

Origins of the words Church, Kirk, Cirice, and Circle

What the Historical and Linguistic Evidence Actually Shows

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The proposed hypothesis is that pre-Christian people possessed a vernacular term connected with circular sacred gatherings and that Christian missionaries appropriated it for Christian worship places, eventually producing *cirice*, *kirika*, *kirk*, and *church*.

Three propositions must be separated: (1) pre-Christian peoples used circular sacred or ceremonial spaces; (2) Christians sometimes appropriated pagan places, customs, and vocabulary; and (3) the word family that produced *church* descended from that circular religious vocabulary. The first two are historically plausible or demonstrable. They do not establish the third. Correlation of place or practice is not proof of linguistic descent.[1][2]

The existence of circular prehistoric monuments does not establish that the peoples of Britain worshipped by assembling in a circle. The surviving classical descriptions of Druidic religious practice provide considerable information about sacred places, sacrifices, prayer, and religious assemblies, but they do not identify circular formation as a characteristic form of worship.

One proposed explanation connects *church* with pre-Christian circular places of worship or with assemblies gathered in a circle, sometimes specifically around a ritual fire. The broader historical setting makes such a proposal initially plausible. Pre-Christian peoples used circular ceremonial spaces, Christian missionaries sometimes repurposed existing sacred sites and customs, and much of the vernacular language of pre-Christian Britain and northern Europe survives only indirectly. Nevertheless, cultural continuity does not establish linguistic descent.

The broader historical intuition behind the hypothesis was not unreasonable. re-Christian Britain contained circular monuments and enclosures associated with ceremonial or sacred activity, making it reasonable to investigate whether circular gathering places influenced later religious terminology. Archaeology can establish the existence and probable ceremonial use of such spaces, but it cannot establish what the people who used them called them. Christians sometimes reused pagan sacred places and adapted existing customs.

The Circle Theory

A. Hadrian Allcroft's *The Circle and the Cross* (1927–1930) argued for continuity between prehistoric sacred circles, circular churchyards, Christian sacred sites, and even the word *church*. Contemporary reviews recognized this thesis. The theory therefore has a real antiquarian history.[3][4]

Allcroft's linguistic proposal did not become the accepted etymology. Modern historical dictionaries continue to derive the *kirika/cirice* family from Late Greek *kyricon/kyriakon*. Continuity of sacred sites may be real without establishing continuity of the word.[5]

Pagan Sacred Circles and Christian Reuse

Pre-Christian Britain contained circular monuments and ceremonial landscapes. Henges and stone circles could serve sacred or ceremonial functions, and sites such as Stonehenge reflect seasonal astronomical attention. Archaeology therefore supports an association between circular space, gathering, and ritual.[6]

Archaeology cannot by itself tell us what ordinary people called those places. A circular enclosure, fire pit, stone ring, sacrifice, or later Christian building on the same site cannot establish a word's etymology.

Pope Gregory I's instructions to Mellitus around AD 601 show that Christian missionaries could deliberately repurpose pagan sacred places and customs. Gregory advised that suitable pagan temples not necessarily be destroyed: idols could be removed, buildings purified, altars established, and familiar practices redirected toward Christian observance. This proves cultural continuity and Christianization of existing forms, but it does not prove that *cirice* meant circle.[7]

Ancient Sources Do Not Describe Druidic Worship in a Circle

Julius Caesar describes the Druids as responsible for divine worship and public and private sacrifices. He also reports that they assembled annually in the territory of the Carnutes at a consecrated place, where people involved in disputes came from the surrounding regions. Caesar further states that Druidic teaching was believed to have originated in Britain and that those wishing to study it more thoroughly sometimes traveled there. His description therefore provides evidence for organized religious gatherings at consecrated places, but it contains no statement that the Druids assembled or worshipped in a circle.[8]

