

St Margaret of Antioch

St Margaret, also known as St Marina the Great Martyr in the Greek Orthodox Church, was born in Psidia (modern day Yalvac in Turkey). Her feast day is commonly celebrated on 20th July in the western church.

St Margaret was one of the most popular medieval saints whose veneration came to England in the 11th century with returning Crusaders. Consequently, there are over 250 churches dedicated to her in England; the most famous being that next to Westminster Abbey. She is one of the Fourteen Holy Helpers and was one of the voices which Joan of Arc claimed to hear.

Her story is one quite common to the early Christian period in the Roman Empire,



where persecution of the Christians was particularly harsh under Diocletian (284-305 AD). The daughter of a pagan priest, her mother died soon after her birth and she was brought up by a Christian woman. Beautiful, pious and a virtuous girl, she was desired by a powerful pagan Roman official who demanded she renounce her beliefs. He refused to accept her rejection and had her tortured, during which many miraculous incidents occurred. In one attempt Satan took the form of a dragon and swallowed her, but its stomach, irritated by the cross she carried, rejected her and she emerged from it alive and intact.

Thereafter, her symbol became a dragon and she was the patron saint of childbirth. Chapels to her can be found in churches today, often in the north aisle.

Even in the Middle Ages (500 - 1500AD) it was considered that her martyrology was too fantastic and the part about the dragon was to be considered as a legend. Latterly, she was removed from the Roman Catholic Saints' calendar as lacking authenticity.

