The idea that certain places and objects in this world are holy was central to the Late Christian Period in Ireland. These places and objects either house the relics of holy men and women or they contain traces of their long absent bodies. It was the desire of people to gain proximity to such holy places and objects that inspired the creation of shrines.

In the wider world do you know of any places or objects that are considered shrines? What is meant by a ‘trace of their long absent bodies’?

St. Patrick’s Bell

The St. Patrick’s Bell is the most authentic and the oldest Irish relic of Christian metalwork that is currently in existence. It is said to possess the singular merit of having an unbroken history through 1400 years.

The four-sided body of the bell is made from sheet iron and is topped with an iron handle. This, the original iron bell dates to 5th/6th century, a period known as Early Christian Ireland.

The Shrine of St. Patrick’s Bell

‘The Shrine of St. Patrick’s Bell’ as it is called is the new decorated casing that was applied to fit over the original iron bell. This encasing which dates to the early 11th century was created and given as a gift to the then High King or Árd Rí of Ireland, Comnall Ó’Lochlainn.
Cast bronze openwork of two interlacing birds

Front face decorated geometrically in over thirty panels of gold filigree and studwork

URNES STYLE
(Scandinavian Origin/Influence)

Large central stud of rock crystal

Cast panels of linear animal interlace (Snakes & other ribbon bodied animals)

Handle – found on both sides of the bell

URNES STYLE of decoration found on both side panels of the shrine.

Handle – found on both sides of the bell

The back of the bell is decorated in an interlocking geometrical cruciform design.
The Cross of Cong

This large processional cross, now preserved in the National Museum of Ireland, is known as "The Cross of Cong." It is undoubtedly one of the finest specimens of metal work of its age in the western world.

It consists of an oak cross, covered with plates of bronze.

The decorated bronze surface of the cross is elaborately carved with a long intertwined pattern of grotesque animals. This style of decoration is known as THE URNES STYLE.

A large polished crystal is found at the centre of the cross. A fragment of the TRUE CROSS, which was sent from the Vatican to King Turloch O'Conor in 1123, was originally placed behind this Crystal.

Hollow silver tubing covers the edges of the cross; this not only holds the decorated bronze plates in place, it also gives the cross a clean and smooth edging.

A highly decorated cast bronze dog's head bites down onto the base of the cross.

The staff or pole used to carry the cross during religious ceremonies was inserted here into the decorated socket below the dog's head.

A Bronze grille holds the dome shaped crystal in place.

The rock crystal was used to magnify and protect the fragment of the TRUE CROSS.
Other St. Patrick Shrines

• Shrine of St. Patrick’s Hand
• Shrine of St. Patrick’s Tooth
• Shrine of St. Patrick’s Jaw
• Shrine of St. Patrick’s Gospels

Modern Shrines

Do modern shrines exist? What do we now as individuals chose to enshrine? Does the highly detailed surface decoration of an object necessarily give it shrine status? Is the body a shrine?