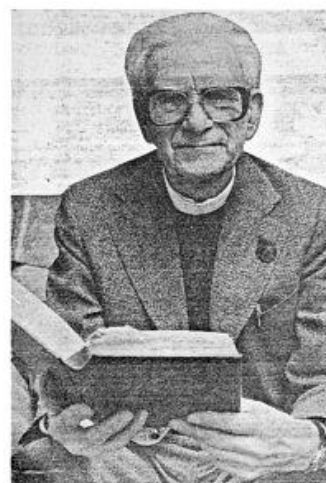


Lost and Found (and Lost Again)

Back in 1991, which seems like another world, a friend and fellow WFA member, Roger Negus, was working as a police officer in Peterborough. During the course of his work he visited an elderly lady who told him that her late husband had been a soldier during the First World War. Being interested in the subject Roger asked her more about him and it turned out that her husband, Private, 30046, Cecil Buckingham, of the Bedfordshire Regiment, had been in Albert on the Somme in 1916. He had found himself walking through the ruins of the town and came across the shattered remains of the Basilica. He walked into the ruins and discovered a shrapnel damaged oil painting amongst the rubble. He cut it out of its frame and eventually had it posted home. Mrs. Buckingham still had the painting and showed it to Roger. As it was quite big and she was living in a small flat, she offered it to Roger for his collection and he did not hesitate to take off her hands.



Mr. Cecil Buckingham
post war



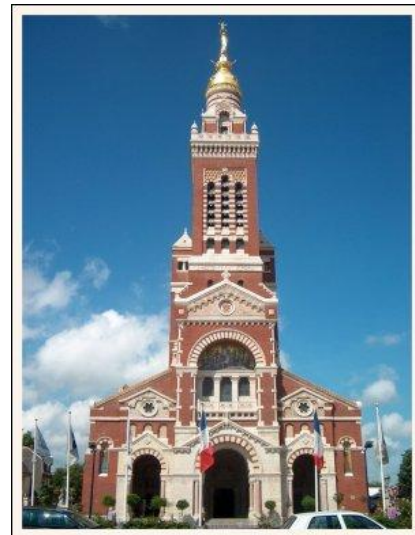
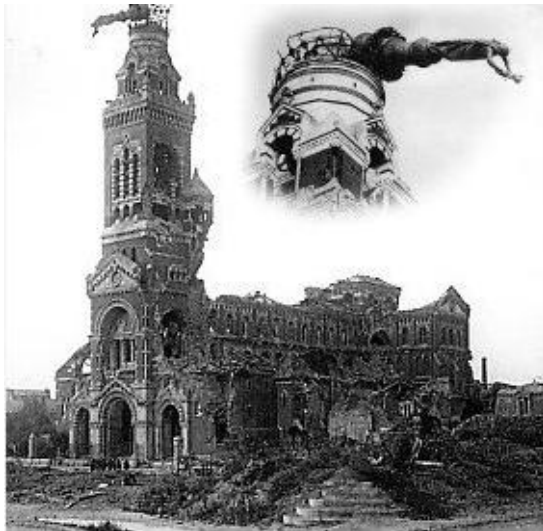
The Road to Calvary

Roger of course showed me the painting and we discussed what was to be done with it as it was a little too big to go on the wall in his house. We eventually decided that the best course was to take it back to Albert and return it to the Basilica. We had been visiting the Somme battlefields for many years, (we eventually stopped going after about thirty years of annual visits). We knew the Basilica well and we knew the people of Albert would welcome the return of their 'Tableau.'

Roger and I went to see the curator of Peterborough Museum, Martin Howe, who sadly passed away very young some years ago. We knew Martin and knew he could speak French. He identified the painting as being entitled 'The Road to Calvary.' We told him what we wanted to do and he immediately phoned the Mayor's office in Albert and by the time the phone call was over, arrangements had been made for a Champaign reception for Roger and I when we went back with the painting.

Right, Private Buckingham's medals which Mrs. Buckingham also donated.





Above, 'Then and Now' photos showing the Basilica in Albert when Private Buckingham discovered it, and as it is today.

A PIECE OF HISTORY: With the painting are Peterborough Museum curator Martin Howe, David Gray, Nell Buckingham and Roger Negus. Mr Howe has been involved in the arrangements to return the painting. (Photo: 9202117/BA)

Slice of history set to go home

A HISTORIC French painting rescued from a damaged church during World War I is to be returned by a Peterborough man.

Nearly 80 years ago a young soldier took the painting entitled *The Road to Calvary* from a church in Albert, France, which suffered severely during the fighting.

The shrapnel-damaged painting was rolled up and sent back to England.

When the soldier came home he became a vicar and kept the picture until his death two years ago.

His widow, Nell Buckingham, then presented it to Roger Negus, secretary of the Soke Military Collectors' Society.

Mr Negus and club treasurer David Gray are set to travel to Albert on February 13 to return the picture to the now-rebuilt church.

Mr Negus said: "The picture isn't worth a lot in money, but in sentimental value it is priceless."

"We thought it would be nice to return it to the church from where it came, to be appreciated by the villagers there. It is probably one of the few remaining items from before the church was so badly damaged."

WAR VICTIM: The damaged basilica of Albert in 1916.

Left, The picture, from the Peterborough Evening Telegraph, shows from left to right: The late Martin Howe, Curator of Peterborough Museum, David Gray, the late Nell Buckingham, and Roger Negus. The photograph was taken at the Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery. Being fluent in French, Martin Howe had kindly helped to identify the painting and make contact with the authorities in Albert in order to make arrangements for its return. The tears and holes caused by German shelling of the Basilica during the First World War can clearly be seen.

"In 1992, two Peterborough men, Roger Negus and David Gray, completed a journey which had begun in 1916 and will forever link the Cambridgeshire City of Peterborough and the French town of Albert on the Somme, France.

In 1916, a young soldier, Private, 30046, Cecil Buckingham, of the Bedfordshire Regiment, walked into the war ravaged and ruined Basilica in Albert and amongst the rubble he discovered a soiled and battered oil painting. He rescued the painting entitled 'The Road to Calvary', rolled it up and placed it in his backpack, eventually sending it back to England. When Private Buckingham came home at the end of the war, he became a vicar, eventually moving to Peterborough, and kept the picture until his death in 1988. His widow, Nell Buckingham, presented to the painting to Roger Negus of the

Soke Military Society [Now the Peterborough Military History Group]. After this, Roger, together with the club Treasurer, David Gray, travelled to Albert in February 1992 to return the picture to the rebuilt church. The picture, or as the French called it "Tableau," was not of any great monetary value, but to the people of Albert, as one of the few remaining items in existence from the days before the Basilica was destroyed, it was priceless."



"The Picture is Found" cried 'The Courier Picard' on 18th February 1992.



The local French press



A Champaign reception was organised and Roger Negus and David Gray presented the Tableau to the Priest of the Basilica *left*, and Stephane Demilly, the Mayor of Albert *right*, at the Hotel De Ville, in Albert.



The procession in 1992, bringing 'The Road to Calvary' back into the Basilica from which it was rescued by Cecil Buckingham in 1916.

There is a sad sequel to this story however; as it appears the 'Tableau' has gone missing. Soon after it was returned it was reported to have been put in the Somme Museum under the Basilica. Roger and I went back the following year, 1993, and were told by a friend we had made there that he had been unable to locate it either in the museum or the church. If anyone has been to Albert recently and has managed to see the picture, we would be very interested to know where it now resides.