

# Cornish Crosses

Cornwall is extremely rich in ancient monuments and antiquities of all sorts. One of the most conspicuous features of the Cornish countryside are the stone crosses, which cannot be seen anywhere else in the country in such numbers or varieties.

There are over four hundred complete stone crosses standing in the county and at least another two hundred fragments, with an increasing number of modern replicas.

**WAYSIDE CROSSES** - The most common type of Cornish cross is the wayside cross which, as its name implies, stands at the side of roads, ancient tracks and footpaths. Its main function was to mark the route to the parish church. In medieval Cornwall outlying farms and hamlets were usually linked to the churchtown by the most direct and level route. The wayside cross was also used to mark tracks to sites of pilgrimage, monastic sites, ancient chapels and holy wells.

Wayside Cross Lanivet



On the beach at Marazion there is a rock known as Chapel Rock which, it is said, was used by pilgrims as the last shrine before visiting the Mount; here a chapel dedicated to the Blessed Virgin Mary stood until 1645. Half-way across the causeway, between Chapel Rock and the Mount, is the base of an ancient cross, still beside the causeway. The cross is said to have been broken down in a storm in 1750.

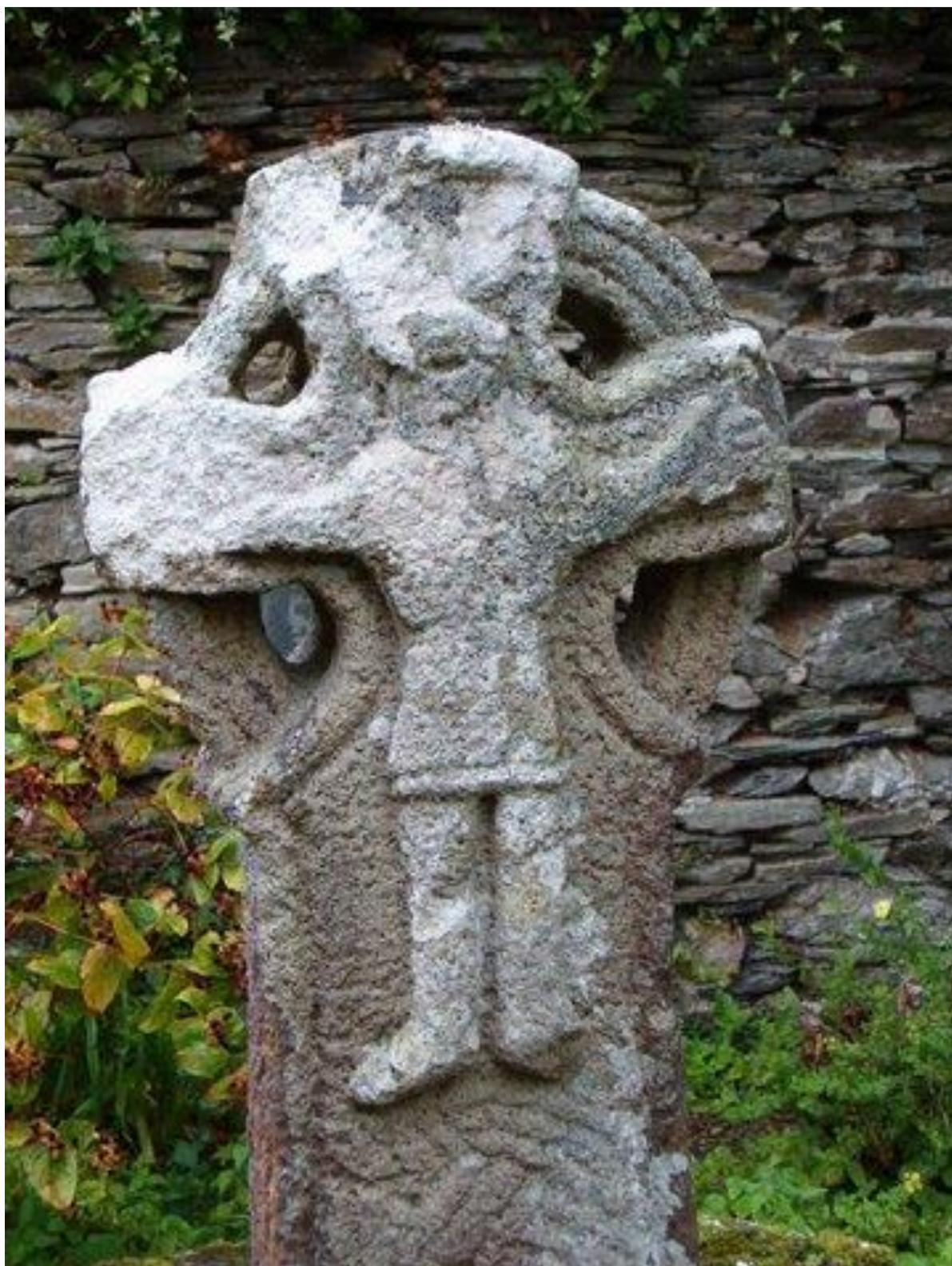
Base of Marazion Causeway Cross



A Latin cross still stands next to the holy well at St. Cleer on Bodmin Moor, and another cross stands near a footpath to Madron Well near Boswarthen Farm in Madron parish.

Some crosses stood at chapel sites, like the cross at Lanherne Convent at St Mawgan in Pydar that was originally discovered on the site of a chapel at Roseworthy in Gwinear parish.

### Roseworthy Cross



Occasionally, crosses were placed beside the banks of rivers to mark a safety fording place. At St Clether on the east side of Bodmin Moor, where a footpath crosses the River Inney, a large wheel-headed cross stands on the south bank marking shallow water and a firm footing.

