

Saint Andrew's Day

St. Andrew is the Patron Saint of Scotland and his feast day is on November 30th, giving Scotsmen (and women) the world over another excuse to celebrate.

THE ORIGINS OF THE FESTIVAL

Saint Andrew was one of Jesus's original disciples, the brother of Simon Peter and a fisherman by trade, who lived in Bethsaida in Galilee (in present-day Israel.) He was originally a follower of St. John the Baptist until he was called to follow Jesus. After Jesus's crucifixion and subsequent resurrection, Andrew travelled widely in Greece and Asia Minor, preaching as he went and making converts to the new Christian religion. Eventually he fell foul of the Roman authorities who were trying to stamp out the new religion, which refused to worship the Emperor as a god, and he was crucified on a diagonal cross in Patras in southern Greece and buried there.



300 years after his death the Emperor Constantine decided to remove the Saint's bones to Constantinople, but according to legend the monk St. Regulus was warned in a dream by an angel, who told him to remove as many bones as he could to the "ends of the earth" to keep them safe.

As far as the Greeks and Romans were concerned, Scotland was as near to the world's end as you could get, so some of his remains were taken to Scotland. St. Regulus brought the relics ashore at what is now St Andrews (some versions say he was shipwrecked there) and a chapel was built to house the bones, followed in 1160 by a cathedral. St Andrews was the religious capital of Scotland and an important place of pilgrimage.

A more plausible version of how the Saint's bones found their way to Scotland is that Acca, Bishop of Hexham, who was a renowned collector of religious relics, actually bought the bones quite legitimately and took them there in 733 AD.

Unfortunately the bones have now disappeared, probably destroyed during the Reformation when anything connected with "Catholic idolatry" was removed without trace. The site where the relics had been is now marked by a plaque in the ruins of the Cathedral in St Andrews.

Not all of St. Andrew's bones were originally sent to Scotland, the rest were stolen from Constantinople by the Crusaders in around 1204 and taken to Amalfi in Italy, from where some fragments were sent in 1879 to Scotland, and in 1969 Pope Paul VI gave some further relics to the Catholic church in Scotland during a visit there and these are now displayed in a reliquary in St. Mary's Roman Catholic Cathedral in Edinburgh.



The cross St. Andrew was crucified on has been adopted as the national flag of Scotland, later incorporated into the Union Flag. One old legend says that in 832 AD an army of Scots led by King Angus was facing an army from the kingdom of Northumbria under Athelstan. The Scottish king prayed to St Andrew for help, and the saltire of St Andrew (the diagonal cross) appeared above them against the background of a clear blue sky. This encouraged the Scots and the battle was duly fought and won, and the saltire is now the national flag (reputedly the oldest national flag in Europe.)



CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS

St. Andrew's Day is mainly celebrated north of the Border and by Scots living outside of Scotland, and "St. Andrew's Societies" flourish. The Saint's Day is usually a celebration of general Scottishness with traditional food, music (especially bagpipes) and dancing, and of course good Scotch.

The **thistle** is widely regarded as the emblem of Scotland. There are several varieties of thistle, most of them common weeds throughout the British Isles and nearly all characterised by extreme prickliness. The legend of how the thistle came to be adopted by the Scots tells of how a group of Scots were sleeping in a field when a group of marauding Vikings crept up to attack. Fortunately one of the Vikings stood on a thistle, whose prickles penetrated through to his foot and made him yell with pain, waking the sleeping Scots who were able to fight off their attackers. So, from that day, or so the story goes, the thistle has been adopted as Scotland's national emblem.

