



Rev. John Williams was a preacher at Cote Baptist Chapel about 3 miles from Bampton. On April 11, 1838, John and Mary Williams set sail from London, bound for the other side of the world. The wharves, docks, and bridges were lined with people who came to see them off. Mortality was so high in the South Pacific that they made the difficult decision to leave their six-year-old son in England. As the ship pulled away, a kind relative lifted Samuel high into the air so his parents could see him in the crowd. The eyes of the little boy streamed with tears, but he was old enough to know that his Mommy and Daddy were going back to his dark-skinned friends to give them the Gospel. That morning, his loving father had written a note in Samuel's journal, giving him a warm goodbye and a fatherly exhortation to live for Christ if perchance they never met again in this life.

Only one year later, soon after he had arrived back in the South Pacific, John Williams set his sights upon the New Hebrides islands. It was known that the inhabitants of these islands were among the fiercest cannibals in the Pacific. Leaving his wife at the mission station on Upolu, Williams sailed toward the New Hebrides.

In the morning of November 20, 1839, John Williams prepared to land on the island of Erromango. Sadly he was brutally beaten with a war club, and his corpse was dragged into the dense vegetation to be cooked and eaten. The grief-stricken native workers, the faithful fellow-laborers of John Williams, watched the entire ordeal from the boat. They were the ones who had to tell Mrs. Williams the sad news. She took it with grace and Christian fortitude. Her eldest son, John, continued his father's work in Samoa. Samuel, the little boy left in England, also became a messenger of the Prince of Peace. He carried the middle name, Tamatoa, the name of the Island King who first welcomed his father to Raiatea.

*John Williams, The Martyr Missionary of Polynesia* by James Ellis



Extract from "History of the Parish and Town of Bampton, with the District and Hamlets belonging to it" by the Rev. J. A. Giles, DCL.

Bampton: Printed at the Author's Private Press, 1848. P. 109

NOTE. The manor of Shifford has, of late years, fallen into a sort of abeyance, no doubt because the population has become so small, and from the fact that almost the whole of it is divided between the two large farms, called Old and New Shifford. The tenants of both these farms have for a large number of years been members of the family of Williams. The late Mr. John Williams (formerly of Coats) who died in 1821, with his sons Mr. Michael and Mr. Peter Williams (the present tenant) have successively held the farm of Old Shifford of the earls of Harcourt.

John Williams, missionary, martyred at Erromanga, and Sir James Williams, Knight, ex-shariff, were branches of this family. The following account of the former may be of interest to my readers:

"The Revd. John Williams was the great grandson of Mr. James Williams of Southleigh, Devon, who was for 40 years a Deacon of the Baptist Church at Coats. He left England in 1816 as a missionary to the island of Raiatea, the largest of the Society Islands, under the auspices of the London Missionary Society. For twenty years he prosecuted his self-denying labours in the Isles of the Pacific, with an amount of success not often realized. In addition to his stated labours in preaching and teaching the truths of the gospel, in establishing schools, in translating and printing the scriptures and elementary publications, his inventive mind enabled him to instruct the natives in improved methods of constructing their houses, in burning lime from their coral reefs, in erecting simple sugar mills, and even in the construction of a sloop of some 60 or 80 tons, in all which labours



like another Oberlin, Williams was the pioneer, working laboriously with his own hands. — The perseverance which he displayed in overcoming the obstacles which arose from his want of tools, and the destruction of his only pair of bellows by the rats, are graphically described in his *Missionary Enterprises*, some 9 or 10 editions of which have been published — His self-devotion and disinterestedness at length had its due effect upon the minds of the natives; animated with the zeal of the first Christians they abolished the superstitions of ages and brought the idols of their ancestors to be committed to the flames. The Honorable Captain Waldegrave, H.M.S. *Singapatam*, and Lord Byron, captain of the *Blonde*, have borne honorable testimony to the proficiency of these poor islanders in Scriptural knowledge, and declared that they had received answers to questions on religious subjects put by them, which most assuredly they never would have received at any provincial School in England.

The ardour of Williams's mind led him to confer the blessings of evangelisation on the Harney group of islands, and especially the island of Rarotonga. At these islands the gospel was received with eagerness. — From one island, where it had been proclaimed, but where it was not possible to have a missionary, a native visited Rarotonga in an open canoe (a voyage of 80 miles) to fetch, as he expressed it, a little religion, which he took home to his countrymen, and then returned for further instruction. In the year 1838 Williams visited his native country, principally with the view of interesting the British public in his favourite scheme of evangelizing the different groups of the Pacific. His intelligent, simple, and manly appeals found a ready response in the heart of thousands. Men of Science and of Commerce saw, in the progress of Missions, the true basis

of civilization and the advancement of knowledge. Many men of rank and affluence (and notably the Duke of Devonshire) cheerfully aided the undertaking.

Mr Williams returned to Polynesia in a ship which had been presented to him, the "Camden", followed by the prayers and the sympathies of thousands. But shortly after his return, in endeavouring to gain access to the island of Erromanga, one of the group of the New Hebrides, he was massacred by those whom he came to save; in revenge no doubt for some long remembered cruelties inflicted on them by Europeans who had formerly touched at their shores. He died Nov. 20, 1833 " B.W.

Copied T.E.C.

26 Aug. 1980