

# ST GEORGE'S CHAPEL ARCHIVES & CHAPTER LIBRARY



## DRAGONS AND SWORDS WORK SHEET

### Background notes

These notes provide more detailed information about the life and legend of St George, and how he came to be associated with the Order of the Garter. Also provided are answers to the questions on the activity sheet.

### St George

St George is one of the most venerated Saints in the Roman Catholic, Anglican, Eastern Orthodox, Oriental Orthodox and Eastern Catholic Churches. As well as being the patron Saint of England he is a patron Saint for many countries including: Greece, Ethiopia, Portugal and Russia.

It is most commonly suggested that St George was born in Nicomedia (in modern Turkey) between 275AD and 285AD to a Christian noble family. When his father died George, aged fourteen, went to the city of Nicomedia and applied to be a soldier under the Emperor Diocletian. By his late 20s he had progressed to become a member of the imperial guard to Diocletian. George was known as one of the emperor's favourite soldiers but in 302AD the emperor issued an edict to arrest every Christian soldier in the Roman army. George refused to convert to Paganism and publicly declared his allegiance to Christianity. He was tortured before being beheaded in 303AD. His body was buried in Lydda and he soon came to be venerated as a martyr. He appeared in Eastern Orthodox iconography from at least the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD.

### The legend of St George and the dragon

The legend of St George and the dragon developed in the West when crusaders returned from the Holy Land bringing with them the story of the Christian martyr. The version which included the slaying of a dragon was popularised in Jacobus de Voragine's *Golden Legend* – a collection of fanciful hagiographies compiled around 1260 and which became popular across Europe (over a thousand manuscript copies survive and when printing was invented in the 1450s it was translated into every major European language. A printed Latin copy published in 1496 is held in the St George's Chapel Archives and Chapter Library).

The tale suggests that a dragon made its nest by the spring which provided water for the city of Silene (or Lydda, depending on the source). To collect water each day the citizens of Silene lured the dragon away with the temptation of food – this was initially a sheep, but when no sheep could be found a maiden chosen by lot (some versions say a child) was sent instead. On the day that the king's daughter was chosen St George happened to be riding past and so, after fortifying himself with the sign of the cross, rescued the princess by grievously wounding the dragon with his lance (or sword). St George then led the dragon into the city, promising to slay it if the people converted to Christianity. They agreed and on the site where the dragon died the king built a church to the Virgin Mary and St George; from this church's altar a spring appeared which was said to cure all diseases.

Through the legend, St George became associated with the symbolic triumph of good over evil and is one of the most widely represented saints in Christian art – in England alone there are over one hundred surviving medieval wall paintings of St George. He was portrayed as a military saint and in the Middle Ages was often called upon as a protector by the crusaders. In the 11<sup>th</sup> century many Norman crusaders wore pendants with an image of St George for protection.

St George was proclaimed England's patron saint in the mid-thirteenth century (supplanting Edmund the Martyr and Edward the Confessor) and was subsequently proclaimed protector of the royal family by Edward III in the fourteenth century.

### **St George and the Order of the Garter**

Edward III formed the Order of the Garter as the highest order of chivalry in 1348 with St George as its patron saint. St George appealed to Edward III because of his status as a military saint and his associations with chivalry. The establishment of the College of St George in 1348 as a spiritual counterpart to the Order of the Garter involved a joint re-dedication of the chapel already within Windsor Castle to St Edward the Confessor, the Virgin Mary and St George. However, St George quickly became the most famous of the three patrons through his association with the Order of the Garter's ideals including loyalty, bravery and chivalrous conduct. The College held several relics reputed to be from St George, including an arm, two fingers, a piece of his skull, and his heart.

### **Answers to activity sheet questions**

The printed image at the top of the sheet shows St George killing the dragon is a woodcut featured in Alexander Barclay's 1515 *Life of Saint George*.

### **Can you find these dragons in St George's Chapel?**

1. This dragon and white greyhound can be found above the entrance to the Urswick Chantry Chapel in the north-west corner of the Nave. The Chapel was founded in 1494 as a Chantry for two Canons and a Virger. It was further endowed in 1507 by the Chapter for Dean Christopher Urswick – a close friend of Henry VII who helped to arrange his marriage to Elizabeth of York. The large monument in the Urswick Chantry is to Princess Charlotte, daughter of George IV, and her stillborn child.
2. This dragon may be found in the interior of the Urswick Chantry Chapel.
3. Two examples of this dragon being slayed by St George can be found on the organ screen ceiling by the entrance to the Quire from the Nave. The organ screen was built in the reign of George III using Coade stone; a ceramic material which was easily moulded, had the appearance of stone and which has proved to be remarkably weather resistant. It was produced in a factory in Lambeth and sold commercially from 1769 to 1833.
4. This dragon is found on the painting of Henry VII in the South Quire Aisle. The four panels, of which the painting is one, were painted in the early sixteenth century. They show four royal figures: Prince Edward (the son of Henry VI), Edward IV, Edward V (who disappeared from the Tower of London, traditionally supposed to have been murdered by his uncle, Richard III) and Henry VII. All four of these figures were served as secretary or tutor by Bishop Oliver King (a canon of St George's Chapel from 1480); the Oliver King Chapel can be seen opposite the panel.

### **The sword of Edward III**

1. The sword of Edward III may be found in the South Quire Aisle. [It is one of the items rescued from the Chapel by the Dean during the Roundhead occupation of the Castle in the 1640s.]
2. The sword, which is 2 metres long (6' 8 ¼"), is pointing upwards.
3. It is thought that this two handled sword was used for ceremonial purposes and carried in an upright position during processions. It is thought to have been hung over Edward III's stall in the original Chapel.
4. The painting of Edward III holding the sword is found in the South Quire Aisle next to the sword. It was painted in 1615.
5. Edward III is wearing the crown of England on his head, which was inherited from his father Edward II. The two crowns impaled on the sword are those of France and Scotland, a symbolic representation of Edward III's claim to their thrones.

## **Statue of St George**

6. This statue of St George may be found in the courtyard of the Dean's Cloister. The fountain and statue were installed in 1998 to mark the 650<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the College of St George. The 20<sup>th</sup> century statue is a copy of a 15<sup>th</sup> century wooden carving which was originally in the Chapel Quire but which is now housed in the St George's Chapel Archives.