



Scottish Culture and History



St Andrew

Saint Andrew is the Patron Saint of Scotland, and St. Andrew's Day is celebrated by Scots around the world on the 30 November. The flag of Scotland is the Cross of St. Andrew, widely displayed as a symbol of national identity.

Little is known about the life of St. Andrew. He was thought to have been a fisherman in Galilee (now part of Israel), along with his elder brother, Simon Peter (Saint Peter). Both became followers (apostles) of Jesus Christ, founder of the Christian religion.

Tradition has it that, when the Apostles apportioned their areas of activity, Andrew was given the area around the Black Sea where he established the Church in many places. His missionary activity came to a halt after he converted the wife of the governor. He was sentenced by the Romans in Patras, Southern Greece, to die by crucifixion. The story of him being crucified upside down is of much later origin. The diagonal shape of his cross is said to be the basis for the Cross of St. Andrew that appears on the Scottish Flag.



The Saltire

St. Andrew's bones were entombed, and around 300 years later were moved by Emperor Constantine the Great to his new capital, Constantinople (now Istanbul in Turkey). Legend suggests that a Greek Monk (although others describe him as an Irish assistant of St. Columba) called St. Rule (or St. Regulus) was warned in a dream that St. Andrew's remains were to be moved and was directed by an angel to take those of the remains which he could to the "ends of the earth" for safe-keeping. St. Rule dutifully followed these directions, removing a tooth, an arm bone, a kneecap and some fingers from St. Andrew's tomb and transporting these as far away as he could. Scotland was close to the extremities of the then known world, and it was here that St. Rule was shipwrecked with his precious cargo.

St. Rule is said to have come ashore at a Pictish settlement on the East Coast of Scotland. This later became St. Andrews. Thus, the association of St. Andrew with Scotland was said to have begun. Perhaps a more likely story is that Acca, the Bishop of Hexham, who was a renowned collector of relics, brought the relics of St. Andrew to Scotland in 733. There certainly seems to have been a religious centre at St. Andrews at that time, either founded by St. Rule in the 6th century or by a Pictish King, Ungus, who reigned from 731 to 761. Whichever tale is true, the relics were placed in a specially constructed chapel. This chapel was replaced by the Cathedral of St. Andrews in 1160, and St. Andrews became the religious capital of Scotland and a great centre for Medieval pilgrims who came to view the relics.

So why did Scotland decide to adopt Andrew as their Patron Saint? Andrew had no connection with Britain at all so far as can be ascertained. Why wasn't Ninian, the first missionary to the Scots of Dalriada, or Mungo, the missionary to the Britons of Strathclyde, whose other name was Kentigern, or Columba, the missionary to the Picts, given the place? The fact is that it was a political and financial ploy by the King of Scots aided by the Scottish Church. The annual revenue of the Scottish Church was substantial and the Archbishop of York laid claim to be the head of the Church in Scotland, a claim which has always been denied.



Rough location of Dalriada
(light shaded area)

The Patron Saint of York was and still is St. Peter. In making Andrew the Patron Saint of Scotland, the Church in Scotland was stating in very clear terms that their Patron Saint, as "first called" of the Apostles, took precedence over Peter. It also brought into play the rivalry between Canterbury and York. That Scotland received Christianity long before the arrival of St. Augustine in England cannot be denied but that this is buttressed by the fact that Scotland had the "first called" of the Apostles as their Patron Saint, gave this fact greater significance.

Perhaps St. Andrew is the appropriate Patron Saint of the Scots, maybe not because of his connection during his lifetime, which was non-existent, but because of the travels of his bones after his death. There can be little doubt that while many ethnic groups who have travelled to other lands and made their homes there, the three nations that have St. Andrew as Patron Saint, namely Greece, Russia and most significantly Scotland, seem to hold most firmly to their origins.

What ultimately happened to the relics of St. Andrew, which were stored in St. Andrews Cathedral, is not known, although it is most likely that these were destroyed during the Scottish Reformation. The Protestant cause, propounded by John Knox, George Wishart and others, won out over Roman Catholicism during the Reformation resulting in the Saints' relics and the decoration of the Roman Catholic churches of Scotland being expunged during the process of converting them to the harsh simplicity of Knox's brand of Calvinism. The place where these relics were kept within the Cathedral at St. Andrews is now marked by a plaque, amongst the ruins, for visitors to see. The larger part of St. Andrew's remains were stolen from Constantinople in 1210 and are now to be found at Amalfi in Southern Italy. In 1879, the Archbishop of Amalfi sent a small piece of the Saint's shoulder blade to the re-established Roman Catholic community in Scotland. During his visit in 1969, Pope Paul VI gave further relics of St. Andrew to Scotland.

St Andrew has served Scotland well over the centuries and still continues to do so. St Andrews Day and its associated celebrations world-wide, both by Scots generally and in the many church services, is an opportunity to celebrate the life of Scotland's Patron Saint, St Andrew.