

# Harold Appleyard's Mission of Remembrance

*In fragments of coloured glass, the young Canadian Army chaplain saw the beginning of a luminous memorial to those who gave their lives and to those who endured*

By LOIS NEELY

**T**HE FIRST things you see are the two double-panel windows in the nave of the church. In a stained-glass panel to the right is a glowing round section from Chichester Cathedral with a red-robed saint instructing a disciple against a background of vivid ocean blue. Above that is a golden head of Christ from Manchester Cathedral. The panel to the left has a matching circle with a cross and knight of Saint George, from Holy Trinity, Brighton. Beneath that you find the lamb from St. Peter's, Bournemouth. But where is the red poppy from France? ... Ah, there, tucked beneath a hand just to the right of the Chichester saint's halo. The hand is from Holy Trinity, Southampton.

Christ Church in Meaford, Ont., a town hugging the south shore of Georgian Bay, is a long way from

100

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**Shining Remnants** - These glass tapestries in Meaford, Ont., unite fragments from 125 war-ravaged churches.

the European bomb sites and battlefields of World War II. But in this Anglican parish church, you will find four stained-glass windows of luminous beauty, composed of fragments from the windows of 125 churches destroyed or damaged during the war. They are a memorial to the war dead of the parish and a bittersweet reminder of the sufferings and sacrifices of that epic conflict.

How did they get there?

**T**HE STORY begins in the summer of 1941 when the 36-year-old rector of Christ Church, Rev. Harold Appleyard, learned of the death of fighter pilot George Stevenson, the first of his parishioners to be killed in the war. Young Stevenson worked at the dairy and had planned to marry Marian Randle. *How many more will there be?* Appleyard wondered as he set out to comfort the family.

A town of 3,500 souls, Meaford, like the rest of Canada, was sending its young into the struggle against Nazi Germany. Parishioners worried about men like Bob Goodman, now in the RCAF, Gord Randle with RAF Ferry Command, nice young Billy McKim, who'd lied about his age to join the Grey-Simcoe Foresters, and curly-headed Billy Hackett, an air gunner. There was talk of Bob Stewart joining up; the oil executive had married Doris Eagles in a Christ Church wedding.

Appleyard, whose father, Canon Edward Appleyard, had been a

chaplain and Military Cross winner in the Great War, felt the bad news was only beginning. *We must have a worthy memorial*, he decided.

Following in his father's footsteps Appleyard, married with two sons of his own, joined the army as chaplain with the Canadian Fusiliers, City of London Regiment. In the summer of 1942, Captain Appleyard found himself training with his unit in Horsham, Sussex, near the Channel coast.

Though the Battle of Britain had been fought and won, a German invasion was still expected. The determined British had armed themselves with everything from pitchforks to old muskets, and thousands of volunteers—mostly housewives and older men—helped the army stand guard along the coast. They'd thrown up barbed wire along the cliffs and built tank traps on the beaches. Every window was blacked out, buses had shields over their running lights and defence volunteers questioned anyone passing their checkpoints at night.

The German Luftwaffe, having bombed docks, harbours, railway lines and airfields during the 1940-41 Blitz, was renewing its attacks and seemed to be targeting places of cultural and historic interest. Appleyard was appalled by the devastation. Wherever he went, he saw buildings and homes levelled, and churches destroyed.

Those times he could get up to London, Appleyard spent the night



**Calm Courage** - Captain Appleyard's gallantry earned him a Military Cross.

doing fireguard duty at St. Paul's Cathedral. As air-raid sirens sounded, Appleyard and others crept through the little doors of the Whispering Gallery onto the steep roof, armed with long wooden tongs to grab the incendiary bombs and toss them to the ground.

When not in London, Appleyard spent his leaves exploring the south-eastern countryside. One day he noticed bits of coloured glass poking out of the rubble of a fire-bombed church. They were smudged yet shining remnants of glorious stained-glass windows, some undoubtedly centuries old. Appleyard put a few pieces in his pocket and

took them to his quarters, where he cleaned them and noted where they had come from.

*Could these fragments be reborn, he wondered, become a window in my church?* It would be a fitting way to link the suffering of England's battered-but-not-broken people with the sacrifices of his parish back home. Appleyard began spending every spare moment digging around church ruins. He got permission to remove fragments of stained glass and meticulously labelled and catalogued each one.

