



**Rev. John Williams**

*"For my own part, I cannot content myself within the narrow limits of a single reef."*

# CELEBRATING 200 YEARS OF CHRISTIANITY IN THE COOK ISLANDS

26 October 1821 – 26 October 2021



**Papeiha Teato**

*"Ua haere mai hoi te Tamaiti a te taata nei e imi e e fa'aora i tei mo'e."*  
Luka 19:10

† This plaque was unveiled on Tuesday 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to mark the 200<sup>th</sup> by-anniversary of Christianity landing on Aitutaki. This being the first island in the Cook Islands to receive the Gospel and teachings of the Christian faith.

† The 26<sup>th</sup> October each year is Gospel Day. It is a National Public Holiday on which all the people of the Cook Islands commemorate the arrival of Christianity to our shores.

† The Raiatea based English Missionary, Reverend John Williams of the London Missionary Society, first arrived on a Mission Ship 'Westmoreland' to Aitutaki on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1821 while taking his ill wife Mary Chawner-Williams to Sydney, Australia for specialist medical attention.

† While the Missionary did not step ashore, he did invite Tamatoa Uma-tetiki Ariki on board the Mission Ship for consultation with regard to Christian Religious matters.

† As a result of these discussions, Tamatoa Ariki agreed for two Native Teachers from Raiatea to land on Aitutaki and to introduce Christianity to the people of this island.

In doing so, Tamatoa Ariki pledged to John Williams that the two Native Teachers would not be harmed. They would be protected by those within the tribe of Tamatoa Ariki of Arutanga. They would be safe-guarded from those who maybe hostile towards the new Christian Teachers.

† And so, on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1821, under the protection of Tamatoa Uma-tetiki Ariki . . . Papeiha and Vahapata landed to bring Christianity to the people of Aitutaki.

† The Native Teacher Faaori was the next visitor from the London Missionary Society to arrive at Aitutaki from Raiatea. He landed in April 1822.

† He was told there were two men and two women, being Tepaeru-Ariki (from the Ngati Makea) and Mata Kavaau (from the Ngati Kainuku), who were from Rarotonga. Faaori was told these four people had embraced the Gospel and wanted to take Christianity back to their home island. Faaori said he would convey this information to John Williams on Raiatea. He said he was sure this Missionary would return to Aitutaki at some stage. But he was not sure when that would be.

† Upon later hearing this news, John Williams made arrangements to travel by the Mission Ship [Endeavour - Te Matamua] to Aitutaki where he arrived on 9<sup>th</sup> July 1823. The person who went out to greet the Missionary was Tepaki. Later that day, Tepaki escorted John Williams and his entourage ashore to land on Aitutaki.

† The following day John Williams blessed and opened a new Chapel that had recently been built under the supervision of Papeiha and Vahapata.

† In the Church Service that followed, John Williams delivered the Sermon based on the text from John 3, Verses 14-16: "As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God loved the world so much that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life."

† After leaving Aitutaki, John Williams, along with Tamatoa Uma-tetiki Ariki and Papeiha, went in search of Rarotonga. But the island could not be found. They diverted to Mangaia but despite their best efforts they were unsuccessful in establishing Christianity there.

† So the Mission Ship went to Atiu where Rongomatane Ngakaara Ariki accepted the Christian faith. In the days that followed, Rongomatane Ariki took John Williams and the Mission Ship to Mitiaro and Mauke. Native Teachers [Taua on Mitiaro and Haavi on Mauke] and their wives were landed on both islands after the various Ariki declared their people wanted to embrace the Christian faith.

† Upon returning to Atiu, Rongomatane Ariki gave John Williams the sailing co-ordinates to reach Rarotonga which was west-south-west of Atiu. Two days later the Mission Ship reached Rarotonga. And so, on 25<sup>th</sup> July 1823 Papeiha landed at Avarua and so brought the Gospel and the Christian faith to the people of this island.

† For 200 years, after first landing at Aitutaki on 26<sup>th</sup> October 1821, Christianity has been the dominant religion in the Cook Islands. So the people of these islands gathered together at Aitutaki on 26<sup>th</sup> October 2021 to celebrate this important milestone in our history as the Christian legacy lives on in our day-to-day lives.

† The First Letter of John 3, Verse 1: "See how much the Father has loved us. His love is so great that we are called God's children – and so, in fact, we are."



**"Ākiukiū, ānaunau! Na te mamao nā te tārerē! Pou reva metua kore! Namunamu kiri tangata, i te va'a o te tā'ae".**

**God bless the Cook Islands: God bless all the people of the Cook Islands.**