

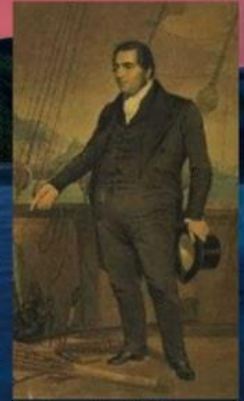
“Greater love hath no man than this,
that a man lay down his life for his friends.” John 15:13

Tribute to Reverend John Williams (1796-1839)

(A Bicentenary Legacy Project by the Cook Islands Christian Church Bicentennial Celebrations Unit)

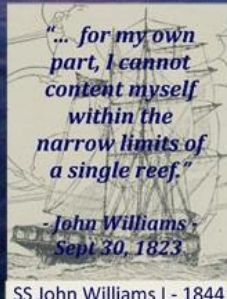


This plaque marks the official commencement of the preparatory programme for the commemoration of the 200th anniversary of the arrival of Christianity to the Cook Islands. It was unveiled on 25 July 2014 in recognition of the accomplishments of the English Missionary Reverend John Williams (1796-1839) of the London Missionary Society (LMS) in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the South Sea Islands of the Pacific. Williams, the son of John Williams and Hannah James Maidmeet of England, was a legendary and inspirational figure with a dynamic personality and great sense of duty who acquired fame as a missionary which ended abruptly through his martyrdom in Erromanga, New Hebrides on 20 November 1839. Williams was born on 29 June 1796 at Rupert House, High Cross Green, Tottenham, London. He was raised a Congregationalist but in 1814 underwent an Evangelical conversion and became a member of the Tabernacle Church (Calvinistic Methodist) where he was taught grammar and exegesis. He applied for missionary service with the LMS in 1815 and was ordained at Surrey Chapel on 30 September 1816. On 29 October 1816 he married Mary Chawner, formerly of Denston Hall, near Cheadle, Staffordshire. On 17 November 1816, Rev. and Mrs Williams and other LMS Missionaries voyaged to the Society Islands (Tahiti) via Rio, Cape Horn, Hobart and Sydney arriving in Moorea on 17 November 1817. The LMS missionaries have served in Tahiti since 1797. They served in the Leeward islands of Huahine and Raiatea with Rev. Lancelot Threlkeld. In Raiatea Williams had encouragement from the Chief Tamatoa of Raiatea.



Rev. John Williams

In 1821, Williams moved his attention to other island groups in Polynesia. He reasons and stopped by at Aitutaki to place two Tahitian Teachers, Papehia landed at Aitutaki on 26 October 1821 - a day currently celebrated annually Sydney, Williams underwent medical treatment and bought a schooner he They returned to Raiatea (via New Zealand and Rurutu) arriving on 22 June price of the Endeavour and renamed it “Te Matamua” (The Beginning) and On 4 July 1823 Williams set sail for Aitutaki arriving there on 9 July to find island, which spurred Williams on to take the gospel to the rest of the Aitutaki on 11 July 1823. They took on board Tapaeru-ariki (the daughter of Rarotonga with her niece Mata Kavau on 12 August 1814 by Captain *(please refer to the Tapaeru-ariki Memorial Plaque for more details)* and five



SS John Williams I - 1844

and Mrs Williams travelled to Sydney for medical and Vahapata, to evangelize the island. They throughout the Cook Islands as Gospel Day. In named the Endeavour for use as a missionary ship. 1822. Tamatoa reimbursed Williams the purchase Williams continued his missionary work in Raiatea, Tahaa, Borabora and Maupiti. that Papehia and his colleagues had managed to convert practically the entire Southern Cook Islands with Rarotonga as the main objective. They departed Rupe from the Chiefly Makea Tribe of Rarotonga who was kidnapped from Goodenough of the “Cumberland” and dropped off in Aitutaki on 14 August 1814 Rarotongans who had drifted to the island by canoe some years earlier - Tairi and

Te Iro from Ngatangia with their wives and one other woman. They spent 8 18 July. After an unsuccessful attempt at evangelizing Mangaia they turned to the neighbouring islands of Atiu (19 July 1823), Mitiaro (21 July 1823), and Mauke (22 July 1823) before returning to Atiu to drop off Rongomatane Ngakaara Ariki who had accompanied them to Mitiaro and Mauke. It was Rongomatane Ariki who pointed out to Williams the direction to Rarotonga (SW X W) and Te Matamua arrived at Rarotonga on 25 July 1823 where he left Papehia to evangelize the island and returned to Raiatea. *(Please refer to the Papehia Memorial Plaque for more details.)* From its early beginnings, Christianity eventually reached the rest of the Cook Islands commencing with Mangaia (15 June 1824), Manihiki (8 August 1849), Rakahanga (15 August 1849), Penrhyn (13 March 1854), Pukapuka/Nassau (6 December 1857) and Palmerston (25 May 1863).

John and Mary Williams returned to Rarotonga in 1827 (bringing Rev. Charles and Mrs Elizabeth Pitman) where they were stranded for a year. During that time Williams started the task of translating the New Testament to Rarotongan and built a ship named “The Messenger of Peace” and returned on it to Raiatea. He revisited Rarotonga several times between 1830 and 1833 with stopovers in Tonga and Samoa. Williams returned to England in 1834 for a series of fundraising lecture tours, to recruit more missionaries for Samoa, to raise funds to purchase a new ship, to publish his book “A Narrative of Missionary Enterprises in the South Sea Islands” and to supervise the printing of the Rarotongan New Testament Bible. He returned to the Polynesian islands in 1837 to continue his missionary work. In 1839 Williams ventured to Erromanga in the southern New Hebrides landing at Dillon’s Bay on 20th November 1839. The local inhabitants were not welcoming and Williams and his assistant James Harris were killed and eaten. His death as a martyr resulted in Williams being seen as a heroic figure and a series of seven LMS ships commissioned by the LMS between 1844 and 1968 were named *John Williams*. The original LMS Church was renamed the Cook Islands LMS Church in 1852 and formally became the Cook Islands Christian Church (CICC) in 1968 through an Act of Parliament. A Cenotaph (pictured left) was erected by the people of Rarotonga in 1839 in memory of Reverend John Williams. Mrs Williams returned to England in 1841. Tapaeru-ariki continued her support for the missionaries and is buried next to the John Williams Cenotaph. Papehia also continued his great work and settled in Puaikura (Arurangi) on the Western side of Rarotonga in November 1828. To God be the Glory and Praise.



Mrs Mary Williams

(This memorial plaque proudly sponsored by the Avarua Cook Islands Christian Church)