

Deep Roots
By Wilma Heberling
Saint Andrew's Day

Most people with any knowledge of Scotland know that November 30th is celebrated as St. Andrew's Day. St. Andrew is acknowledged as the patron saint of Scotland in the same way as St. Patrick is of Ireland, and Saints George and David are of England and Wales. We seem to know the stories, history, and legends of Saint Patrick, but why not Andrew of Scotland? Andrew, the brother of Peter, was the first disciple called by Christ. He was a fisherman. Andrew traveled to Asia Minor, Macedonia and Russia. He ended up in Patras, Greece, where he was martyred by crucifixion on an X-shaped cross (saltire). He became the patron saint of Greece, Russia and, of course, Scotland. Now the name Andrew and being a fisherman are good Scottish connections, but Andrew is the English translation of his Hebrew name, and where he fished was an obscure inland sea in the Middle East, so why Scotland?

Legends abound about Andrew, but when one sifts through them, there is little doubt left that there is indeed some tie between Andrew and the place in Scotland that bears his name, St. Andrew's. At some time during the 300's or 400's, a few of his bones were carried by either a Greek monk, or Regulus, an Irish assistant to Columba, to a Pictish settlement in the east of Scotland for safe keeping. This settlement later became known as "St. Andrew's" because of this sacred connection.

This is all well and good, but why the white cross on the dark blue background? Ah yes! This is the history of Scotland after all, so there has to be a battle involved!

In the 600's and 700's—sometimes referred to as the Dark Ages—there were numerous battles between the Northumbrians, from the north of England, and the Picts of Scotland. One of these battles, the Battle of Dunnichen, near Forfar, in Angus, was a particularly bloody one. King Ecgfrith of Northumbria led his troops into Pictish territory hoping to seize the wonderful fertile farming land there. Well, it didn't work out. As the noted historian of the times, The Venerable Bede, wrote, "Ecgfrith was slain, and henceforth the hopes and strengths of the English realm began to waver...many of the English were slain, or forced to flee from Pictish territory."

The Northumbrians didn't forget, however, and fifty years later they again invaded. The battle took place near the present day village of Athelstaneford, outside Haddington, East Lothian, Scotland. It was this battle that cemented Andrew as Scotland's saint and the Saltire as Scotland's flag.

According to Walter Bower's Latin history of Scotland, "*Scottichronicon*," around the year 750 a Pictish warrior-king, called Unust, was losing a battle to the Northumbrians. He claimed that St. Andrew appeared to him in a dream, and promised victory. Following his dream, Unust saw a huge cloud formation in the form of a *crux decussate* (Saltire) against the blue sky. This was the cross on which Andrew was crucified, so it

was taken as a very good omen. This is why the Scottish flag is a white cross on a blue background.

The early Church of Scotland built up the legend of Andrew by promoting the story that it was Regulus (not the Greek monk) who brought the relics at the behest of an angel. There is no doubt that there is some connection between the Saint's bones and the site, and soon the area in Fife became a shrine, a cathedral town and a university town. It was a site of pilgrimage.

I lived for a short time, in the late 1940's, in Athelstaneford. It was a sleepy little spot to which no one paid any attention.

Today, tourists are the pilgrims. Both Athelstaneford, dubbed "the birthplace of the Saltire," and St. Andrew's, a golf nirvana and center of religion and education, are meccas for visitors. If you plan to visit Scotland in 2009, the "Year of Homecoming", try to put these on your itinerary, and on November 30th hang your Saltire with pride for St. Andrew and Scotland.

References

- Bede, *History of the Church*, ca. 731
- Walter Bower, *Scottichronicon*, 1447
- Magnus Magnusson, *Scotland: The Story of a Nation*, 2000