

## GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

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**No. 6: St Martin's, Aldington**

*2<sup>nd</sup> Lt and Flying Officer Norman Rausch de Pomeroy*

**11<sup>th</sup> Squadron RFC**

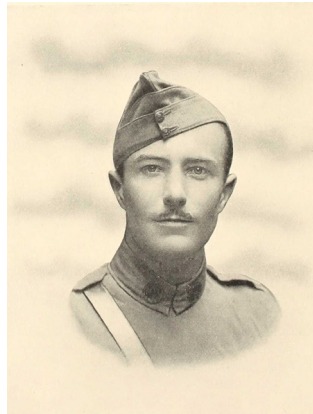
**KIA 20 October 1916**

**Window: St Martin's, Aldington**

**Kent links: Family home**

**Medals: 1914-1915 Star**

**War Grave: Cagnicourt British Cemetery, Pas de Calais, France**



**2nd Lt Norman Rausch de Pomeroy**  
**Source: Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour**

Norman Rausch Pomeroy was born on 2 August 1891 in Osnaburgh Street, St Pancras, London.<sup>1</sup> His father, Edward William Norman Pomeroy, was a cabinetmaker from Bristol. His mother, Julia Charlotte née Rausch, was Edward's second wife whose father, a master tailor, had migrated from Germany.<sup>2</sup> Norman was an only son, with a half-sister and a younger sister. His early life was among the skilled artisan trades of London.

His parents clearly had ambitions for him, for he attended a small private school in Dalston Lane, Hackney and subsequently, between 1902 and 1908, was sent for his secondary education to a small boarding school run by Rev. Newton Kent at Scottow Vicarage, Norfolk. There he won prizes for English, drawing and music.<sup>3</sup> As with so many young men of his era, he became fascinated with the new internal combustion engine and would soon own a motorbike, on which he would take his younger sister for rides.<sup>4</sup> After a period of coaching,

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<sup>1</sup> Service Record, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt Norman Rausch Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>2</sup> Baptismal Register, St Mary's, Marylebone.

<sup>3</sup> 1901 Census; UK Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour (1924), p.101 (via Ancestry.Co.UK).

<sup>4</sup> Great War Forum, <http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=14861&hl=%2Bpomeroy+%2Bsquadron>.

Pomeroy matriculated at the University of London in 1909 and became a student at the City and Guilds Technical College in Finsbury.<sup>5</sup> He passed the two-year course, again winning prizes, and in 1911, with his certificate in electrical engineering, he took up an apprenticeship at the large workshops of The British Thomson-Houston Company in Rugby. This company had strong links to General Electric of New York and manufactured numerous heavy electrical goods, including generators, light bulbs and steam turbines.<sup>6</sup> There were few better places in Britain to serve an electrical engineering apprenticeship.

Pomeroy completed his apprenticeship in September 1914, but had already attested to join the army on 28 August.<sup>7</sup> Many of his friends from Rugby enlisted at the same time. He was posted as Driver 192 to the newly formed 1/5<sup>th</sup> Warwickshire (Howitzer) Battery, a Territorial unit that was part of the 4<sup>th</sup> South Midland Howitzer Brigade. After training at Great Baddow, Essex and on Salisbury Plain, the brigade left for France as part of the 48<sup>th</sup> (South Midland) Division, Pomeroy arriving in Havre on 31 March 1915. He spent several months with the Battery, being used as a telephonist at a forward observation post for the artillery.<sup>8</sup> This could be a more risky occupation than working the guns, as it placed Pomeroy much closer to the front line. In August he fell sick with blood poisoning and eczema and, after a fortnight in a field hospital, was invalided home.<sup>9</sup> He was not cured until December.<sup>10</sup>

Meanwhile his commanding officer had recommended him for a commission, which was accepted on 28 December 1915.<sup>11</sup> Pomeroy was placed on the General List but after having applied specifically to join the Royal Flying Corps in October and following an interview in January 1916, he was attached to the flying service.<sup>12</sup> His experience of mechanical, electrical and motor engineering made him a natural choice.

Pomeroy began his training with No. 2 Reserve (Training) Squadron at Brooklands and received his flying certificate on 28 January 1916.<sup>13</sup> He then was transferred to No. 16 Reserve Squadron, but his progress was slowed by the recurrence of a knee injury that had been caused by a bicycle accident before he went to college. Floating bone in his knee had to be removed in an operation and it was not until 25 August that a Medical Board declared him fit for General Service.<sup>14</sup> He returned to France, now as a Flying Officer, just over a year after he had been invalided home.

Pomeroy was posted to No. 11 Squadron, part of 13 Wing of III Brigade RFC. At the time it was based at Izel le Hameau, an airfield west of Arras. It was a fighter squadron (although it did take on other tasks), with most of its planes being two-seater FE.2bs. These 'pushers' (the engine was behind the pilot) were part of an allied air fleet that in the first months of the Battle of the Somme had gained air supremacy on the Western Front.<sup>15</sup> But by the time that Pomeroy arrived the German Air Service was regaining the initiative. By transferring a large number of squadrons from the Verdun battlefield, the Germans equalized the numbers of machines on the Somme. In the middle of September they introduced new planes, the

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<sup>5</sup> Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>6</sup> Anne Langley, 'British Thomson-Houston Works at Rugby', <http://www.ourwarwickshire.org.uk/content/topics/industry/british-thomson-houston-works-rugby>

<sup>7</sup> Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>8</sup> Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour, p.101.