Appleyard got caught in an air raid himself on February 10, 1943, when a nearby bomb knocked the windows out of Chichester Cathedral. A clean-up party gathered fragments of a circular section and gave them to the Canadian padre. Unbroken, the pieces had simply fallen out of the leading.

Acting on a suggestion, Appleyard took the glass to Cox & Barnard Stained Glass Works in the nearby town of Hove. There, the section was reled and the overjoyed Appleyard beheld a red-robed saint instructing a young apostle in the restored circle.

Collecting glass for his memorial window now became Appleyard's passion. Diary extracts from the spring of 1943 record the scope and intensity of his search:

*March 18. Went to Liverpool. Cathedral windows only slightly damaged. Met Canon Selby, who promised to get me some glass. Passed St. Luke's—*



entirely gutted. I went around the ruins finding quite a bit of glass. A caretaker told me to take all I wanted and I gathered a carton full.

March 21. Portsmouth has been hard hit downtown. Visited burned-out church, St. Stephen's, and with luck secured a little glass. All Saints' is shattered. Got some glass there, too.

April 13. Winchester. At cathedral received 3 pieces of old glass (over 300 years old).

May 19. Much of Canterbury town is demolished. The cathedral is undamaged except the library. Got some glass from St. George the Martyr, this church is absolutely destroyed, except the walls. Went to see St. Martin's, the oldest church in England, undamaged except for windows.

And so it continued, wherever the Luftwaffe had been, wherever Appleyard had the chance to go. His

sorrow over the devastation he saw often filled his diary:

*Manchester was badly hit. The cathedral is pathetic, the choir and north transept are all gone, also the south side. The walls are filled in with some plasterboard and services go on in the nave. I admire their courage in carrying on.*

Appleyard scrounged an army-issue metal trunk for his rapidly growing collection. On May 28, 1943, he went back to Cox & Barnard with his dream of a memorial window for Christ Church, Meaford. The owner told him they would construct one for him free of charge, in gratitude for "all that Canada has done for us." The excited padre wrote immediately to his wife, Muriel, asking her to measure the windows in the church and prepare a template.

At home in Meaford, Muriel and their nine-year-old son, Ted, taped brown paper over a plain glass window and traced the 160-by-90-centimetre opening. Muriel folded the bulky pattern flat, shoved it into a big envelope and mailed it to her husband.

She wrote often, frequently with news of parishioners. Appleyard learned that Bob Goodman, reported missing in action, had been killed in a plane crash. Winnie Hackett was concerned for her son Billy, and Mabel Randle worried about her Gordon. Billy McKim had gone overseas, and Doris Stewart had had a baby girl.

By this time Appleyard had been appointed padre to the Royal Regiment of Canada, which had almost been wiped out in the disastrous 1942 raid on Dieppe. Of the 554 men who attempted the landing in France, only 67 got back to England. Two years later Appleyard landed on the beaches of Normandy with the men of this reconstituted unit.

Behind him, with Cox & Barnard, he had left his large glass collection, having agreed on designs for the two panels of the window for Christ Church.

FROM JULY 1944 to victory in May 1945, the Royal Regiment of Canada was in the thick of the fighting to liberate western Europe. In one of their first skirmishes with the Germans, on the morning of July 19, the Royals completed the capture of Louvigny in Normandy. In the ruins of the church there, Appleyard found an intact stained-glass flower: a blood-red poppy, the symbol of remembrance for Canada's war dead. He tucked the precious relic in his pocket.

And the padre kept up his diary. As Canadian soldiers slogged their way through Belgium and Holland, the entries became terse.

*Feb. 22. Buried 6 Essex Scots. In p.m. prepared more bodies up front. Buried 7.*

*Feb. 23. Chilly and damp. 2 burials.*

*Feb. 28. Spent all day gathering bodies with Jack Fyfe and Bob Sneyd. Picked up 16 Essex and 4 Royals. Had*

*a bath after supper, first in 12 days.*

On the night of April 2, Padre Appleyard's gallantry at the Regimental Aid Post on the Twenthe Canal near the Dutch-German border made him the second in his family to be awarded the Military Cross.

"Heedless of the ever present danger," the citation read in part, "Captain Appleyard helped to dress the wounds and to attend to the comfort of the casualties. His calm courage, disregard for his own safety and steadfastness of purpose proved a steadying influence on all with whom he came in contact."

A month later on May 5, Appleyard heard the last artillery shots fired by his unit. Two days later the war was over.

