

GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

No. 9: St Saviour's, Westgate on Sea

Lieutenant Ronald Charles Wybrow Morgan

3rd South Wales Borderers attached No. 55 Squadron RFC

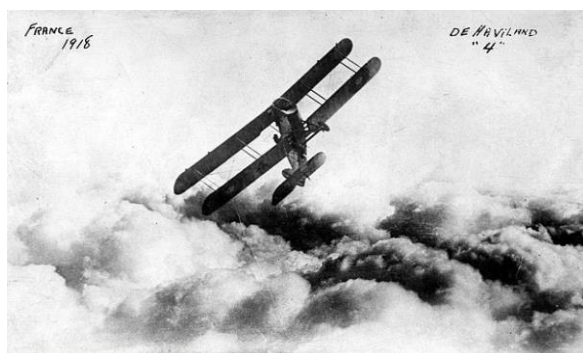
DOW 28 July 1917

Window: St Saviour's, Westgate on Sea

Kent links: Prep School, Family Home

Medals: British War and Victory medals

War Grave: Hoogstade Belgian Military Cemetery, Alveringhem



De Havilland DH 4

Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airco_DH.4

Ronald (Ronnie) Morgan was born in Sunbury on 9 September 1897 to Aaron Herbert and Constance Rachel Morgan.¹ He was the only surviving child, another having died between 1901 and 1911. His father was a Director of a wine-shipping firm, the head office of which was in the City of London. The parents moved to Westgate on Sea at some point after 1901, probably so that they could be close to their son while he attended Doon House Preparatory School. They moved from “Upthorpe”, Albert Rd, Caversham near Henley, to “Upthorpe”, Collingwood Terrace, Westgate.² The latter was a large semi-detached house and the family had two servants and, at one time, a nurse. Morgan, therefore, was brought up in a comfortable middle-class household (his father left £15503 when he died in 1934).³

Following his time at Doon House, Morgan attended the public school of Uppingham in Rutland. One of the more progressive schools at the time and a founder member of the Headmasters' Conference—established in 1869 by Edward Thring, Uppingham's headmaster—its curriculum did not focus exclusively on the Classics. By the time Morgan attended science was compulsory in the lower forms and a pupil could pass through the school concentrating on science and mathematics or history and modern languages. Subjects

¹ Service Record, Ronald Charles Wybrow Morgan, TNA, PRO WO 339/31522. For Ronnie as his pet family name, see *The Times* (London), 28 July 1919.

² For the Henley address, 1901 Census, Ancestry.Co.

³ Probate Records, Ancestry.Co.

such as music, drawing and carpentry were also available.⁴ This process of curriculum change was partly demand driven, as increasing numbers of parents in the middle classes sought a public-school education for their sons that would confirm their status as gentlemen yet give them some useful knowledge. In the years before Morgan went to Uppingham, however, an over-emphasis on the cult of sporting activities had led to an unhealthy culture of bullying, which led to some boys being taken away from the school and which only began to subside following the appointment of a new headmaster in 1908 to replace Dr E.C. Selwyn.⁵ By the time Morgan arrived, in 1911, pupil numbers were again very healthy.⁶

Uppingham had a company of Rifle Volunteers that in 1908 became an Officer Training Corps. Participation was voluntary although, in the aftermath of the Boer War, Selwyn had decreed that no pupil could either receive a school prize or play inter-school games without having first passed a compulsory shooting test on the rifle range.⁷ Morgan belonged to the corps, as a Private. It appears that he had ambitions of joining the regular army. Although his branch of the Morgan family did not have a tradition of military service his paternal uncle, Cecil Buckley Morgan, was a regular officer who, while serving in the West India Regiment, was attached for duties that involved action in the Niger Territory, the Mendiland Expedition, Sierra Leone and South Africa during the Boer War. Promoted to Major in 1898 and awarded the DSO in 1900, he was three times wounded, thrice Mentioned in Despatches and received the Queen's South Africa medal with three clasps. He retired to the Reserve of Officers in 1903, but at the outbreak of war in 1914 he was appointed firstly to the 9th (Service) Battalion North Staffordshire Regiment and subsequently became CO of the 22nd Battalion Durham Light Infantry, a Pioneer battalion. He went to France in July 1915 and was mortally wounded on 28 March 1918, dying the next day. By a tragic coincidence, his son Basil, 2nd Lt in 1st Hampshire Regiment and Ronald's cousin, was killed on 28 March 1918 in the same area.⁸

Morgan left Uppingham in July 1914, aged sixteen. He was thus a participant in a defining moment, in retrospect at least, in the career of the feminist and pacifist Vera Brittain. More than fifty years after the outbreak of war Brittain wrote:

What does that date, 4 August 1914, immediately bring back to me? ... The immediate memories are purely personal ... I think ... of names, places, and individuals and hear, above all, the echoes of a boy's laughing voice on a school playing field in that golden summer.

