

Dressed to kill the dragon: images of St George

Background Notes

Dr Antonia Whitley - 16 October 2013

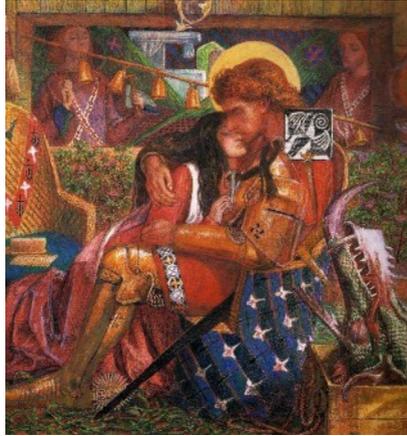


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There is a vast bibliography on St George. His popularity spills over into literature and art in which he is an important source of inspiration for artists. Spencer's Fairie Queene (1590), in which he appears as the Redcrosse Knight of Holiness, must surely rate as one of the greatest poems of the English language.



Dante Gabriel Rossetti:

The Wedding of St George and Princess Sabra 1857

From the Middle Ages (when his popularity began to spread exponentially), he has remained an important cultural, religious and national symbol not just for England, for he is also the patron saint of numerous other places including: Aragon, Armenia, Antioch, Catalonia, Genoa, Georgia, Germany, Greece; Hungary, Istanbul, Lithuania, Moscow ('St George for Holy Russia' was the battle cry of the Tsars), Palestine, Portugal, and Venice (second to St Mark). He is also the patron of soldiers, cavalry and chivalry; of farmers and field workers, Boy Scouts and butchers; of horses, riders and saddlers; and of sufferers from leprosy, plague and of Syphilis.

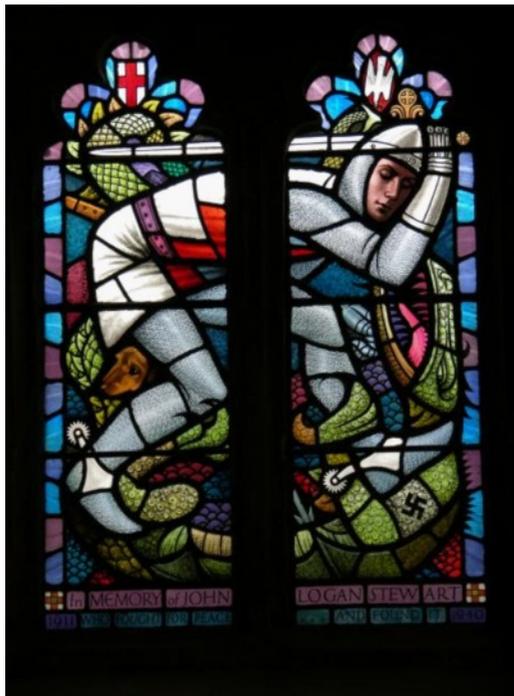
St George and World War II

I will not be talking about St George and World War II, however he was also invoked then, as in the two-light window designed by John Petts at the Church of St Mary, Llandoverly, Camarthenshire (1965).

This stained-glass window was commissioned by his parents, as a memorial to Captain John Logan Stewart, of Llanfair House, killed at Dunkirk in 1940. The design includes a portrait of Captain Stewart (as Saint George) and of his favourite dog.

The swastika on the dragon's limb symbolizes the evil, which was defeated in World War II. The inscription reads:

'He fought for peace – and found it.'



Most recently, the image of St George and the dragon features on the new £5 coins struck to commemorate the birth of Prince George. The design is by Benedetto Pistrucci, an Italian engraver, who worked for the Royal Mint in the early 19th century; the image is normally associated with the gold sovereign. A limited edition of a £20 coin, made from fine silver with the same design has also been produced.



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