

## Swastikas on Scottish War Memorials

Very little is known or has been written about these examples of the use of the Swastika in Scotland, for the simple reason that they often appear in unexpected places, off the beaten track and the relevant artefacts are sometimes only to be found in museums.



Figure 1: War Memorial in Crathie Churchyard, Deeside

### ***The Balmoral War Memorial***

The Balmoral War Memorial in Crathie Churchyard was unveiled on 3rd September 1922 by His Majesty King George V, in memory of the men from the estates who gave their lives in the Great War. The names of local men who were killed in the Second World War were later added to the base.

The Swastikas, in both recto (crampons to the right) and verso (crampons to the left) forms, were inscribed in the lower, central section of the memorial. There is a plaque to the right of the memorial that offers an explanation to anyone who might be mystified by the presence of these Swastikas. That text reads as follows:

‘The Swastika was a symbol of widespread ancient usage, associated with the sun and its name is from Sanskrit, denoting ‘well-being’, ‘fortune’, ‘luck’. The symbol appeared on the bindings and title pages of many of Rudyard Kipling’s works. The symbol had no sinister associations at the time the Memorial was designed.’

There are several other examples of the Swastika in use during the First World War. There was a series of Cigarette Cards issued in 1925 depicting the Army corps and Divisional Signs in use in 1914-1918. The Swastika was the emblem of the 6<sup>th</sup> Indian Cavalry Brigade and The Euphrates Defences. Another company issued a series of cards showing Lucky Charms and including the Swastika among them.

In addition servicemen of the Royal Field Artillery [462 Battery] had the Swastika stamped on the right arms of their uniform. From the same period,

the Escadrille Lafayette, comprised of American pilots, fought for the allies prior to the formal entry of the United States into the conflict. They were formed in April 1916 and were later absorbed into the US Air Service in 1918. Their emblem was the black Swastika and the head of an Indian chief. In addition the US 45<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had the Swastika as their insignia, deriving from an age-old Native American Indian culture. Many Indian tribes, not least the Hopi, had long regarded the Swastika as a 'good luck' symbol.

Several military formations in Poland also used the Swastika as part of their emblematic insignia during the 1920s. This widespread use reflected a tradition stretching back over many centuries in that region [the boundaries of Poland have varied over the years]. A similar example of Swastikas appearing on a War Memorial may be found in the churchyard of St. Thomas, Brampton, Chesterfield, in Derbyshire. Further afield, we find an example of the use of Swastikas on memorials in a military cemetery in Aquileia near Venice in Italy.

### ***The Edinburgh War Memorial***

Here in Great Britain there is another rather unusual and unexpected use of this symbol in the stained glass windows of the shrine of the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh. These unusual windows were installed during the 1920s. The guide book states, 'Even as the mortar was drying in the walls, this ancient symbol of fortune was appearing in the skies over Europe, the insignia of a man who, like the rider on the white horse, would "Smite the nations and rule over them with a rod of iron" - Adolf Hitler.' However, we might wonder what was in the mind and heart of the artist himself and what his vision might have been.

Robert Douglas Strachan had taken the imagery of several themes from the last book of the New Testament - the book of Revelation. Windows 6 and 7 seek to depict the overthrow of Tyranny, one section of which illustrates the Horseman, Faithful and True, from Revelation Chapter 19:11. On his cloak is a symbol that the casual observer would be most likely to regard as a 'Swastika'.

There are occasions when this symbol popularly known as the Swastika may also be termed more appropriately a 'Gammadion'. The author would prefer to refer to the symbol in these windows as the Gammadion. In many contexts it has been used as a fully acceptable alternative to the more traditional form of the Christian cross, as exemplified in another design by Robert Strachan in the stained glass windows of Westminster College chapel in Cambridge.

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