelity and immortality.
Key	knowledge; entrance to heaven
Knot, Celtic	The interlaced Celtic knot represents resurrection and life everlasting.
Labyrinth	The passage of life.
Ladder	Scale of perfection
Lambs	purity, gentleness, innocence (popular on children's graves)
Lamp	knowledge; spiritual immortality
Laurel wreath	Laurel, especially when fashioned in the shape of a wreath, is a common symbol found in the cemetery. It can represent victory, distinction, eternity or immortality.
Lily	innocence and purity; resurrection; marriage and fidelity (Calla); innocence and humility (Lily of the Valley)
Lion	The lion serves as a guardian in the cemetery, protecting a tomb from unwanted visitors and evil spirits. It symbolizes the courage and bravery of the departed.
Mariner	anchor; sextant
Menorah	Seven-branched candlestick that is a Jewish symbol for divine presence of God
Mortar and pestle	medical profession (pharmacist or doctor)

Oak leaf	strength; stability; endurance
Olive branch	The olive branch, often depicted in the mouth of a dove, symbolizes peace - that the soul has departed in the peace of God.
Olive tree	peace; reconciliation between God and man
Pall, pick, or spade	Mortality
Palm	life conquering death; resurrection
Peacock	Symbolized the incorruptibility of flesh, resurrection, beauty of soul, immortality.
Phoenix	resurrection
Pineapple	prosperity; hospitality; perfection
Pitcher or ewer	Traditional Jewish symbol found on a man's gravestone, signifying a Levite, who was responsible for cleaning the hands of the Temple Priest before he performed his priestly duties.
Poppy	The poppy flower is a symbol of death, eternal sleep as well as peace
Pyramid	Eternity. It was supposed that a pyramid-shaped tombstone prevented the devil from reclining on a grave.
Rod or staff	Comfort
Rose	love; beauty; virtue; motherhood; strong bond (intertwined); youthful death (rosebud)
Scales	justice; law
Scroll	Symbol of life and time. Both ends rolled up indicate a life that is unfolding like a scroll of uncertain length and the past and future hidden.
Scythe	Death, the divine harvest.
Serpent	Shown swallowing its own tail, it represents spiritual striving.
Shell	symbolic of fertility, resurrection and pilgrimage
Shield	protection, faith, defense of the spirit
Shoes	(empty, one overturned) loss of a child
Sickle	Death as the "last harvest".
Skull, skeleton	death; mortal remains
Snake in a circle	Everlasting life in Heaven.
Sleeping child	A sleeping child was often used to signify death during the Victorian era. As expected, it generally decorates the grave of a baby or young child.
Soul effigy	immortality of the soul; passage to the afterlife (especially if winged)
Sphinx	courage; honor; power

Star	A star may symbolise eternity or immortality and divine guidance.
Sun rising or with rays	Renewed life; resurrection
Sun setting	Death
Sword	A military career. Broken sword- life cut short. Crossed swords- life lost in battle.
Thistle	sorrow and remembrance; potential Scottish ancestry
Torch	Lit or upright the torch represents life.
Torch, inverted	The inverted torch is a true cemetery symbol, symbolizing life in the next realm or a life extinguished.
Tree	Trees are an enduring symbol of eternal life and protection, with their roots firmly in the ground and their canopy offering protection.
Tree-shaped or tree stump	life cut short; sudden death; possible membership with the Modern Woodmen of America or Woodmen of the World
Triangle, trefoil	In Christianity, the equilateral triangle is the symbol of the Trinity.
Trumpets	Heralds of the resurrection.
Urn	death of the flesh
Wheat	farming; harvest; prosperity; full life
Wheel	the wheel represents the cycle of life, enlightenment, and divine power
Winged death's head	mortal remains of the deceased
Winged face	Effigy of the soul of the deceased.
Winged wheel	Symbolized the Holy Spirit.
Willow	mourning and earthly sorrow
Wreath with wheat	See Laurel Wreath