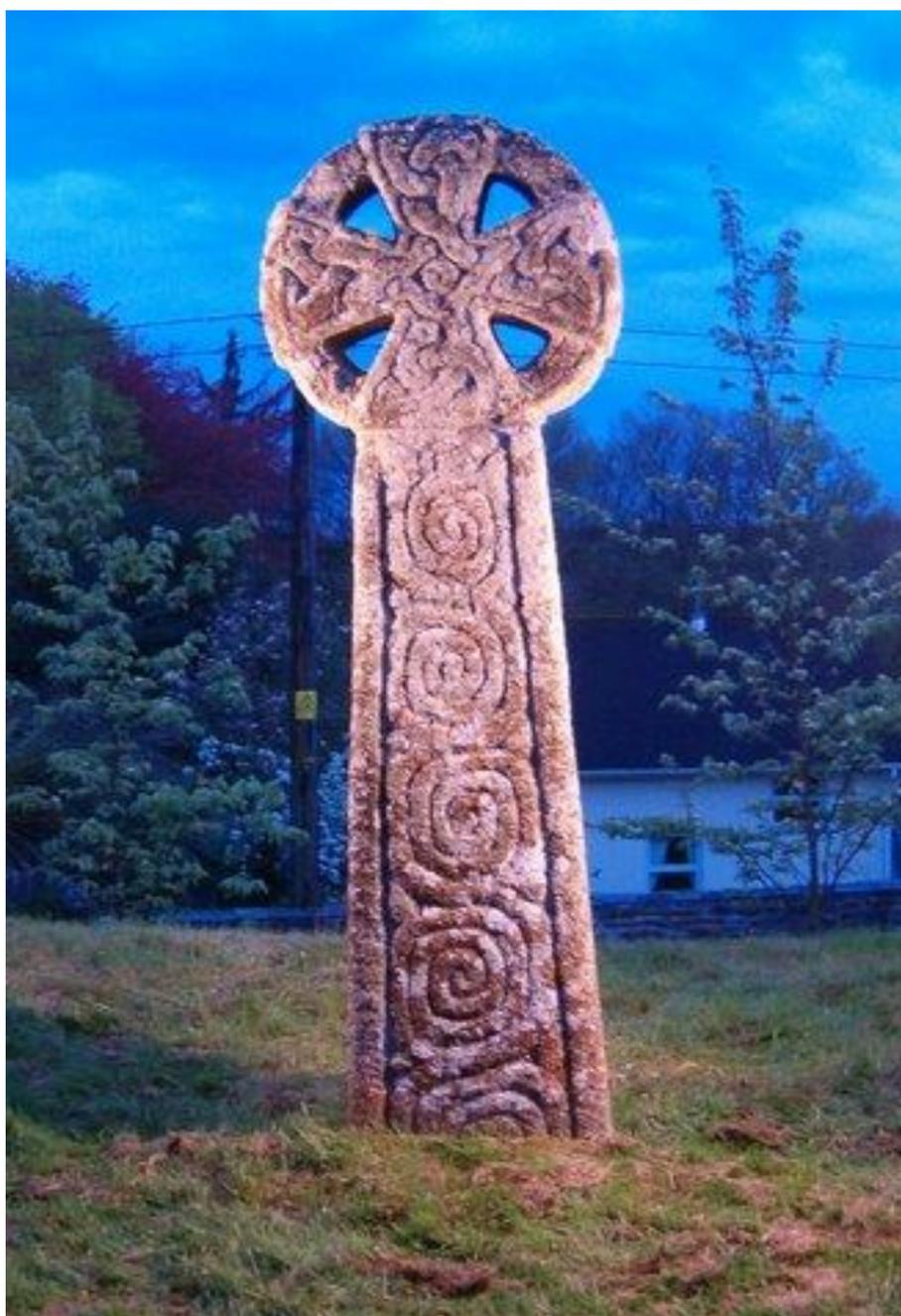
St Clether Cross



Callywith Cross at Bodmin still marks the parish boundary between Bodmin and Cardinham, while on Tregonetha Downs a cross known as 'Cross and Hand' stands at the intersection of three parish boundaries; those of St Columb Major, St Wenn and Roche. According to Arthur Langdon in his publication *Old Cornish Crosses*, the Nine Maidens Down Cross which now stands in the grounds of Clowance Estate in Crowan parish originally marked the boundary of no less than four parishes.

At Cardinham the glebe land was also marked by crosses, four in total, and Rostigan Cross is mentioned as a bound stone for glebe land at St Wenn in a terrier dated 1601.

### Cardinham Cross



**BOUNDARY CROSSES** - Another reason for the large number of crosses around the Cornish countryside is that the stones were also used to mark boundaries. Crosses were set up to mark parish boundaries, and the boundaries of glebe land. They may also have marked monastic land and the extended sanctuaries that a very few parish churches possessed. During the post medieval period several crosses were adopted as manorial or personal boundaries, with initials being carved on the cross or it's base-stone.

**MEMORIAL CROSSES** - There are a number of inscribed stones and inscribed crosses in the county, most of which were erected as a memorial to some local king or chieftain. One of the most famous memorial crosses in Cornwall is the King Doniert Stone at St Cleer, which is the pedestal of a fine late 9th century decorated cross. Additional examples of crosses with inscriptions can be seen at Sancreed, Cardinham and Lanteglos by Camelford.

King Doniert Stone



**CHURCHYARD CROSSES** - The most elaborate crosses in Cornwall are usually found in our parish churchyards. In many cases the churchyard or burial ground existed before the building of a church or oratory. Some of these crosses may have been erected to mark the Christian burial site, prior to the building of the church.

