ACTIVITY II

Key figures in The History and Ritual of The British Unknown Soldier

In this text I am going to summarize information from documents about Reverend David Railton and his important role during the First World War.

The ideal reader is one that knows something about WWI and is interested in knowing more about David Railton figure.

David Railton was born on 13 November 1884 at Leytonstone in London, son of George Scott Railton, a Commissioner in the Salvation Army and Marianne Parkyn. He was educated at Keble College, Oxford and further, at Bishop's Hostel, in Liverpool. He was a Church of England clergyman, a Military chaplain and the originator of the idea of the Tomb of The Unknown Warrior.

Having joined the Church of England he was ordained in Liverpool in 1908 and in 1910 became a curate in Folkestone in Kent before becoming a chaplain to the 2nd Battalion of the Hon Artillery Company on the Western Front during the 1914-18 war. He is also reminded for having saved an officer and two men under heavy fire. For this heroic act, he was awarded the Military Cross in 1916.

In 1916, in a back garden at Erkingham near Armentières in France, he noticed a grave with a rough cross on which were pencilled the words “An Unknown British Soldier”. He had an idea: to commemorate all the fallen of war who had no known grave with a symbolic burial in England.

In August 1920 he wrote to Herbert Ryle, Dean of Westminster. King George V and the government, supported the idea and on 11 November 1920 David Railton saw his dream become reality. Brigadier Wayatt chose the body to be sealed and it was placed in a coffin. This became the official coffin of the “Unknown Warrior”.

After the war he became Vicar of St. John's church at Margate in Kent. He was killed in an accidental fall from a train in Scotland in June 1955.

The documents’ language is very simple and direct, this because all the people can better know about his role in WWI and his life.

The ideal reader can understand how David Railton wanted to remember all the warriors heroically fallen in war, thanks to the Unkown Soldier’s burial that represents them.

The documents want to remember an important figure for England history because today, his “became reality idea”, is one of the most important and famous memorials in England, placed at Westminster Abbey.