Pliny the Elder provides a more detailed description of a Druidic ceremony involving mistletoe and an oak tree. He describes preparations for sacrifice and feasting beneath the tree, the ritual cutting of the mistletoe, the sacrifice of two white bulls, and prayer for divine favor. Although the ceremony is centered upon a sacred tree and involves an assembled religious community, Pliny does not describe the participants as standing or worshipping in a circle.[9]

Tacitus likewise describes Druids during the Roman assault on Mona, modern Anglesey, in the first century. He portrays Druids raising their hands toward heaven and invoking curses while women carrying torches moved among the defenders. After the Roman victory, the sacred groves associated with the indigenous religion were destroyed. The account supplies additional evidence for sacred groves and Druidic ritual activity but does not describe circular worship as a religious practice.[10]

These literary sources are especially important because they are substantially closer to the period of pre-Christian British and Gallic religion than the medieval and early modern traditions that later associated Druids with stone circles. The familiar image of Druids conducting ceremonies at Stonehenge is not derived from ancient descriptions of Druidic religion. The association was developed particularly by antiquarians such as John Aubrey in the seventeenth century and William Stukeley in the eighteenth century. Archaeological dating subsequently established that Stonehenge was constructed long before the historically documented Druids described by Greek and Roman authors.[11]

Circular monuments and enclosures undoubtedly existed in prehistoric Britain, and archaeological evidence indicates that some had ceremonial, communal, or sacred functions. That evidence establishes the existence and probable use of the physical spaces; it does not establish the terminology used by the people who occupied them. More importantly for the proposed etymology of *church*, the ancient literary evidence examined here does not identify worship in a circle as a characteristic Druidic or British pagan practice.

The proposed sequence *circular pagan worship* → *circle* → *cirice/kirika* → *church/kirk* therefore encounters an evidentiary problem before the linguistic derivation is even considered. No ancient source examined here establishes the first proposition as a characteristic religious practice, and no linguistic evidence establishes the subsequent transition from a word for a circle to *cirice* or *kirika*. The existence of circular ceremonial monuments cannot supply either missing link.

Linguistic origin of the word *Church*

The English word *church* has accumulated several meanings over the course of its history. It can refer to a building, a local congregation, an ecclesiastical institution, a denomination, or the Christian community more broadly. In the modern Bible, the Greek word *ekklesia* literally means assembly or congregation. Yet the word itself is not derived

from the Greek *ekklēsia*, the term commonly translated as “church” in English Bibles. This distinction raises a historical question concerning the origin of *church*, its relationship to Scots *kirk* and earlier forms such as Old English *cirice* and Old Saxon *kirika*, and the meanings those words carried before and during the Christianization of northern Europe.[12]

The surviving linguistic evidence does not support deriving *church* or *kirk* from a word meaning “circle.” The better-supported history connects Old English *cirice*, Old Saxon *kirika*, Old High German *kirihha*, and related forms with Late Greek *kyrikon/kyriakon*, meaning essentially “the Lord’s [house or place].” The precise route by which this term entered West Germanic remains partly reconstructed, but the proposed “circle” derivation lacks the lexical evidence necessary to sustain it.[13]

Much of the vernacular language of pre-Christian Britain and Ireland is also poorly documented. These circumstances make it reasonable to investigate whether an earlier term associated with a circular place or gathering could lie behind *cirice/kirika* and ultimately *church/kirk*. The surviving evidence, however, does not provide the linguistic bridge necessary to establish “circle” as the origin of the *cirice/kirika* word family from which *church* and *kirk* developed.[14][15]

The evidence instead supports a Germanic word family represented by Old English *cirice*, Old Saxon *kirika*, Old High German *kirihha/chirihha*, Old Norse *kirkja*, and later Scots *kirk* and English *church*. The standard etymological explanation connects that family with Late Greek *kyrikon/kyriakon*, essentially “the Lord’s [house/place].” The exact historical route into West Germanic is reconstructed rather than continuously documented.[16][17]

