

The Legend of the Deerhurst Dragon, and St George's Day.



Once upon a time, a long time ago, the tiny hamlet of Deerhurst Walton near Tewkesbury, was being terrorised by a fierce dragon or serpent, that some say had been swept up the Severn by the floods. Things were getting pretty desperate, they were running out of virgins to sacrifice, the BBC sent Kate Adey AND Lyse Doucet to commentate, etc.

The response to an appeal by the villagers to the Government was pretty disappointing (nothing much has changed!), but then along came farmworker George Smith, who fed milk to the dragon, and then cut off its head with an axe whilst it slept! The people were very grateful, Saint George (as he was beginning to be called) married the farmer's daughter, and the Smith family still farm the land to this day. The pond is still there, (Apperley Scouts sailed rafts on it years ago) but the axe which did the deed has disappeared. It was apparently put on display in Cheltenham for some time, then it was in the keeping of a member of the Smith family but has now been lost. There is a carving of the dragon in Deerhurst Church. (Picture above)

There are several accounts of this story, from the 15th (Robert Atkins) and 18th centuries (Samuel Rudder), a famous poem by William Vizard, and even a song, by local musician Gwilym Davies. There is also a hymn "When a Knight Won His Spurs" by Jan Struther for St George's Day to the tune Stowey.

So, when it is April 23rd, St George's Day, and you are wearing your red rose, and people talk about St George being a Roman cavalry commander from Asia Minor, (a plot to help Turkey to join the European Union!) you can say "I know differently! St George was English, and he lived in Deerhurst Walton!"

Peter Cripps

PS April 23rd was also the birthday of William Shakespeare (1664), JMW Turner (1775), Sergei Prokofiev (1891), and Shirley Temple (1928)