The padre soon learned that several of his parishioners had not made it. Eager, underage Billy McKim was killed in Normandy on July 25, 1944. Billy Hackett died in a training accident. Bob Goodman's plane crashed into the English Channel. Gord Randle's plane went down en route to Egypt. Bob Stewart died of wounds received in the Hochwald forest just inside the German border; he would never see his baby girl grow up.

Returning to England in November 1945, Appleyard went down to Hove to visit Cox & Barnard and deliver a few more bits of glass he'd picked up in France, Belgium and the Netherlands. He was delighted to discover they had fashioned not one but two windows. Even in the

fading afternoon light, they were lovely. With the leftover glass, Appleyard ordered two single panels for the cloister, one of which was to be made entirely of fragments from Christopher Wren churches in England, including St. Paul's.

Les Aylward was a young apprentice with Cox & Barnard at the time and was careful to replace the little numbers on each piece of glass, indicating where they had come from. He made wooden crates and packed the precious cargo for shipment by sea. They would follow Appleyard back to Canada.

On his last day in England, Appleyard visited Bob Stewart's grave at Brookwood, southwest of London. Appleyard wrote in his diary: *The cemetery must have 500 or 600 graves but is beautifully kept. I am now ready to get along home.*

Appleyard sailed for Canada in November 1945. Muriel and the boys were in Toronto to meet his train. Ted, 11 at the time, remembers his dad breaking ranks when he saw them and gathering his family in his arms. Young David didn't know this tall stranger who was hugging him so hard—he'd been a baby when his father left home almost four long years earlier.

### DOGGONE RIGHT!

After my husband and I had had a disagreement, in exasperation he mused: "I knew the day we met that you were Miss Right. Too bad I didn't find out until after we were married that your first name was Always."

—JENNIFER RICHARDSON, *Winnipeg*

The windows arrived April 3, and on August 11, 1946, war veterans and townspeople packed Christ Church, Meaford, for the unveiling by Winnie Hackett and Mabel Randle, whose sons had made the supreme sacrifice. Between the two double-panel windows hung a plaque fashioned from a fire-scorched oak pew from Christ Church, St. James Park, Westminster, on which were inscribed the names of the six parishioners killed in the war.

Since then a steady stream of pilgrims have come to this church to sit in the quiet coolness and study the glowing glass tapestries. One such visitor, in 1996, recalled his wartime service with Captain Appleyard. It was Christmas Eve 1944, in Holland.

"The padre started Communion, and then the firing began. We all fell flat, and he just carried on saying a few prayers, passing the bread and wine around, with the shells flying overhead. I'll never forget it. He was some chaplain."

*The Right Reverend Harold F. G. Appleyard, M.C., D.D., died in 1982, having served as Bishop Ordinary to the Canadian Armed Forces.*

## “ Quotable Quotes ”

Work is a mysterious thing; many of us claim to hate it, but it takes a grip on us that is so fierce that it captures emotions and loyalties we never knew were there.

—BOB GREENE, *Tribune Media Services*

There is no security quite as comfortable and undemanding as the kind you feel among old friends.

—PETER DODO in *Tennis*

Never forget that music is much too important to be left entirely in the hands of professionals.

—ROBERT FULGHUM, *Maybe (Maybe Not)*, (Random House)

The moon is always jealous of the heat of the day, just as the sun always longs for something dark and deep.

—ALICE HOFFMAN, *Practical Magic* (Putnam)

There's an intrinsic value in doing something without being the best at it.

—SUSIE GEPHARDY, quoted by SUSAN MCCULLOUGH in *Washington Post*

**One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.**

—HELEN KELLER

**Anger is a thief who steals away the nice moments.**

—JOAN LUNDEN, quoted by JANICE KAPLAN in *TV Guide*

Change is what keeps us fresh and innovative. Change is what keeps us from getting stale. Change is what keeps us young.

—RICK PITINO, *Success Is a Choice* (Bantam)

To be able to be caught up into the world of thought—that is to be educated.

—EDITH HAMILTON

The sense of beauty is a tuning fork in the brain that hums when we stumble on something beautiful.

—DAVID GELEENTER, *Machine Beauty* (Basic Books)

Humour, you can't exist without it. You have to be able to laugh at yourself. Otherwise, you suffer.

—KIRK DOUGLAS, quoted by CLIFFORD ROTHMAN in *USA Today*