A separate conclusion remains important for biblical interpretation: English *church* is not the etymological equivalent of Greek *ekklēsia*. *Ekklēsia* fundamentally denotes an assembly or congregation. *Church* developed a broader semantic range including building, congregation, institution, denomination, clergy, and worship service.[18][19]

What the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) Says

The OED entry lists Old English *cirice/cyrice/circe*, Middle English *chirche/cherche*, northern *kirke/kirk*, Old Saxon *kirika*, Old High German *chirihha/kirihha*, Dutch *kerk*, Old Norse *kirkja/kyrkja*, and related Germanic forms.[20]

The OED explicitly says that the “ulterior derivation has been keenly disputed.” It discusses alternative proposals, including the Latin *circus* family behind *circle*, and reports that such proposals were set aside as untenable. It instead connects the Germanic family with Greek *kyriakon*, “of or belonging to the Lord,” used substantively for a Christian place of worship.[21]

Under “B. Signification,” the OED says that *kirika/cirice* was originally applied to the building. With Christianization, the word expanded to the organization, clergy, congregation, larger ecclesiastical bodies, and eventually the universal Church. This old building/place sense fits the traditional interpretation of *kyriakon* as “the Lord’s [house/place].”[22]

Why Circle Is a Different Word

Modern English *circle* belongs to the Latin *circulus/circus* family, transmitted through French. The OED treats that family separately from *church/kirk*. No early Germanic descendant of *cirice/kirika* has been demonstrated to mean “circle,” “sacred circle,” “people gathered in a circle,” or “worship around a fire.”[23]

If *kirika* had originally meant circle, some trace of that sense would be expected in early evidence. Instead, surviving uses point toward a religious building/place and later the religious community associated with it. The specific circle gathering in a pagan ritual or worship derivation therefore lacks the necessary lexical evidence.[24]

The Word *Ekklēsia* Is Not the Word *Church* Etymologically

Greek *ekklēsia* fundamentally means an assembly or congregation. Classical Greek could use it for a civic assembly; the Septuagint uses it for assemblies of Israel; the New Testament uses it for Christian communities and even, in Acts 19, for non-Christian civic assemblies. It does not inherently mean a Christian building.[25]

Two semantic streams eventually overlapped. *Ekklēsia/ecclesia* began with the assembly and could later name the place where the assembly met. *Cirice/kirika* appears strongly associated with the worship place and later expanded to include the congregation and institution. This explains why modern church can mean both building and people without the two ancient words sharing an etymology.[26][27]

Greek: Why *Kyriakon* Is More Than a Look-Alike

The conventional derivation is not based merely on resemblance. Greek *kyriakos* means “of or belonging to the Lord,” and Christian usage of neuter *kyriakon/kyrikon* for “the Lord’s [house/place]” is independently attested. Historical linguists also compare sound development, chronology, semantics, and geographic distribution.[28]

D. H. Green discusses the phonological development from the Greek form into West Germanic, including vowel adaptation, Germanic stress, and grammatical changes. The combined phonological, semantic, chronological, and comparative evidence is substantially stronger than a simple look-alike argument.[29]

Gothic: The Transmission Route Is Still Reconstructed

An older explanation proposed transmission through Gothic Christians, but the required *kirika*-type Gothic intermediary is not attested in surviving Gothic. That is a real weakness in that particular historical route.[30]

Modern scholarship has proposed western routes through the late Roman frontier world, including the Rhineland and Trier, where Greek/eastern Christian influence coexisted with Latin Christianity. Germanic speakers could have borrowed a term for a Christian building before their own peoples were fully Christianized.[31]

The careful conclusion is therefore that the Greek origin is strongly supported, while the exact sequence of people and places through which the word traveled remains reconstructed.[32]