And gradually the voice becomes one of many: the sound of the Uppingham School choir marching up the chapel for the Speech Day service in July, 1914, and singing the Commemoration hymn:

*O Merciful and Holy
Who once by ways unknown
In simple hearts and lowly
Dost build Thy loftiest throne,
As Thou of old wast near us
To bless our Founder's care,*

⁴ Timothy Halstead, 'The First World War and Public School Ethos: The Case of Uppingham School', *War and Society* 34 (2015), pp.214, 216.

⁵ Malcolm Tozer, 'Manliness: The Evolution of a Victorian Ideal', PhD thesis, Leicester University, 1978, p.342.

⁶ For the period Morgan spent at Uppingham, I am grateful to Jerry Rudman, the school's archivist.

⁷ Don Farr, *None That Go Return: Leighton, Brittain and Friends, and the Lost Generation 1914-18* (Solihull 2010), p.43.

⁸ http://angloboerwar.com/component/grid/?gid=24_pq_0&p=15; Medal Index Card, C.B. Morgan, Ancestry.Co; *London Gazette*, 1 April 1898, 10 January 1900, 24 February 1902. Basil Morgan is commemorated on the Arras Memorial.

*Bow down Thine ear and hear us
In this, Thy house of prayer.*

There was a thrilling, a poignant quality in those boys' voices, as though they were singing their own requiem—as indeed many of them were.⁹

The Golden Age was coming to an end.

At sixteen, Morgan was too young to join the armed forces. In June 1915, however, while still under age, he applied for a commission in the Reserve of Officers and was accepted in July, being posted to the 3rd (Reserve) Battalion South Wales Borderers.¹⁰ The battalion was based at Pembroke Dock in Wales and Morgan stayed with them for more than a year. Five days before his eighteenth birthday he was attached to the Royal Flying Corps and began training at No. 1 School of Aeronautics in Reading. After two months of square-bashing, schoolroom lessons and spending between ten and twenty hours learning the basics of flying, including flying solo, he was sent to No. 3 Higher Training Squadron at Netheravon in Wiltshire in December 1916. There he became a Flying Officer on 1 March 1917 and was posted to 49 Squadron. A month later he was transferred to No. 51 Squadron at Thetford, which was an anti-Zeppelin unit. Whether because he was not suited to night flying or because the need for pilots in France was overwhelming (the RFC suffered heavy losses in April 1917), after only twelve days he was posted to No. 55 Squadron.¹¹

Morgan arrived in France just when the RFC introduced a range of new aircraft that were slowly to turn the air war in Britain's favour. His new squadron arrived in France in March 1917, the first to be equipped with a new light bomber, the Airco DH 4. The DH 4 was the best two-seater, single-engine bomber of the war, with a maximum payload of 210 kg, a top speed of 143 mph and a good defensive capability. The squadron was based at Fienvillers, about five miles south-west of Doullens. It was part of 9 Wing, a formation controlled by RFC Headquarters rather than by the army and thus available to be deployed wherever it was most needed along the whole front. Its first mission was against Valenciennes railway station on 23 April, probably too soon for Morgan to be involved.

On 6 June 1917, flying machine A2144 and with Lt W.E. Cooke as his observer, Morgan returned from a bombing raid and made a bad landing. The aeroplane 'turned turtle' and was so badly damaged that it had to be written off. Cooke was unhurt, but Morgan was taken to hospital at St Omer with a lacerated forehead. He was discharged after a week.¹²

On 13 July Morgan was promoted to Temporary Lieutenant.¹³ His luck ran out at 2.15pm on 27 July when, with Cooke again as his observer, he was returning from a raid on the Gotha bomber airfield at Gontrode in Flanders. He was wounded while under attack, probably from

⁹ Vera Brittain, 'War Service in Perspective', in George A. Panichas (ed), *The Promise of Greatness: The War of 1914-1918* (London 1968), pp.371-72.

