

# Riverside Methodist Church

## Blairgowrie



## Labour Corp Memorial Window

Towards the end of 1977, exactly 55 years after it was unveiled and dedicated, the only National War Memorial Window in a Methodist Church to the men of the Labour Corps who gave their lives in the 1st World War was vandalised, and quite seriously damaged.

The Minister and members of the Church Council decided that a detailed history of the window should be produced, and although little information is now available, it is known that in 1922 the sum of £800 was paid to the artist Mr. R.A. Bell, R.A.

From early in 1917 Blairgowrie was the Headquarters of the Corps and during the two years following, well nigh 20,000 men of all ranks passed through the Headquarters. The average number of men stationed here being 3,000 to 4,000. Over 7,000 Officers, NCOs (Non Commissioned Officers) and Men were killed or died of wounds or sickness in many parts of the world.

The Memorial Fund was started by contributions of the Officers and men of the Labour Corps in 1919 and over 1,300 of its ranks subscribed to it.

It was their desire that the memorial should take the form of a stained glass window in the Riverside Church, in which thousands of the men had found retreat and a very pleasant social centre at the Church, (Rev. J.Sutcliffe Allen was minister at that time).

This memorial window will stand as a token of remembrance and gratitude to them for their work well done and their splendid example of Christian and human ideals. In giving honour to all and remembering those who made the supreme sacrifice, let us not forget the living.

The unveiling ceremony on Saturday 2nd December 1922 was carried out by Mrs Hay Wilson together with Major-General G. S. Sinclair-McLagan, C.B., D.S.O., Commanding 51st Highland Division, Col. A. B. Robertson C.M.G., D.S.O., General Staff, Scottish Command.

The following is a reprint 'Souvenir of WAR MEMORIAL to Labour Corps'  
Printed 2nd December 1922

Riverside Church  
Blairgowrie, Perthshire  
November 1922

Dear Sir,

LABOUR CORPS WAR MEMORIAL

According to my promise to all who subscribed over three years ago to this Memorial, I have pleasure in sending you a picture and description of the window now erected in the Riverside Church, Blairgowrie, and inviting you, if you should be able to attend, to the UNVEILING AND DEDICATION, on Saturday 2nd December.

The Committee were most fortunate in securing as artist, Mr Robert Anning Bell, R.A. of Glasgow and London, one of, if not the most distinguished of stained-glass artists in great Britain.

The craftsmanship has been, under his direction, executed by the famous firm of Messrs J. & W. Guthrie & Andrew Wells Ltd., of Glasgow. The result is a Memorial, we trust, in some degree, worthy of the sacrifice commemorated. I do not think there will be found in the country any memorial to surpass it in artistic beauty, in the wealth and appropriateness of its symbolism, or in the integrity of its craftsmanship. It will be one of the permanent treasures of art in Scotland, and will witness, we believe, for centuries to come, to the heroism and devotion of the men who gave their lives, serving in the Labour Corps.

We are endeavouring to secure special railway facilities for any who may wish to be present at the Dedication.

With all good wishes,

I am. Yours faithfully,  
J. SUTCLIFFE ALLEN.

DESCRIPTION OF LABOUR CORPS MEMORIAL WINDOW AT  
BLAIRGOWRIE

The Tracery contains in the middle of the upper part, the emblems of the passion of our Lord, against a ruby background - the ladder, the column and the whip, the spear and sponge, and the three nails.



Below, in the centre, is the crown of thorns, surmounting a cross and resting upon the cup. These may be taken as a symbol of the suffering and endurance of the Labour men, as followers of their Saviour.



The rest of the Tracery contains figures of angels against a blue ground. These are holding scrolls with the words:

“Laborare et honore”



and

“Laborare est orare”



Two smaller Tracery Lights contain the Union Jack on a shield, and the badge of the Labour Corps, with its motto:  
“Labor omnia vincit”



Then come the four main Lights. In the upper portion of each, in the pointed head of the Light is a half-length young angel, holding a scroll with the name of the figure shown at full length below:

- St. George for courage.
- St. Paul for endurance.
- The patriarch Job for fortitude, and
- General Gordon for self-sacrifice.