Old High German: Building, Assembly, and Semantic Expansion

Early Old High German *kirihha/chirihha* is strongly associated with the Christian worship place. Other Germanic words could express assembly or congregation. As *kirihha* became a regular vernacular counterpart to Latin *ecclesia*, the broader senses of *ecclesia* could spread into it.[33][34]

This helps explain modern church: a word associated with the worship place came to denote the congregation meeting there, then the wider organization, clergy, denomination, and universal Christian body.[35]

Britain and Ireland Around Patrick

The pre-Christian vernacular record is thin. Patrick’s authentic fifth-century *Confessio* and *Epistola* are in Latin, not Irish. Primitive Irish survives in ogham inscriptions, but these are mostly short personal names, kinship formulas, ancestry, and titles rather than descriptions of worship.[36][37]

This means later Christian sources cannot automatically tell us everything ordinary pagans once said. But a gap in evidence cannot itself establish a hypothetical earlier meaning. Unknown does not equal circle.

Celtic Christian Vocabulary

Old Irish *eclais*, modern Irish *eaglais*, and Welsh *eglwys* ultimately derive from Latin *ecclesia*, itself from Greek *ekklēsia*. Early Irish ecclesiastical vocabulary contains many words adopted from Latin. Latin-speaking western Christianity therefore left clear linguistic fingerprints in Britain and Ireland.[38][39]

This does not make a Greek-derived West Germanic words adopted from Latin impossible. A word may enter a language through earlier contact elsewhere and later be carried into Britain by speakers who already know it.

Earliest English *Cirice*

The law code attributed to Æthelberht of Kent, traditionally dated around AD 600, contains *ciricean* in explicitly Christian provisions alongside bishops, priests, deacons, and clerics. The surviving manuscript is later, so it is not an original AD 600 parchment, but the code preserves very early Old English legal material.[40]

By early Anglo-Saxon Christian times *cirice* is therefore established Christian vocabulary. What we do not possess is an earlier pagan sentence using *cirice* to mean something else.[41]

From *Cirice* to *Church*: Evidence, Translation, and Modern Meaning

The surviving evidence traces *church* through several distinct stages that should not be confused with one another. Bede provides evidence for early Anglo-Saxon Christianity but cannot tell us how he would have translated Greek *ekklēsia*, while the continued use of Scots *kirk* and Scottish Gaelic *eaglais* demonstrates that different linguistic traditions could develop separate words for the same Christian institution. By the English Reformation, *church* was already an ancient English word with meanings extending beyond the basic sense of Greek *ekklēsia*. The disagreement between Tyndale and More, followed by the King James translators' explicit instruction to retain *church* rather than *congregation*, shows that its use in English Bibles was a conscious translation convention rather than the origin of the word itself. These developments explain the breadth of modern *church*, which can designate a building, congregation, institution, denomination, clergy, or worship service, while *ekklēsia* in a biblical passage must be interpreted according to its own Greek context.

Bede and the Bible

Bede Cannot Tell Us How *Ekklēsia* Was Translated into Early Old English. Bede is particularly relevant to the history of *cirice* because he lived from approximately AD 673 to 735, relatively near the period in which Anglo-Saxon England was being Christianized. If an Old English biblical translation from his lifetime survived, it could provide valuable evidence for the vocabulary early English Christians used when translating biblical concepts from Latin or Greek into their own language.

According to Cuthbert's account of Bede's death, Bede spent his final days working on a vernacular translation of the Gospel of John. The translation has not survived, although Cuthbert's testimony indicates that Bede had translated at least through John 6:9. Consequently, the actual Old English vocabulary Bede selected cannot be examined. [42]

Even if the translation were recovered, however, it would not answer the particular question concerning *ekklēsia*. The Greek word *ekklēsia* does not occur in the Gospel of John. Bede therefore would not have encountered the term in the Gospel he was translating, and his translation could not show whether he would have rendered *ekklēsia* as *cirice*, used an Old English term meaning "assembly" or "congregation," or chosen some other expression.

