

The background story to the St Andrews Tide tradition

Blackbirding

On 20th September, 1871, the *Southern Cross* mission ship of the Diocese of Melanesia in the Pacific Ocean, rode at anchor outside the reef of the Island of Nukapu in the Santa Cruz Group. The bishop of the diocese, John Coleridge Patteson, was visiting the area, and had received news of trouble on the island. Shortly before the arrival of the *Southern Cross*, a group of white men had disembarked on Nukapu, pretending to be friends and even - so we are told - using Bishop Patteson's name. The white men were engaged in "black-birding" - that is, collecting slaves for the plantations of Fiji and Queensland. This group had made off with five young men. Tempers were high and, in this atmosphere, Patteson prepared to land, and to comfort the local people. The bishop landed, leaving a young priest, Joe Atkin, on board the *Southern Cross*.

Revenge

At 4.30 p.m., a canoe came out from the island with another canoe in tow. This canoe cast off, leaving the second canoe to drift slowly towards the ship. As it came across the water of the lagoon, the sailors on board the *Southern Cross* could see that it contained the dead body of Bishop Patteson. The uncle of the five kidnapped youths had vowed to kill the first white man to set foot on the island: Bishop Patteson was that man.

A Tradition is Born

News of the bishop's death took some time to reach England, and it was not until near the end of November that the full facts became known at the headquarters in London of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel. The Queen was shocked, and asked Parliament to outlaw the slave trade in the Pacific. The SPG, joined in this request by CMS, asked the Archbishop of Canterbury to appoint an annual day of prayer for the mission work of the Church throughout the world. It happened that news of Patteson's death was received near the Feast of St. Andrew on 30th November and, as Andrew first called his brother Simon to meet Jesus, so St. Andrew's Tide was suggested as a most appropriate time for prayer for mission.

Pray fervently....

The Church is called upon to pray fervently for the mission of the Church at all times, but especially on the Eve of St. Andrew's Day. When we do this, we stand in the tradition of prayer which was inspired by the courageous life and faithful death of John Coleridge Patteson, Bishop of Melanesia.

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