

Factsheet

NUMBER 20: THE ST. MARTIN'S BANNER

Looking Back...



The 16th (Service) Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps (Church Lads' Brigade) raised in 1914 from former and serving CLB members was known throughout the Great War as 'The Churchman's Battalion'. Sadly, many gave their lives at High Wood on the Somme on 15th July 1916. In 1917, the whole CLB became affiliated to the KRRC as Cadets in recognition of the sacrifice of those men of the 16th Battalion.

In April 1921, 'The Brigade' magazine gave notice of memorial services to be held at High Wood and in Paris from July 10th to 16th to be attended by a representative contingent of the CLB. Notice was also given that an offer by the CLB Governing Body to the Dean and Chapter of Westminster Abbey to present a Banner to commemorate all Brigade members killed in action had been accepted. The cost of the Banner would be raised by a levy of one penny per member, past and present. A general description of the design appeared in 'The Brigade' magazine that June where it stated that: ".it will be a worthy memorial of our glorious dead, in what is, perhaps, the most famous shrine of Christendom." In October, there was a further invocation in 'The Brigade' to contribute a penny per head by stating that: "The Banner isn't a 'rag of militarism', but a real freewill gift to the glory of God. . .So see to it that your penny sent at once entitles you to a share in this age long honour of a place in Westminster Abbey."

The 9th November 1921 was the date of the parade, dedication and presentation of the Banner. The proposed parade from Horse Guards to the Abbey due to move off at 7.15 p.m. had to be cancelled because Parliament was still in session; so all units made their way in an 'orderly manner'. There were between 2,000 and 3,000 Officers, Warrant Officers, NCO's, Lads, Past Members, Parents, Veterans of Loos, High Wood, Neuve Eglise, Salonika and Gallipoli present that evening in the Abbey for the Dedication of the Banner.

The Governor and Commandant, Field Marshal Lord Grenfell presented the Banner to the Dean at the high altar who then said: "In the faith of Jesus Christ we dedicate this Banner to the glory of God and in memory of those members of the Church Lads' Brigade who gave their lives for their King and Country in the Great War. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost - Amen." In total silence the Banner escort presented arms and the Brigade Prayer resounded throughout the Abbey. The Dean, The Rt. Rev. Herbert Ryle, then addressed the congregation recalling the 20,000 fallen, the 22 Victoria Crosses and other distinctions. He pledged that the Banner would be kept in the Abbey in perpetuity in remembrance of the service, discipline and devotion in 'fighting the good fight' as the motto demands. After the address, the Banner was carried in procession round the Abbey by Colonel Hugh Lawrence and Major R Alcock accompanied by the singing of the hymns 'Hark the Sound of Holy Voices' and 'Onward Christian Soldiers'. Guarded by Sergeants of the London Division dressed in blue with the rest of the CLB in khaki, it was finally placed at the south of the altar. The Dean then led further prayers followed by the blessing. Last Post and Reveille were sounded from the Chapel of King Henry VII and the service concluded with the National Anthem.

Continued:



Factsheet 20 continued:

The Banner was designed by the Revd. Edward Dorling, an authority on ecclesiastical heraldry and was worked by the Royal School of Art Needlework at South Kensington. The Banner depicts St. Martin, [Patron Saint of the CLB founded at Michaelmas, (11th November) 1891], parting his cloak to give to the beggar. It bears the legend 'I am become the soldier of Christ'. Above the pictorial scene are the arms of the Collegiate Church of St. Peter, Westminster and below is the CLB Badge with the motto 'Fight the Good Fight'. The background is a rich cream colour bordered with the coats of arms of England, Scotland, Ireland and HRH The Prince of Wales, (Later CLB Vice Patron) along with those of St. George, St. Andrew, St. Patrick, St. Peter and St. Martin. The arms are entwined with the Rose of England, Thistle of Scotland, Leek of Wales and the Shamrock of Ireland.

In December 1921 an inscription in Latin was added to the rear of the banner, it translates as follows:

'In eternal memory of members who recently so splendidly died in war for God, King and Country the C.L.B. gave this banner 1921'

On 25th June 1977, to celebrate the Silver Jubilee of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Church Lads' Brigade and the Church Girls' Brigade paraded from Horse Guards to Westminster Abbey for a service of witness and dedication. The St. Martin's Banner was paraded in the Abbey with the CLB's National Colour and the Colours of the London Regiment. The Banner was carried by Sgt. Alan Carter of the Monmouth Diocesan Battalion.

In the mid-1980s the Banner showed signs of wear and decay so the Royal School of Needlework took upon itself the task of refurbishment. Now, restored to its former glory, it is kept in the Sacristy in the Chapter House Crypt where it may be viewed by prior arrangement with the Dean's Verger.



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Based on an article written in January 1996 by Des Carter MBE