Bede's surviving Ecclesiastical History of the English People does not resolve the question either. Bede composed that work in Latin rather than Old English. A later Old English translation of the Ecclesiastical History, probably produced more than a century after Bede's death, does use forms of *cirice*. That evidence is valuable because it demonstrates that *cirice* was established Old English Christian vocabulary by the period of the translation. It cannot, however, be used to establish that Bede himself used *cirice* as a translation of *ekklēsia*.

The distinction is important to the history of the English word church. The evidence establishes that *cirice* belonged to early English Christian vocabulary and was used for the Christian place of worship and eventually for the Christian community. What the surviving evidence does not establish is that the earliest Anglo-Saxon

Christians understood *cirice* simply as the vernacular equivalent of Greek *ekklēsia*. Bede's lost translation cannot supply that missing evidence.

Kirk and the Scottish Evidence

The continued use of *kirk* in Scotland provides another surviving form of the same word family as English *church*. The Dictionary of the Scots Language traces Scots *kirk* through northern Middle English forms such as *kirke* and *kyrke* and relates them to Old Norse *kirkja* and Old English *cirice/circe*. English *church* and Scots *kirk* therefore developed into different modern forms, but they belong to the same historical family of words. [43]

The Scottish setting can easily create confusion because Scotland preserves both Germanic and Celtic linguistic traditions. Scots and Scottish Gaelic are not two forms of the same language. Scots developed principally from the northern varieties of English brought into southeastern Scotland during the medieval period and belongs to the Germanic language family. Scottish Gaelic, by contrast, is a Celtic language closely related to Irish.

This distinction becomes particularly useful when examining the word for a Christian church. Scots uses *kirk*, following the Germanic *kirika/cirice* family, whereas Scottish Gaelic uses *eaglais*. Gaelic *eaglais*, like Old Irish *eclais* and Welsh *eglwys*, ultimately derives from Latin *ecclesia*, which in turn derives from Greek *ekklēsia*. Scotland therefore preserves two different linguistic histories for Christian terminology within the same geographic region:

Scots: *kirk* ← northern Middle English *kirke/kyrke* ← Germanic *kirika/cirice* family

Scottish Gaelic: *eaglais* ← Old Irish *eclais* ← Latin *ecclesia* ← Greek *ekklēsia*

This distinction is important because the survival of *kirk* in Scotland does not by itself provide evidence that the word originated among the earlier Celtic or Pictish inhabitants of Scotland. The modern geographic location of a word cannot be used to determine its linguistic ancestry. *Kirk* survives in Scotland because it belongs to the Scots linguistic tradition, while the Celtic linguistic tradition represented by Gaelic preserves the *ecclesia* family instead.

The Scottish evidence therefore reinforces an important distinction in the history of *church*. The Germanic *church/kirk* family and the Latin-Celtic *ecclesia/eaglais* family eventually came to refer to the same Christian institution, but they reached that meaning through different linguistic histories. Their convergence in meaning should not be mistaken for a common etymological origin.

Church as an English Bible Translation

The English word *church* was not created by English Bible translators. Its Old English ancestor *cirice* was already in use many centuries before the first complete English Bibles. The law code associated with Æthelberht of Kent, traditionally dated to the beginning of the seventh century, contains *cirice* in an explicitly Christian context. The history of *church* as an English word must therefore be distinguished from the later history of *church* as a translation of the Greek word *ekklēsia*. [44]

The translation question became particularly important during the English Reformation. Greek *ekklēsia* can denote an assembly or congregation and is not restricted by its Greek meaning to a Christian building or ecclesiastical institution. William Tyndale consequently chose congregation rather than church when translating *ekklēsia* in his New Testament. This was not because the English word *church* did not yet exist. Tyndale deliberately avoided it because he believed congregation represented the underlying Greek term more accurately and avoided meanings that the English word *church* had acquired through centuries of ecclesiastical usage. [45]

