

Charlie Appleby - A 'Can You Help?' Special *By Tom Marriott*



Charlie Appleby

Charlie was born in Paynton Saskatchewan, Canada on October 10th 1913. To say it was a rural community in the farming flatlands of Canada may be an understatement because the population was under 200 people. It is located just East of the Alberta border.

Coming from a farming community he was no stranger to hard work and was working the fruit fields before his 7th birthday. In 1920 the family moved West to Edson, Alberta, population a few thousand. On leaving school he left home to work on the Prairies working in the vast wheat fields. Following that he worked in the forestry industry as a lumberjack, a most back breaking job in those days. He was obviously a nomad in those days as he left the lumber camps to become a hunter and trapper in the North. This proved to be a profitable line of work and he managed to save a considerable sum of money.

In 1932 Charlie left Canada on board a ship to England to seek adventure and to have a year-long holiday. However within a few weeks of his arrival fate was to intervene when a friend took him along to his first dirt track race at Wembley Stadium. He was hooked on the sport and a life as a speedway rider appealed to him.

However riding speedway did not come easy to him and try as he may he found it difficult to break into a team. He was on the verge of returning to Canada when he was offered a contract with Hackney Wick and lost no time proving himself a valued member of the team. By the 1939 season he was proving a hard man to beat but once again fate had something else in store for him as WW2 broke out.

Charlie being who he was joined up within 14 days of the war and became Aircraftsman Appleby of the RAF. Four months later he was a wireless operator-air gunner. And for the next five and a half years he saw action in India and Burma.

Demobbed in the spring of 1946 Charlie was immediately signed by Birmingham. It took a while for Charlie to regain his form but there was improvement in his riding. Charlie had at some point since arriving in England found the time to meet his wife and start a family.

Fate was to catch up on Charlie in his 25th meeting of the 1946 season. Birmingham were away to Newcastle in the Kemsley cup match on the 7th of October. Charlie was in heat three in the white helmet along with Jock Grierson (who was taking the place of Stan Dell who was listed in the programme but did not ride). Riding for the home team was the pairing of Leo Lungo and Syd Littlewood. Lungo gated and was being followed closely by Littlewood with Charlie in third place trying to pass the Newcastle pairing. Suddenly Lungo's bike seized and fell. Having nowhere to go Littlewood plowed into Lungo and was thrown clear of his bike. Charlie tried to steer clear but hit Littlewood's bike sending him high into the air falling hard on his head. Charlie was rushed to the Royal Victoria hospital with serious injuries to his head.

The meeting was continued but it had lost all its excitement as the 10,000 spectators and the riders were left in no doubt that Charlie Appleby had sustained serious injuries. Doctors at the Royal Victoria hospital made the decision to call Mrs. Appleby who immediately made the trip to Newcastle but she never got to the hospital in time as poor Charlie succumbed to his injuries shortly before 2 am the next morning. He left behind a wife and two children.





And there the story seemed to end until earlier this month when my good friend Roger Stevens told me about a trophy on the Canadian E Bay won at High Beech in 1939. The riders name being R.C. Appleby. The cup was being sold by someone in Alberta Canada. Was this the same rider? Did he go by his middle name for racing.

On doing some investigating I found out that in 1939 High Beech held some individual meetings, Did Charlie win one of these in 1939? The tie to Alberta is there as his family move there. Was he married prior to going to England? I don't know. If so did his wife return Canada after his death with the Children?

I called the seller who could not tell me much other than the trophy was from an estate sale so that proved a dead end.

Perhaps someone reading this article can shed some light on Charlie's cup win at High Beech or maybe someone has a copy of the program with the results?

Any help would be appreciated. I can be contacted at tmarriott@sympatico.ca

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Many thanks to Roger Beaman for all his time and effort providing me with the info on Charlie Appleby.

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