Courage and Endurance



Fortitude and Self-Sacrifice

Below each of these is a small square panel, containing a modern soldier in khaki forcing his way through a wood of thorns, intertwined with a scroll, upon which is an appropriate inscription:

1. “If it had not been the Lord who was on our side, when men rose up against us: then had they swallowed us up alive.”



2. "These are they which came out of great tribulation."



3. "My heart panteth, my strength faileth me: as for the Light of mine eyes, it is also gone from me. In thee, O Lord, do I hope."



4. "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith."



Below these, again, are four small panels inserted in the border - sun, frost, rain, tempest, and below all is the inscription:

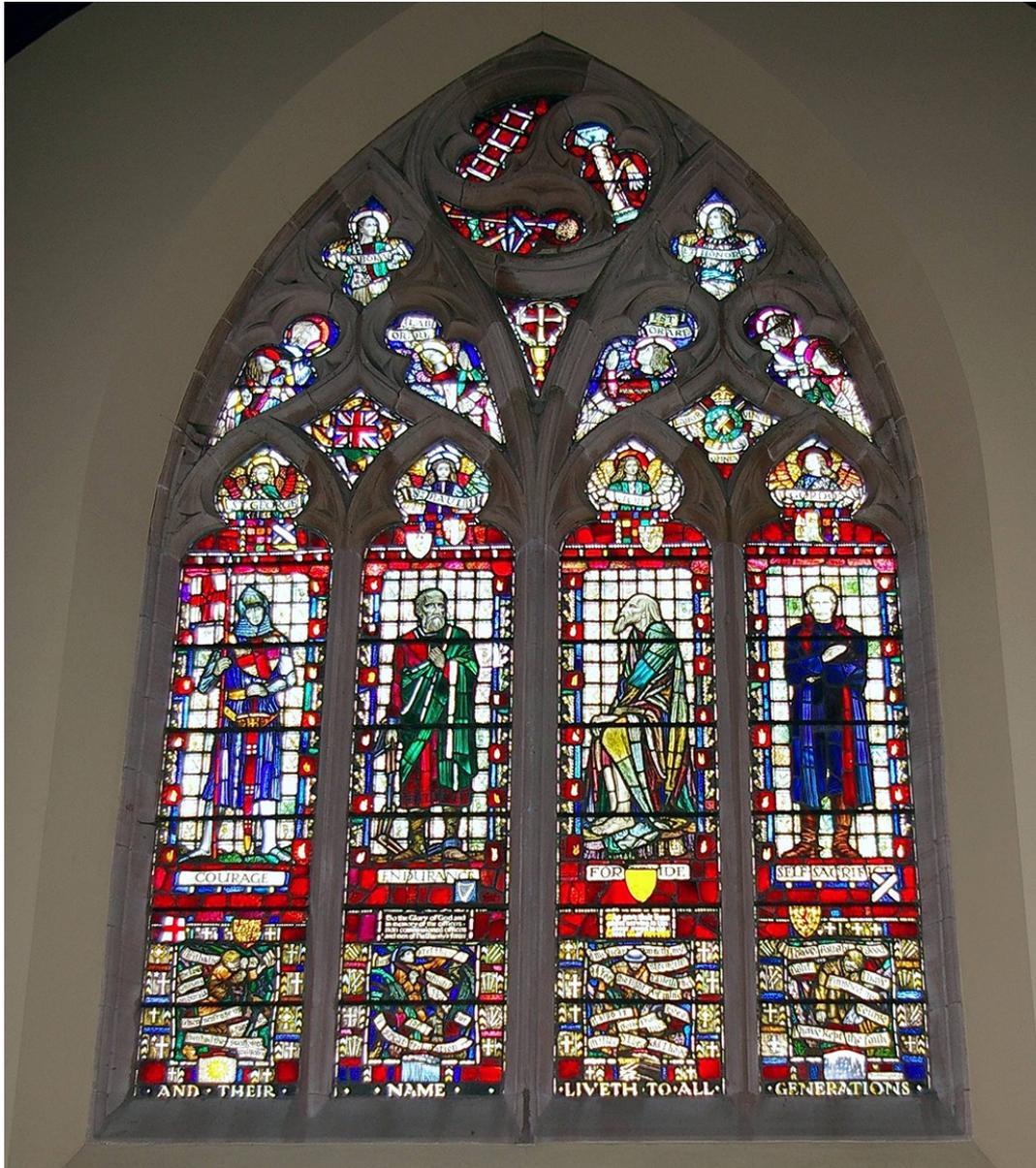
"And their name liveth to all generations."