Tyndale explained his reasoning during his controversy with Thomas More. More objected to several of Tyndale's translation choices, including his substitution of congregation for *church*. Tyndale responded that *ekklēsia* was not inherently a technical word for the institutional Christian Church. He pointed to the broader Greek sense of an assembly or gathering. The New Testament itself demonstrates this range of meaning in Acts 19, where *ekklēsia* is used for the assembly at Ephesus, including a gathering that was not a Christian congregation. Tyndale therefore

regarded congregation as capable of representing the Greek word without importing the additional institutional meanings that English church could carry.[46]

The controversy demonstrates an important distinction. By the sixteenth century, church already had a long English history and could refer to a Christian building, congregation, clergy, or ecclesiastical institution. *Ekklēsia*, however, did not acquire all of those meanings merely because *church* was conventionally used to translate it. The translator had to decide whether to preserve the traditional English ecclesiastical term or use an English word that more directly expressed the sense of assembly or congregation.

That decision became explicit during the preparation of the King James Bible. The translators did not simply arrive independently at *church* as the natural English equivalent of *ekklēsia*. The rules governing the translation specifically instructed them to preserve established ecclesiastical terminology. Rule 3 stated:

“The old ecclesiastical words to be kept, viz.: as the word ‘Church’ not to be translated ‘Congregation’ etc.” [47]

This instruction is particularly significant because it shows that church versus congregation was a conscious translation decision. The translators knew that congregation was available as an English rendering and that earlier translators such as Tyndale had used it. Nevertheless, they were directed to retain the traditional ecclesiastical word *church*.

The King James Bible therefore did not introduce the word church into English, nor did its translators create the association between church and Christianity. That association was already many centuries old. What the translation helped preserve and reinforce was the convention of using church as the English biblical rendering of Greek *ekklēsia*. The distinction is important: the historical development of the English word *church* and the decision to use that word to translate *ekklēsia* are two separate linguistic histories that eventually became joined in English Bible usage.

Consequently, when an English Bible uses *church*, the reader should not automatically assume that every historical meaning of the English word is contained in the underlying Greek. In a passage where *ekklēsia* denotes the assembled Christian community, *church* can be an appropriate English translation because *church* itself has acquired the meaning of a Christian congregation. The translation does not, however, make “building,” “denomination,” “clergy,” or later ecclesiastical organization inherent meanings of *ekklēsia*. Those belong to the broader semantic history of the English word *church* and must be distinguished from the meaning of the Greek term in its particular context.

English Bibles did not invent *church*. The word existed centuries earlier. What Bible translation affected was the conventional relationship between *church* and *ekklēsia*.

William Tyndale preferred congregation for *ekklēsia* and defended that choice against Thomas More, stressing that *ekklēsia* could be a general assembly. The King James translators were instructed to retain traditional ecclesiastical terminology, including *Church* rather than *Congregation*. Thus translation policy helped standardize *church* as the English biblical rendering without creating the word.

Modern Usage and Biblical Precision

The modern English word *church* carries a much broader range of meanings than any single definition can express. It can identify the physical building in which Christians meet, as in “the church on the corner”; the people who meet there, as in “the church gathered for worship”; an organized denomination, as in “the Methodist Church”; a larger historical or institutional body, as in “the medieval Church”; the clergy or ecclesiastical establishment; or even the activity of attending Christian worship, as in “going to church.” These meanings developed through the long history of the English word and are documented in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. [48]

This broader English history does not mean that *church* is necessarily an incorrect translation of Greek *ekklēsia*. Translation is based on meaning in context rather than on two words having the same etymological origin. Because *church* can mean a Christian congregation or community, that particular English sense can correspond naturally to *ekklēsia* when the Greek word refers to an assembled Christian body. The problem arises only when meanings that belong to the later history of the English word are assumed to be present in the Greek word itself.

