All About... Celtic Art
Who Were the Celts?

The Celts were groups of people who lived in Europe during the Iron Age (800 BC-AD).

The Iron Age was the period of time when iron replaced bronze in the making of tools and weapons. It was discovered that iron could be produced from iron ore in a process called smelting. Iron was harder than bronze so made better objects.
Who Were the Celts?

There were three main Celtic groups; the Gauls (in Northern mainland Europe), the Britons (in England) and the Gaels (in Ireland). Iron Age Celts lived in Britain and Ireland from 750 BC.

Celts lived in tribes, each with their own king or queen. Celtic tribes, in what is now Britain, included the Iceni, the Cornovii and the Ordovices.

The Celts ruled Britain until the Romans invaded in AD 43.
Because the Celtic people lived all over Europe, Celtic art is varied. Some of it came in the form of stone carvings, jewellery, pottery, tools and other objects.
How Do We Know About Celtic Art?

There are only very limited records from the Celtic period so our knowledge of Celtic art comes from archaeology. This is the study of history through excavating sites and studying artefacts and other remains.

Lots of Celtic art was discovered at Newgrange in Ireland. Newgrange is a passage tomb built over 5000 years ago. Archaeologists started excavating the site in the 1970s. Many different examples of rock art have been discovered.
How Do We Know About Celtic Art?

The Winchester Hoard is a collection of gold from around 75 BC to 25 BC. It was found in a farmer’s field near Winchester. There were brooches, bracelets and necklaces. The Winchester Hoard was found by a man whose hobby was searching for things with a metal detector. The items are now on display at the British Museum.
How Do We Know About Celtic Art?

In 1950, a farmer was ploughing a field in Snettisham, Norfolk. He uncovered some gold. Over many years, the site was excavated and Celtic jewellery made from gold and other precious metals was found.
Tri-Spirals

Tri-spirals, sometimes called triskele, were an important part of Celtic art. They could be found on shields, cups and carved into stone.

It is uncertain what the tri-spirals represented. They may have symbolised the cycles of life such as birth, death and rebirth or even the sun, air and water.
Celtic knots are usually created by endless circles or continuous designs. They are a mixture of straight lines and rounded edges. As Christianity started to spread, they were often used on crosses.
Celtic key patterns look a little like Celtic knots but are only made from straight lines. They take their influence from Ancient Greek patterns.
Celtic art has inspired art through time. With the spread of Christianity, tri-spirals began to symbolise the Trinity (the Christian belief in God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit). Celtic knots were used to decorate crosses.

Celtic patterns remain popular choices for modern jewellery.

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