The majority of these churchyard crosses are impressive monuments and were decorated rather than plainly carved like the wayside and boundary crosses. There is no evidence to suggest that any of the churchyard crosses in Cornwall are earlier than the late 9th century, and most are considered to be between the 10th and 11th centuries. The setting up of churchyard crosses continued through the centuries: less decorated examples followed during the medieval period and by the 15th century lantern crosses were being erected in churchyards.

St Mawgan in Pydar Lantern Cross



**VILLAGE/MARKET CROSSES** - In Cornwall there are only a few true village or market crosses, although in some cases a wayside cross has been adapted for this function. They were usually set up by religious groups or authorities as a reminder of Our Lord during the day to day bustle of secular life. There are the remains of a village cross at St. Ewe, on a stepped base, which is still one of the focal points of the village. In the past, proclamations would be read at the village cross and public meetings conducted there. At many of these crosses merchants sold their goods and so some became named after the goods sold there. For example at Winchester there is a Butter Cross, while the elaborate cross at Salisbury is known as the Poultry Cross. There are records in Cornwall to indicate that at both Redruth and St Columb Major there was a Fish Cross. Taxes and market dues might be paid at the cross to the Lord of the Manor or a religious house.

St Ewe Cross...



At a later date some market crosses had elaborate shelters built over them to protect traders and tax collectors from the weather. Gothic style structures and canopies can still be seen in many English villages, made of timber or stone, usually octagonal in plan and even if a conventional cross did not exist, the structures were still known as Market Crosses, as at Dunster in Somerset and Malmesbury in Wiltshire. At Newport, St Stephen by Launceston

is the only example of a market cross enclosed by a canopy in Cornwall; the structure dates to the early 19th century. As the need for larger covered areas on market days increased many of these structures were demolished to make way for more conventional market halls.

Market Cross House Newport



Market Cross Newport