¹⁰ Service Record, Ronald Charles Wybrow Morgan, TNA, PRO WO 339/31522; *London Gazette*, 6 July 1915, p.6674.

¹¹ RFC Service Record, R.C.W. Morgan, TNA PRO AIR/76/356. Among the squadron's pilots was Capt. W.E. Johns, later to be well known as the author of the Biggles stories. For the RFC's plight in April 1917, see Peter Hart, *Bloody April: Slaughter in the Skies over Arras, 1917* (London 2006). Aircrew casualties for the month were 319. Trevor Henshaw, *The Sky Their Battlefield II* (High Barnet 2014), p.85.

¹² Royal Flying Corps, Report on Casualties, 7 July 1917, <http://www.rafmuseumstoryvault.org.uk/archive/morgan-r.c.w.-ronald-charles-wybrow>; Service Record, Ronald Charles Wybrow Morgan, TNA, PRO WO 339/31522. I am very grateful to Nieuport11 of the Great War Forum for a copy of the Casualty Report.

¹³ *London Gazette*, 13 July 1917, p.7104.

Sergeant A. Werner of Jasta 17.¹⁴ The plane crash-landed behind British lines. An ambulance of the army's 6th Division took him to the Belgian Military Hospital at Hoogstade. His injuries included fractured ribs, damaged kidneys and a bullet in the stomach.¹⁵ He died at 3am on the 28th. Cooke was unhurt.

Morgan's mother first heard the sad news of her 'only son and child' when she received a communication from an officer in 55 Squadron on 31 July. The War office had previously informed her that Morgan had been wounded, but there was no mention that his condition was 'serious or dangerous'. She attended the War Office on the 31st, where a junior officer saw her. He was 'politeness itself', but could give her no further information. In fact, a War Office telegram confirming Morgan's death had been sent to his father on the 30th, but it was sent to a hotel in Malvern, even though Mr Morgan had informed the War Office of his change of address a fortnight earlier. Mrs Morgan only heard of her son's death officially at 9pm on the 31st. She was, understandably, not impressed with 'the whole process'.¹⁶

The Morgans commemorated their son in a number of ways. On the anniversary of his death in 1918 and 1919 they placed In Memoriam notices in *The Times*. These emphasized his heroism in saving his observer even though badly wounded:

In ever-loving memory of Ronnie Morgan ... only child ... who, mortally wounded on the 27th July, 1917, whilst flying ten miles over the German lines, succeeded in landing his machine and observer safely in the Allied lines, and who died peacefully in a Belgian hospital, age 19.¹⁷

When the Imperial War Graves Commission gave them the opportunity to have a dedication carved on his permanent headstone in Hoogstade Belgian Military Cemetery, Alveringhem, they chose a text that has echoes of Simeon's forecast to Mary that her son Jesus' influence in Israel would fall and rise (Luke 2:34), as well as suggesting that the way he died would lead to everlasting life: 'His life on Earth was short. He appears to fall but is rising'. Morgan is also commemorated on the war memorials at Westgate on Sea and in the Priory Church of St Mary and St Michael, Malvern, the latter presumably because his father was working at a branch of his firm in the area at the time. He is also on Uppingham School's Roll of Honour.

The most lasting and impressive memorial to Morgan is the stain glass window that was dedicated at St Saviour's, Westgate in 1921.¹⁸ It was designed by Kempe and Co., a prominent stain glass manufacturer then under the directorship of Walter Tower (see Fig.1).¹⁹ At the left-hand bottom corner of the window is Tower's trademark, a tower, superimposed on Charles Eamer Kempe's old trademark, the wheatsheaf.

It is a three-light window, without much colour, with the inscription: *Remember me in the Lord, Ronald Morgan, Lieut and Pilot, Royal Flying Corps, who fell mortally wounded near Ypres and died 28 July 1917, aged 19 years, to whose memory this window is dedicated.*

Centrepiece of the window is a roundel, surrounded by a wreath, of the prophet Elijah in a chariot passing through the flames and being translated to Heaven (2 Kings II:11) (see Fig. 2). This an unusual representation for a war memorial window, but, with its links to flight and

¹⁴ Henshaw, *Sky Their Battlefield II*, p.105.

