

The POW Cross



During a recent visit to Pat Campbell's home in Dumfries, he told us of an old metal cross that he had brought back from the Far East and which he thought was still somewhere in his garage. We were very interested in the story as Pat told us that it had been used during Services at the Great World POW Camp in Singapore conducted by Father Gerard Bourke of the Redemptorists Order. It appeared that after the Camp had been broken up when the men were moved up to the Death Railway in October 1942, an Australian POW had retained the cross for safekeeping and had later given it to Pat who had helped Fr Bourke with the Services.

Following a search of the garage at Dumfries, Pat's nephew Gerry recovered the Cross which was in fact a rather beautiful Crucifix and brought it along to the Service at Newmains. Its presence at the Service was perhaps apt. It had travelled from the makeshift altar at the POW Camp in Singapore, along the length of the Death Railway and was now back in a Christian environment.

Father Bourke returned to his native New Zealand after the war. In 1984, while a patient in Wellington Hospital, his former life as a POW was discovered by the hospital Chaplain, Fr Dennis McBride.. Said Fr. McBride, 'As a newly ordained priest and newly appointed hospital Chaplain who was struggling to make sense of the pain and suffering that I was encountering on a daily basis, I asked him how he had managed to remain a priest in the face of so much suffering. He did not seem to mind the question and with a gentleness born of great pain, said'

"Every time I could not stand the suffering and bloodshed anymore, and every time I wanted to go AWOL, the Lord would send someone into my tent who needed help. The soldier would inevitably pour out all his troubles and suffering to me. I was always so moved by these stories that I knew that I had to stay because I could make a difference to these soldier's lives. In truth, these soldiers made a difference in my life, because they gave me hope... so much so that I am still a priest".

Pat has gifted us the Crucifix and we are currently enquiring with the Redemptorist Order in New Zealand if they would like to have it.

The above photograph shows the Crucifix lying on a piece of railway sleeper brought back from the Death railway in Thailand by Lt Peter Legard of the 155th. Peter Legard had been a POW along with Pat Campbell in the Great World Camp in Singapore. The piece of timber was given to Tom McKie by the widow of Lt Legard.

For those attending the Service, the silent figure in the uniform of a Lanarkshire Yeomanry Officer must have been a bit of a shock. We had been generously donated the tunic of the late Lt. Col James Fasson by his son Tony. Lt Col Fasson was CO of the 155th during their dark days of captivity and had been Mentioned in Despatches for his leadership during this very trying time. With help from Jacqueline Hardisty, who gifted buttons and a badge from the collection of her late Papa, Bill Penman of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry, and by sourcing other items, we were able, with the help of a life size mannequin kindly lent by South Lanarkshire's Low Parks Museum, to have a presence from the past with us on the day. For the days before and after the Service, 'James', as our guest affectionately became known, was a source of shock and bemusement to neighbours passing the house who saw him standing silent sentinel in the hall. He is now safely back with the Museum and we hope that at some stage in the future, he and the uniform will be reunited as a permanent feature at Low Parks Museum.



Memorial Update

We had hoped that the costs for a Memorial could be met from a Heritage Lottery Grant as from their web page we appeared to fit the criteria. However, on making contact with them today in order to clarify a procedural point prior to submitting the Grant Application Form, we discovered to our unpleasant surprise that the Fund does not cover the 'creation of new works of art, monuments or memorials'. This is not stated on their web page and it was only in conversation with one of their Development Officers that we discovered this. We will now have to look at other options to fund a Memorial.