For example, an English reader may encounter *church* in a New Testament passage and instinctively imagine a dedicated religious building, an organized denomination, a body of clergy, or an ecclesiastical institution. Those concepts can legitimately be expressed by the English word *church* in modern usage, but they are not thereby inherent in Greek *ekklēsia*. The Greek term has a semantic range centered upon an assembly or congregation and could be used outside a specifically Christian setting. Its use for the civic assembly at Ephesus in Acts 19 demonstrates that the word itself did not inherently designate a Christian institution.[49]

The distinction is therefore between **the meaning of the Greek word in its historical context** and **the meanings accumulated by the English word used to translate it**. A translator may appropriately use *church* for *ekklēsia* when *church* is understood in the sense of a Christian congregation. The reader should not work backward, however, and assume that every meaning subsequently acquired by English *church* belongs to *ekklēsia*. Doing so would allow the translation to determine the meaning of the original rather than allowing the original context to determine which sense of the translation is appropriate.

Historical English dictionaries and Greek lexicons consequently perform different functions. The *Oxford English Dictionary* can establish what *church* has meant at different periods in the history of English and how its senses developed. A Greek lexicon such as Liddell–Scott–Jones establishes the documented meanings and uses of *ekklēsia* within Greek. Comparing the two allows the reader to determine where their semantic ranges overlap without assuming that they are identical. This distinction is particularly important in biblical interpretation because *church* may be an appropriate English translation of *ekklēsia* while still carrying additional English meanings that must not be read back into the Greek text.[50]

Final Assessment

The evidence does not support deriving English *church* or Scots *kirk* from pagan circular worship or a word meaning “circle.” Although pre-Christian cultures used sacred gathering places and Christians sometimes repurposed existing sites and customs, no linguistic evidence connects those practices to the *cirice/kirika* word family.[51]

Old English *cirice*, Old Saxon *kirika*, Old High German *kirihha*, and related forms are most strongly traced to Late Greek *kyrikon/kyriakon*, “the Lord’s [house/place],” although the precise route into West Germanic remains uncertain.[52]

Greek *ekklēsia*, by contrast, denotes an assembly or congregation and is not the etymological source of *church*. The two became associated because *church* eventually became the conventional English translation of *ekklēsia*, not because the words share a common origin or identical range of meaning.[53]

Proposition	Assessment	Reason
Pre-Christian Britain contained circular monuments associated with ceremonial or sacred activity.	Supported	Archaeological evidence establishes circular monuments and probable ceremonial uses, but not the terminology used for them.
Ancient sources describe Druidic worship	Not supported by	Caesar, Pliny, and Tacitus describe sacred places,

Proposition	Assessment	Reason
as characteristically conducted in a circle.	the sources examined	sacrifices, prayer, feasting, groves, and religious assemblies without describing circular formation as a characteristic form of worship.
Christians sometimes repurposed existing pagan sacred places and customs.	Documented	Gregory's instructions to Mellitus explicitly recommend adapting pagan temples and customary celebrations to Christian use.
The incomplete record of pre-Christian vernacular language permits reconstruction of an otherwise unattested meaning of <i>cirice/kirika</i> .	No	Gaps in the surviving evidence establish uncertainty, not a particular lost meaning.
<i>Church/kirk</i> derives from pagan circular worship or gatherings around a ritual fire.	Not supported	Neither the underlying worship practice nor the required linguistic transition is established by the evidence examined.
<i>Cirice/kirika</i> originally meant "circle."	Not supported	No early occurrence examined gives <i>cirice/kirika</i> that meaning, and the <i>circle</i> and <i>church/kirk</i> families have different documented histories.
<i>Church</i> and <i>kirk</i> belong to the same historical word family.	Supported	Old English <i>cirice</i> , Old Saxon <i>kirika</i> , Old High German <i>kirihha/chirihha</i> , Old Norse <i>kirkja</i> , Scots <i>kirk</i> , and English <i>church</i> belong to the related Germanic tradition.
The <i>cirice/kirika</i> family is most strongly derived from Late Greek <i>kyrikon/kyriakon</i> .	Best-supported etymology examined	The derivation is supported by phonological, semantic, chronological, and comparative evidence and is accepted by the OED and modern Germanic etymological scholarship.
The exact route by which <i>kyrikon/kyriakon</i> entered West Germanic is known.	No	The older proposed Gothic intermediary is unattested, while alternative western Roman-frontier routes remain historical reconstructions.
Greek <i>ekklēsia</i> inherently means a Christian building or ecclesiastical institution.	No	Its semantic range centers on assembly or congregation and includes non-Christian civic assemblies.
English <i>church</i> and Greek <i>ekklēsia</i> have the same etymology and semantic range.	No	They have different linguistic histories. Their meanings overlap in the sense of a Christian congregation, but English <i>church</i> developed additional senses.

