

Deepening Understanding

YR4 Non-fiction Text

Who was St George? by Laura Curtis



Who do you think of when you think of England? Do you think of the Queen, Henry VIII or Shakespeare? Well, have you ever heard of our patron Saint? His name is St George and the anniversary of his death is celebrated on 23rd April every year on what is known as St George's Day. Let us now discover more about how this person from hundreds of years became so linked with our national identity.

Many years ago, there was a man. You might have thought he was an Englishman but in fact 'Georgios' was born in the country that is now called Turkey in the year 270AD. Being a successful fighter, this man ascended through the ranks of the Roman army (who had conquered the lands of Turkey at the time) until he was awarded the great honour of being the personal bodyguard to the Emperor Diocletian. However, the Emperor and Georgios had very different religious beliefs because the Emperor still worshipped the Pagan Gods but Georgios held faith in Jesus. Refusing to follow the Emperor's commands and convert from Christianity, Georgios was tortured, some say for a total of seven years. Furthermore, Georgios protested against the cruelty that the Romans inflicted

upon Christians. Throughout this time, he was so fearless and resolute that people were amazed by his strength. Legend says that he died and was brought back to life three times.

St George spent many years fighting for Christians, but he was sadly executed and laid to rest as a Saint in Israel on 23rd April 303AD - the day we now remember honour him as our patron saint. This means that people believe he is like a special protective guardian looking after our country and all the people in it.

Yet, there is more to this story of bravery. Over time, his real-life deeds were interwoven with those of legend. You have probably heard of the story of George and the Dragon, the many versions of which have been passed down from generation to generation. Yes, this is our Georgios. The story goes like this: there was once a town called Silene and the only well was guarded by a fearsome beast - the dragon. To gain access to the well, the dragon demanded that every day the villagers offered up one of their children (some versions say sheep) to be sacrificed. One day, St George was passing through the town and saw that the beautiful princess had been selected for most certain death. Promising that he would slay the dragon if the people converted to Christianity, he rescued the princess, killed the dragon and forever after the townspeople lived in gratitude, free to gain water whenever they wanted. St George was regarded as a hero.

Long after St George's death, his symbol of a red cross on a white background was flown on flags during the crusades in the 1100 and 1200's. The 'crusades' were religious wars fought in the medieval period between Christians and Muslims for the sacred holy lands in the Eastern Mediterranean. The English Knights wore the emblem of St George on their uniforms and then it became the official flag of England.

In the 14th Century, King Edward III (1327-77) read the by-now legendary tales of King Arthur and his knights of the round table and was so inspired by their noble deeds that he founded



something called the Order of the Garter around 1348. The Order of the Garter was a special group of knights and he chose St George as the patron of it. The badge of St George slaying the dragon remains an important symbol of knighthood in this country today.

Many artists over hundreds of years have tried to capture the moment in paint when St George brandishes his sword upon his magnificent white horse. Today, many people celebrate St George by holding parties, dancing or participating in parades whilst proudly waving an English flag. In churches, many Christians sing a hymn called 'Jerusalem' written by the poet William Blake. Interestingly, the story of St George is also remembered in other countries across the world. He represents bravery, honour and his story is one of good defeating evil which all people - wherever they live - can identify with.

So the next time you see a white flag with a red cross you will know the real-life story behind this fascinating figure from history.