¹⁵ RFC Casualty Report, R.C.W. Morgan, 27 July 1917,

<http://www.rafmuseumstoryvault.org.uk/archive/morgan-r.c.w.-ronald-charles-wybrow>.

¹⁶ Service Record, Ronald Charles Wybrow Morgan, TNA, PRO WO 339/31522.

¹⁷ *The Times*, 27 July 1918, 28 July 1919. In fact, the plane was written off.

¹⁸ The original designs were accepted by Leonard White-Thomson, Archdeacon of Canterbury, in June 1921.

¹⁹ Canterbury Cathedral Archives, FACULTIES, DCb/E/F/Westgate, St Saviour/15.

storms, is appropriate for a pilot, as well as representing God taking his prophet (chosen one) directly into Heaven. It thus symbolizes the family's confidence that their son is with God and connects directly to the text used on his official gravestone.

The left light depicts the thirteenth-century French king, Crusader and saint, Louis IX (see Fig. 3). Here he is representing France, in alliance with which country Morgan fought for and over and where he died and lies buried. With his left-hand Louis is touching a crown of thorns encircling three nails, symbols of the passion, suffering and death of Christ. The implication is that Morgan underwent the same Christian suffering.

Unlike many stain glass memorials, this window contains no overt references to war. There are no military crests, no weapons, no flags, no overt patriotism. There is a Roman centurion in the right-hand light, but with his right arm he cradles the city of Tours and with his left hand he holds a Roman standard topped with a bird. It does not look like a classical Roman eagle, more like a dove (see Fig. 4). The centurion is the fourth century St Martin (of Tours) who, as a Christian, refused to shed blood on the battlefield. His position in this memorial is ambiguous. Is he there to represent Christian pacifism, or is he a soldier Saint? The absence of any patriotic or military symbolism in the window and the possibility of a dove of peace on the standard favours an irenic interpretation, which makes the memorial more than slightly unusual. The family clearly expressed their belief that Morgan died a Christian death; that he died for his country is less clear.

Is it also just coincidence that the Feast Day of St Martin in the Church of England Calendar is 11 November, Armistice Day?



Figure 1: Design for Memorial Window

Source: Canterbury Cathedral Archives, FACULTIES, DCb/E/F/Westgate, St Saviour/15.



Figure 2: Final Memorial Window
Copyright: M. Durey & ellesmerecollective.co.uk

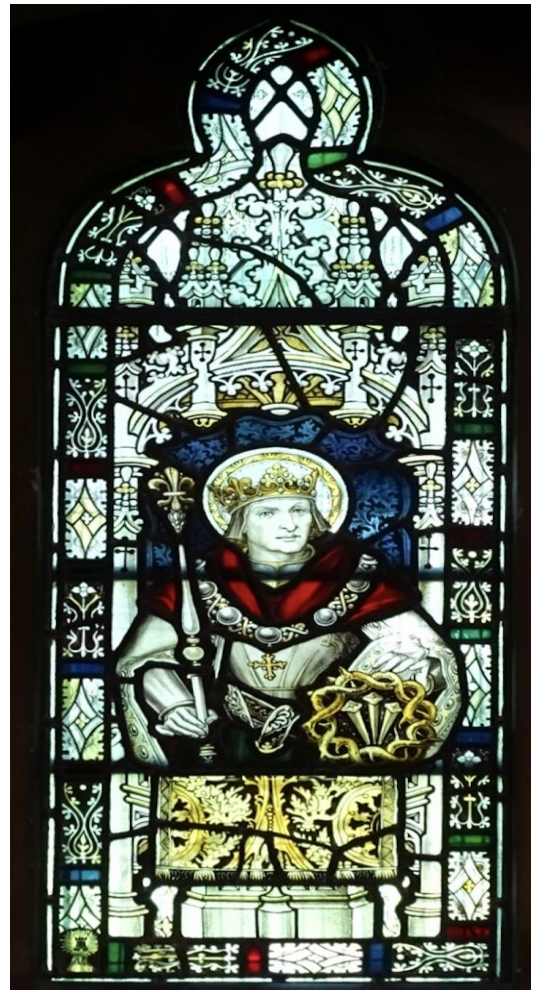


Figure 3: St Louis IX
Copyright: M. Durey & ellesmerecollective.co.uk



Figure 4: St Martin of Tours
Copyright: M. Durey & ellesmerecollective.co.uk

Copyright © Michael Durey 2018. All Rights reserved