

Oh, to be in England...

In the last century, thousands of young Canadians *were*, and failed to return. Their 'April' became a passage frozen in perpetuity.

For many, the riveting imagery in *Saving Private Ryan* and Pat Barker's brilliant *Regeneration* trilogy, vivifies the wages of sacrifice on foreign shores; I now further believe you can *physically* brush such tumultuous times.

For me, it came while moving through the place where Thornton Wilder said the 'weaning' of the dead from this earth occurs. Where passion, ambition, and suffering fall finally away. My sense is that some demi-life is born and lingers there -- half projection of the Quick's desire for continuity, half the spiritual energy emitted by those 'resting' beneath the green.

When my schedule opened suddenly on a recent trip to Surrey, I grabbed a sandwich and sketch pad and hopped a train for Woking, then changed for another short haul to Brookwood (ironically, the end of the line) where I'd heard many Canadians lay buried. The 'Dominion of Canada' still echoes her gratitude in nearby Guildford: in our soldiers' funds for its Cathedral tower, and in the mixed, bittersweet vignettes of their long-ago hosts living and able to remember life before 'mobiles', Beamers, and www.letusvacateyourbrain.com.

A simple path led from the back stairs of the vine-draped brick station, trees like sentinels guiding me off to the right, past a skewed wooden sign pointing to 'American war graves' (Brits never sort out our accent -- presumably the plots weren't scrambled ...). And there it was.

A manicured field with a slight sloping pitch, bordered by sumptuous flowers, trim hedges, and dark, gigantic conifers. A pillared pavilion at the far end, a cenotaph with inverted sword at the upper, entry gate. A sanctum bound in nature -- silent, but for a constant light symphony of birds.

It left me dumbstruck. A hushed vitality prodded me, as if now there, I had a duty to 'inspect' the troops, the rows and sad rows of stones etched with maple leaves. At the bottom of the Canadian sector, a living maple stood guard.

I began my tour-- no one else appeared in my three hours -- with a gut observation: *so many young men*; yet the first pale slab read,