

Apparently, these countries: Catalonia, England, Ethiopia, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Lithuania, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Portugal, Russia and Serbia, all have had the same patron saint - St George. Ironically, not Turkey, which is where he came from (inasmuch as we can know what is true or not about his life).

Diocletian was upset that, during his persecution of Christians, one of his senior soldiers, George, had refused to denounce the faith. So, around the year 303, Diocletian tried many bribes to convert him, then reverted to torture (from which, legend has it, he repeatedly recovered), then beheading (from which he did not!).

Although known about in England since 7th century, medieval crusaders really bumped up George's reputation with stories they brought back from the middle east: miracles, dragon slaying, etc. 23rd April was declared St George's Day here in 1222; within the following century he had become England's patron saint - indeed, in 1415 (after Agincourt) the archbishop of Canterbury, Henry Chichele, promoted George's Day to be observed with as much celebration as Christmas. (Is anyone in the government reading this?) It hasn't been, though, since 1778. (Thanks very much, Archbishop Cornwallis and King George III.)

Nonetheless, George is now well established as the English patron: Edward III put the country's premier knighthood (the Garter) under St George; the national flag is his cross (as is the major component of the Royal Navy's White Ensign - not bad going for a pongo!); Henry V rallied the troops at Agincourt by St George; George VI's medal for the most conspicuous courage in extreme danger - the George Cross - has on it St George slaying the dragon.

However, this year we're going to celebrate St George officially on 2nd May. Oh yes, the whinging about that! How dare the Church put Holy Saturday (which this year is 23rd April) ahead of St George. Outrageous.

St George: patron saint of England.

St George: sainted for putting Christ's Church ahead of himself.

I won't celebrate May Day this year - I'll be celebrating St George.