



St Marylebone  
Parish Church

## St George 2021

*Almighty God, who gave to your servant George boldness to Confess the Name of our Saviour Jesus Christ before the rulers of this world, and courage to die for this faith: Grant that we may always be ready to give a reason for the hope that is in us, and to suffer gladly for the sake of our Lord Jesus Christ; who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever.*

*In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.*

If there is one thing people know about today it is that today is the first day of the asparagus season. Forget about all of that imported stuff from Peru. Today the asparagus fields of Worcestershire and Lincolnshire come into their own.

If there is a second thing that people know it is that today is the birthday and death day of William Shakespeare – probably!

Bringing up the rear in third place, lies one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers, good in times of plague, pestilence, leprosy and battle – especially if one is armed only with an asparagus paring knife and a bottle of hollandaise!

Poor old St George, the patron saint of Greece, Venice, Genoa, Portugal, Ethiopia, Georgia and Catalonia – and England.

Born in the 3rd century in Cappadocia, St George probably died in Lydda (modern day Israel) in what was the Roman province of Palestine

the early years of the fourth century. At some point his body was moved to Lod and its became a centre of Christian pilgrimage.

Whilst St George was depicted from the 11th century as a chivalric knight or a warrior on horseback (so nothing to do with the Crusades then!), it is more likely that George was an officer in the Roman army.

Tradition says that St George was executed for refusing to make a sacrifice in honour of the pagan gods during the persecutions of the Emperor Diocletian.

From the 9th century onwards, St George was widely celebrated in England and he was already beginning to eclipse England's two saintly kings, Edmund the Martyr and Edward the Confessor in the popularity stakes by the time of the Crusades.

Edward I (1272-1307) and Edward III (1327-77) who founded the Order of the Garter under the patronage of St George in 1348, both adopted heraldic banners bearing the emblem of St George (a red cross on a white background) and it was St George whose prayers were sought so fervently (as Shakespeare reminds us) on the battlefields of Agincourt in 1415 after which St George had well and truly established himself as the nation's patron saint.

150 years later, in the reign of that most Godly Defender of the Faith, Henry VIII, the cross of St George began its life as a national flag.

The story goes that St George rode into Silene (modern day Libya) to free the city from a dragon who had a taste for human flesh, post-dates the real George by several centuries and originally the stories may simply have started as a representation of the battle between Good and Evil (probably compounded by the martamoros traditions of Spain). But the story was developed and popularised throughout the Middle Ages not least in that great compendium of stories about saints' lives, The Golden Legend.

During the First World War – a ghostly apparition of St George is said to have helped British troops during their retreat from Mons, and the naval commander of the Zeebrugge Raid cited the saint as inspiration.

During the Second World War, 1940 King George VI created a new award for acts of the greatest heroism or courage in circumstance of extreme danger which he named the George Cross, the medal bearing the image of St George vanquishing the dragon. The subject of the great sculpture surmounting St Marylebone's own war memorial.

So, take your pick, April 23<sup>rd</sup> – national day, Shakespeare's birthday, or a day with the help and the prayers of St George to conquer our inner and outer demons.

St George, holy martyr of God, pray for us.



*The St Marylebone War Memorial*