<sup>9</sup> Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>10</sup> Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour, p.101.

<sup>11</sup> *London Gazette*, 21 January 1916.

<sup>12</sup> Pomeroy was permanently transferred to the RFC on 1 July 1916.

<sup>13</sup> Royal Aero Club Aviators' Certificates, 1910-1950, certificate No. 2346 (via Ancestry.Co.UK).

<sup>14</sup> RFC Record, N. R. Pomeroy, TNA PRO AIR/76/407; Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>15</sup> See Michael Durey, "'Casualties had been Somewhat Heavy': Officer Fatalities in the Royal Flying Corps over the Somme, 15 September 1916", on this website.

Albatros D I and D II, which were superior to those available to the Allies. They also instigated new tactics, forming squadrons (*Jastas*) whose experienced pilots fought closely together in packs. By October 1916 'the RFC had lost both their qualitative and numerical advantage' over the Somme.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this move towards a change in the balance of power, the RFC continued its tactics of the offensive at all times. Owing to bad weather in the first weeks of October there was little combat in the air, but on days when conditions improved the squadrons continued their aggressive tactics. One such day, following two days of sleet and rain, was 20 October and Pomeroy was one of six pilots from No. 11 Squadron ordered to make a reconnaissance and photographing expedition over the Douai-Cambrai-Bapaume region. His observer was 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt William Black, formerly of the 1/7<sup>th</sup> Durham Light Infantry. Having completed the first part of their mission they were heading south when attacked by Albatros D IIs of *Jasta 2*, the squadron led by Oswald Boelke, the famous air ace.<sup>17</sup> In the ensuing dogfight the British were severely mauled and Pomeroy's was one of the planes that did not return.<sup>18</sup>

Pomeroy's father received a telegram from the War Office on 23 October, informing him that his son was missing.<sup>19</sup> The squadron's CO also wrote to the family, with hopeful news:

Your son went out on a reconnaissance with several other machines, and they were attacked by German machines in superior numbers, and he had the misfortune to be brought down on the other side of the line. He was seen going down, under control, by another of our machines, so the probability is that the engine of his machine was hit and so he had to come down, and I most sincerely hope that he is now an unwounded prisoner in Germany and I expect you will receive a letter from him soon, only it generally takes four to six weeks for the first letter to come through. We were very sorry to lose him, as he was a good fellow as well as being a good pilot. We have had no further news of him at all; should I receive any, of course, I will let you know at once, but I honestly believe that he is all right and you need not worry about him.<sup>20</sup>

As the weeks and then months passed, however, there was no news at all. The War Office set in train its usual programme seeking the fate of missing officers, including sending a list of names to the neutral American Embassy in Berlin. The first glimmer of an answer to the riddle of the fate of Pomeroy and Black came early in 1917. Black had been badly wounded before the crash and had remained in hospital for two months. He had then been sent to a POW camp near Douai, where he was allowed to send a message home to say that he was alive.<sup>21</sup> Whether he also informed his family that Pomeroy had been killed remains unknown, but it appears that Pomeroy's mother heard of Black's survival and wrote to the War Office in January 1917 seeking an address for Black. In April the War Office wrote to her suggesting that she now allow her son's name to be officially listed as a casualty. Mrs de Pomeroy (as she signed herself) was not prepared to accept this suggestion immediately, presumably

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<sup>16</sup> Peter Hart, *Somme Success: The Royal Flying Corps and the Battle of the Somme 1916* (Barnsley 2012), p.199.

<sup>17</sup> H.A. Jones, *The War in the Air* (1928: Uckfield n.d.), Vol. 2, p.306.

<sup>18</sup> Pomeroy was probably shot down by Lt Erwin Böhme of *Jasta 2*. Ironically, only ten days later during a dogfight the wings of Boelke's and Böhme's planes touched and the former was killed in the subsequent crash. See Johannes Werner, *Knight of Germany: Oswald Boelke, German Ace* (Newbury 2009), pp.256-60.

<sup>19</sup> Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>20</sup> Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour, p.102.

<sup>21</sup> The letter was dated 4 January 1917. International Committee of the Red Cross Archives, [grandguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/21893/3/2/](http://grandguerre.icrc.org/en/File/Details/21893/3/2/).

because she still had not received a reply from Black.<sup>22</sup> But a month later Pomeroy was unofficially declared dead.<sup>23</sup>

Final confirmation of Pomeroy's death came more than a year after it had occurred. During the Battle of Cambrai in November 1917 a British army chaplain discovered the grave.<sup>24</sup> When a report from Germany dated October 1917 stating that Pomeroy had been buried in a local grave in Guémappe, near Monchy arrived in January 1918, the War Office accepted this as conclusive proof of his death. Pomeroy's father was accordingly informed.<sup>25</sup>

