Bragagnini Paolo Form IV Als

Summary of the activity 2

The function of the present text is to expose David Railton’s life story.

David Railton became famous becuase he was the of Unknown Soldier’ cult in England. He had the idea to commemorate the Unknown Soldier in 1916, when he was busy on Western Front, in France. Railton looked a marked grave on which there was an inscription which said :”An Unknown British Soldier”.

David Railton was born in 1884 in Stoke Newington London by a Scottish family. David Railton’s family was composed by his father, his brother Nathaniel, his sister Esther and him. The father, George Scott Railton, was a close colleague of General William Booth in the founding of the Salvation Army and Booth sent him to the United States to further the cause there. He was a larger than life character and also was involved in Salvation Army work in Europe, dying suddenly at Cologne in 1910.

David was educated by private tutors before attending Macclesfield Grammar School as a boarder. After that, David and his brother went to Keble College where they were led to ordination in the Church of England. The college had a strong High Church tradition and this appears to have led the Railton brothers to a different style of worship from their upbringing in the Salvation Army. David Railton was ordained deacon in 1908 and priest in 1909 by the Bishop of Liverpool and after that he married Ruby Marion Wilson in 1910.

When the First World War broke out, he had to see hundreds of thousands of soldiers leaving the town for the Western Front and as many other clergy’s delegates at that time, he enlisted himself in order to serve there as an Army chaplain.

As I wrote earlier, on France battlefields David Railton had the idea of commemorating an Unknown British Soldier. Here he wrote :

*“The idea came to me, I know not how, in the early part of 1916 after returning from the line after dusk to a billet at Erkingham near Armentieres. At the back of the billet was a small garden and in than garden, only about six paces from the house, there was a grave. At the head of the grave stood a white cross of wood on which was written in deep black pencilled letters, An Unknown Soldier of The Black Watch. How I longed to see his folk! But who was he and who were they?”*

After that, in August 1920, he wrote to the Dean of Westmister in order to persuade him about the instoration of a burial into Westmister Abbey, where the Unknown Soldier’s body should be laid. After some indecision the Dean accept David Railton’s proposal.

In 1924 David Railton initiated a plan to restore the St George’s Chapel in memory of the war dead. The area of the church was used for weekday services but the project was not completed until the 1930s when the carved screens to separate the chapel from the nave and chancel were erected.

In his last twenty years of life, David Railton served as Vicar of St James, Bolton in Bradford, a growing suburban parish. He then was appointed to be the Vicar of Shalford, near Guildford. His final parish appointment was as Vicar of Liverpool Parish Church from 1935 to 1942.

It was there that he saw the outbreak of another World War and his church was gutted in the blitz on the city in 1940. Much of the parish was destroyed and David Railton chose to return to the life of a padre. This time he was to serve with the RAF before finally retiring to the Scottish Highlands. He sadly died in a railway accident at Fort William in 1955.