Proposition	Assessment	Reason
<i>Church</i> can appropriately translate <i>ekklēsia</i> .	Yes, according to context	English <i>church</i> can mean a Christian congregation, but its building, denominational, clerical, and institutional senses should not automatically be read into the Greek.
English Bible translators introduced the word <i>church</i> into English.	No	Old English <i>cirice</i> is attested in the early English Christian tradition centuries before the Reformation and the King James Bible.
The use of <i>church</i> rather than <i>congregation</i> for <i>ekklēsia</i> became a conscious English translation issue.	Documented	Tyndale preferred <i>congregation</i> , while the King James translation rules explicitly required retention of the traditional ecclesiastical word <i>Church</i> .
Scots <i>kirk</i> demonstrates a Celtic or Pictish origin for the word.	No	Scots <i>kirk</i> belongs to the Germanic linguistic tradition; Scottish Gaelic <i>eaglais</i> belongs to the Latin <i>ecclesia</i> tradition.

Endnotes

1. English Heritage, "Prehistory: Religion." <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/prehistory/religion/>
2. Gregory the Great, Letter to Mellitus (c. AD 601). <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/601gregory1-lettertomellitus.asp>
3. A. Hadrian Allcroft, *The Circle and the Cross: A Study in Continuity*, vol. 1 (1927), proposing continuity between prehistoric sacred circles, church sites, and the word church. https://www.romaneranames.uk/resource/allcroft_1.pdf
4. Nature, review of Allcroft, *The Circle and the Cross* (1928), describing his thesis that the pagan sacred circle survived in later Christian forms and even in the word church. <https://www.nature.com/articles/121743b0>
5. Nature, review of Allcroft's later volume (1931), noting the value of some continuity arguments while criticizing overextension; compare Lühr et al., EWA, s.v. "kiricha," for the modern etymological position. <https://www.nature.com/articles/127363a0> ; <https://ewa.saw-leipzig.de/articles/82130/de>
6. English Heritage, "Prehistory: Religion," on prehistoric ceremonial monuments, henges, stone circles, and sacred landscapes. <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/learn/story-of-england/prehistory/religion/>
7. Gregory the Great, Letter to Mellitus (c. AD 601), preserved by Bede, recommending purification and Christian reuse of pagan temples and redirection of customary feasting. <https://sourcebooks.web.fordham.edu/source/601gregory1-lettertomellitus.asp>
8. Julius Caesar, *The Gallic War* 6.13–14. Caesar describes the Druids, their sacrifices, their annual assembly at a consecrated place in the territory of the Carnutes, and the tradition that Druidic teaching originated in Britain.
9. Pliny the Elder, *Natural History* 16.95, describing the Druids' ritual cutting of mistletoe, sacrifice of white bulls, feasting, and prayer beneath the sacred oak.
10. Tacitus, *Annals* 14.29–30, describing the Roman attack on Mona (Anglesey), the Druids, women bearing torches, invocations, and the subsequent destruction of sacred groves.
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