Pomeroy had been instantaneously killed in the crash. The Germans buried him near Les Fosses Farm with his wings badge fixed to a grave marker made from propeller blades. The inscription on the blades was: *Hier ruht der Englische fliege N. de Pomeroy T.d 20.10.16. N: 29847 RIP* (Here rests the English Airman N. de Pomeroy).<sup>26</sup> According to one source, Pomeroy's grave was subsequently 'entirely obliterated' by artillery fire.<sup>27</sup> In 1920, however, when the Imperial War Graves Commission was following its policy of concentrating isolated graves in new cemeteries, Pomeroy's remains were found and moved. His body was recognised by its uniform and dentures. His mother and his sister were present during the unpleasant task of disinterring the remains as well as during their reburial in Cagnicourt British Cemetery.<sup>28</sup> On his new headstone they placed the text: *claro qui spiritu Familiares tuos animasti Ipse in pace requiescas*, which can be roughly translated as 'the bright spirit of his family inspired him. Rest in Peace'.<sup>29</sup>

There is one minor mystery to resolve. Pomeroy was described on both the German inscription and on his headstone at Cagnicourt as 'de Pomeroy'. In 1916 his mother was also using the nobiliary particle when she signed her name. Yet in no sources before 1916 was Pomeroy or his family described as de Pomeroy. Norman was baptised as Pomeroy; at school he was Pomeroy; and he enlisted and later applied for a commission as Pomeroy. Only after his death was he elevated socially. It appears that Pomeroy's mother was the driving force in trying to link her family to a noble heritage, for when Edward Pomeroy died in 1921 there was no nobilial particle in the signature on his will.

The 1911 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* noted that many Victorians mistakenly believed that the nobiliary particle before a surname denoted noble ancestry. The de Pomeroy family had first come on to the English scene in 1066, when three de Pomeroy brothers accompanied William of Normandy in his invasion. One of them served as William's Chief of Staff. Why Julia Pomeroy decided to add the particle to her surname remains unclear, although someone who described herself as a dressmaker in the 1911 census and whose husband had inherited a farm in Kent in 1906 may have felt that the possession of land raised the family's social profile. Alternatively, as the daughter of a German, she may have felt that associating the family with an ancient dynasty in England confirmed her patriotism. It is noticeable that her maiden name and her son's second name, Rausch, is omitted from his headstone. Or she may have been a social climber and snob. Whatever the reason, her son Norman Rausch Pomeroy is memorialized as Norman *de* Pomeroy.

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<sup>22</sup> Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>23</sup> *Flight Magazine*, 24 May 1917, p.510.

<sup>24</sup> Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour, p.102.

<sup>25</sup> Service Record, Pomeroy, TNA PRO WO 339/52563.

<sup>26</sup> Great War Forum, <http://1914-1918.invasionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=14861>.

<sup>27</sup> Electrical Engineers Roll of Honour, p.102.

<sup>28</sup> Commonwealth War Grave Commission Archives, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/314167/DE%20POMEROY.%20NORMAN>.

<sup>29</sup> The headstone with inscription was not placed in the cemetery until after Pomeroy's father had died in 1921.

Despite pretensions to gentility, the de Pomeroy's were not wealthy. When Edward Pomeroy died he left only £25. Although Julia de Pomeroy kept the farm, she could not afford a permanent memorial to her son in the parish church. After her death in 1943, however, her daughter raised a stained glass window in St Martin's in memory of both her and her son (see below). It is a two-light window, with rather fine figures in both, but much of the background is in clear glass, perhaps reflecting the amount of money available for the memorial. The inscription reads: *This window is to the undying memory of Julia de Pomeroy who died July 30<sup>th</sup> 1943 and her only son Norman who gave his life in battle October 20<sup>th</sup> 1916.*

In the left hand corner of the left light there is etched a weathervane, possibly the mark of the stained glass designer Hugh Easton (1906-1955). His most famous window, dedicated to RAF personnel killed during the second half of 1940, can be found in the Battle of Britain Chapel in Westminster Abbey. This window was dedicated in 1947, probably a year or two after Pomeroy's.

The left light contains the figure of a young woman with long flowing flaxen hair. She is dressed in a yellow gown and a blue cloak, in the style of the 11<sup>th</sup> century, the time that the de Pomeroy's first came to England. She wears a Christian crown and holds red flowers with yellow centres. These could be marigolds (Mary's gold) that in Christian iconography symbolise sorrow or grief. At her feet are the arms of the Pomeroy family. This is a representation of Julia Pomeroy as she perhaps saw herself, still grieving for her lost only son.

The woman is looking towards the right-hand light, in which Pomeroy is represented by St Michael who, in a Roman centurion's uniform, spears the fiery dragon of evil. Beneath him is the badge of the Royal Air Force (the Royal Flying Corps when Pomeroy served). Overall, the window symbolizes the strong bond of the mother-son relationship that was so strong in Edwardian England, especially when a family had only one son. It also asserts the claim that the Pomeroy's were linked to a long ancestral line stretching back to the Norman Conquest. That Pomeroy was baptised Norman was possibly just a coincidence, given his father's forenames.

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Source: ellesmerecollective.co.uk