Around the soldier panels are border patterns made of the three nails, a cross, and a star, and the crown of thorns.

Between them, on a ruby band which separates the main figures from the lower soldier panels, is the Dedication of the Window:-

"To the Glory of God and in memory of the officers, non-commissioned officers and men of His Majesty's forces who gave their lives while serving in the Labour Corps in the Great War, 1914-18."

and at each side of the main panels is a border made up of ruby quarries with a silver flame. These symbolise prayers arising upwards, and between the ruby quarries are panels with the Thistle for Scotland. On the silver white background of the principal figures are quarries containing St. Andrew's Cross, and the emblem of Labour. Coats of Arms of Great Britain and the Colonies are placed irregularly, on red bands, above and below the principal figures.



"Since 1922 the upkeep and maintenance and insurance of this window has been bourn solely by the members and friends of the Riverside Methodist Church.

"While we accept the responsibility of this, the approximate cost for replacing the whole window would be in the region of £20,000, and adequate insurance to cover the window in extremely costly. We have recently started a fund to finance the protection of this valuable window, and any contribution which you care to make would be gratefully received and can be sent to the present Minister of Riverside Methodist Church, Rev. Norman Birtwell, 163 Glasgow Road, Perth."

"September 1978"

November 2004

This description of the window was produced in 1978 At the present date the window is insured for £135,000, a responsibility still willingly bourn by the friends and members of the Church. But if you would still like to make a contribution towards its continuing protection it can be sent to our present Treasurer, Mrs. Sue Marshall, The Cottage, The Square, Meigle, PH12 8RN, or placed in the wooden box on the wall at the inner church door.

## A GRUMPY MAN!

A quote from the Blairgowrie Advertiser 27 June 2002:

*100 Years of Change [of the Church of Scotland] at Blairgowrie*

"....the Rev. Robert McDonald was translated to Leith."

"After he left, the congregation prepared a call to a minister in Newton Stewart. But at a meeting beforehand a large number of the congregation objected to the call, chief among them being an elder, David Borrie...."

"Mr. Borrie was quite a character. He was the first session clerk of the South Free Church but when he died it was reported in the newspaper that in his will he left £19. 19s to the South Free Church for the poor and he left £2000 for the erection of a Wesleyan Methodist Church in Blairgowrie, and £10,000 for endowment thereof.

"He left his house to be the manse and other houses for their use.

"In total he gave £25,000 to them. He had no children but other relations objected and it was reported in the paper 'Mr. Borrie retired in 1848 and was most excitable, irritable and absentminded, miserly and a grumpy disposition. His wife had supreme power and control. He was under her influence and lived in terror of her rebuke.'

"But the result was 'the Methodist Church at the Riverside which survives today due to the fund set up by Mr. Borrie."

JEAN REPLIES: [Blairgowrie Advertiser 4th July 2002]

### Methodist Church Funding

Sir, - The members of Riverside Methodist Church are very aware of the debt they owe to David Borrie for the provision of their lovely church and for the trust fund which provided housing for retired ministers for many years.

However, in a report on the history of the churches in Blairgowrie it is incorrectly stated that the Riverside Methodist Church survives today due to this fund.

The Church is part of the Angus, Dundee and Perthshire Methodist Circuit and with four other churches shares in the worship, mission and financial responsibility of the Circuit.

The interest from the Borrie Trust Fund forms only a small percentage of the Circuit income.

Rev. Jean Murrie

Note: Portraits of David Borrie and his wife hang in our Church Hall