

## GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

**No. 12: St Saviour's, Westgate on Sea**

*Captain Leonard Neville Rogers*

**1<sup>st</sup> attached 18<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers**

**DOW 11 April 1917**

**Window: St Saviour's Westgate on Sea**

**Kent links: Family home**

**Medals: British and Victory medals**

**War Grave: St Nicolas British Cemetery, Pas de Calais**



**Captain Leonard Neville Rogers**

**Source: Imperial War Museums, First World War Portraits Collection, HU 125126**

Leonard Neville Rogers was born on 29 October 1878 and was baptised in St Mary's, Balham in South London on 3 December.<sup>1</sup> He was the fourth son of William Bennett Rogers and his wife Anne Catherine. Bennett Rogers was a surveyor and auctioneer (at one time President of the Auctioneers' Institute), with offices in Kensington and Gloucester Road in South-West London. On the south coast he was also agent for Coutts, the private bank, a local JP and 'one of the most influential people in the history of Westgate'. The family home from 1874 was *Danehurst*, a large property on the front at Westgate-on-Sea.<sup>2</sup> Leonard was to have a very comfortable middle-class upbringing. When his father died in March 1916 he left nearly £67,000 in his will.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Service Record, Leonard Neville Rogers, TNA PRO WO 339/28784; London Baptism Registers, Ancestry.Co.

<sup>2</sup> L.N. Rogers, Obituary, *The St George's Gazette*, 30 April 1917; Records, St Saviour's, Westgate, Historical Society. I am grateful to Robert ("old owl") on the Great War Forum for the first reference and to Dr Dawn Crouch for the second.

<sup>3</sup> Probate, William Bennett Rogers, 1916, Ancestry.Co.

Even with four brothers it was financially possible for Leonard to be sent to a top public school, Marlborough College in Wiltshire, which he attended from January 1891 until midsummer 1896.<sup>4</sup> Much has been written about the late Victorian and Edwardian public schools, some, if not most, of it being highly critical. The focus on classical languages rather than on science; the emphasis on building character rather than on developing the mind; the increasing focus on sport as a moulder of manliness; the promotion of militarism, imperialism and the cult of white British superiority; and the dangers of homo-eroticism in an all-male closed environment, all have been seen as weaknesses in the public school system.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the public schools have been accused of turning boys from the families of manufacturers and industrialists into anti-industrial and anti-business young men ‘detached from the single-minded pursuit of production and profit’.<sup>6</sup> This view of the baneful effects of the public schools on Britain’s economic fortunes has been undermined by W.D. Rubinstein’s convincing studies of the “cultural critique” thesis.<sup>7</sup>

In so far as Leonard Rogers is concerned, Marlborough apparently failed to turn his head, for he, and some of his brothers (three of whom attended Marlborough), were to follow in their father’s business footsteps, while another followed a mercantile career. This was despite Leonard’s excellence at team sports, playing in the Marlborough first teams in cricket, rugby and hockey. He also continued playing for Old Boys’ teams after he left school and represented the county of Surrey at rugby.<sup>8</sup> At the age of eighteen he joined his father’s firm, Messrs Rogers, Chapman and Thomas, and subsequently became a partner. In 1911 he was living with two of his brothers in Putney, South-West London, and in 1915 with another brother in Belgrave Road, Westminster.<sup>9</sup>

Rogers was approaching his thirty-sixth birthday when war was declared and was still unmarried. Like so many of the more mature male civilians reacting to the war, he did not enlist immediately, but settled his affairs first. He attested on 17 December 1914 and joined the Inns of Court OTC as Private 2775 on 25 January 1915.<sup>10</sup> The Inns of Court OTC was a territorial unit with a long history as a volunteer corps, although it only became an officer training corps after the Haldane reforms of 1908-9. In 1914 it was an exclusive unit composed almost entirely of ‘Public School and University men’ in its ranks.<sup>11</sup> Training was expected to

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<sup>4</sup> Marlborough College Roll of Honour World War 1 Archive, [www.archive.marlboroughcollege.org](http://www.archive.marlboroughcollege.org)

<sup>5</sup> The most extreme example of this criticism, which is limited mainly to sources from men who disliked their lives at school, is Peter Parker, *The Old Lie: The Great War and the Public-School Ethos* (London 1987). Despite the enormous amount of new research in subsequent decades, when reprinted in 2007 the author refused to change a word of his book. Parker’s work has been, rightly, described as ‘a polemic, and a flawed contribution to the historical debate’. Timothy Halstead, ‘The First World War and Public School Ethos: The case of Uppingham School’, *War and Society*, Vol. 34, No. 3 (2015), p.211. Schooling at Marlborough did not seem to blunt the minds of war poets Siegfried Sassoon and Charles Sorley, or of John Betjeman, or of art historian and spy Anthony Blunt. Leonard Rogers’ brother Vivian believed his time at Marlborough to be ‘five of the happiest years of my life’. V.B. Rogers, *Major Vivian Barry Rogers: An Autobiography* (Edinburgh 1965), p.12.

<sup>6</sup> Martin J. Weiner, *English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit, 1850-1980* (London 1981), p.20.

<sup>7</sup> See especially, W.D. Rubinstein, *Capitalism, Culture, and Decline in Britain 1750-1990* (London 1993), pp.102-39.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew Renshaw (ed), *Wisden on the Great War: The Lives of Cricket’s Fallen 1914-1918* (London 2014), p.362.

<sup>9</sup> 1911 Census; Service Record, Leonard Neville Rogers, TNA PRO WO 339/28784.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> F.H.L. Errington (ed), *The Inns of Court Officers Training Corps during the Great War* (London 1922), p.18.

take three to four months. In Rogers' case, he applied for a commission after only two months and was gazetted on 4 May 1915.<sup>12</sup>

According to his application form, Rogers specifically asked to be commissioned in the 18<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, a battalion in Kitchener's New Army. At first glance it appears strange that he would seek to join a unit so far north, hundreds of miles away from London and the family home in Westgate. The answer lies in the early military career of his youngest brother, Vivian. As he had served in the OTC while at Marlborough, Vivian applied for an immediate commission and on 23 December 1914 was gazetted and posted to the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. It was at the battalion CO's recommendation, no doubt influenced by Vivian who was Assistant Adjutant, that Leonard was encouraged to join the same unit as his brother.<sup>13</sup>

The full title of the unit when Leonard joined was the 18<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (1<sup>st</sup> Tyneside Pioneers). It had begun as an infantry battalion raised in October 1914 by the Lord Mayor and Corporation of Newcastle-upon-Tyne. Its ranks were filled mainly by miners. It was only in February 1915 that it became a pioneer battalion and was attached as Divisional Troops to 34<sup>th</sup> Division in the following June.<sup>14</sup> No sooner had Lionel joined than Vivian left, taking the first steps towards becoming a Staff Captain and eventually a Major with a DSO and an MC.<sup>15</sup> Both, however, were to be promoted Temporary Captains on the same day, 3 September 1915, although Vivian's seniority dated from 15 April 1915 and Leonard's from 7 August 1915.<sup>16</sup>

The 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion joined the BEF in January 1916, landing at Le Havre on the 8<sup>th</sup>. Neither brother was present. According to the March 1916 Army List, both were serving with the 28<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers.<sup>17</sup> This had been formed in July 1915 when the depot companies of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> Battalions of the regiment had been merged. Leonard was to stay with this unit until it was absorbed as a Training Reserve Battalion in 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Brigade.<sup>18</sup> Only then did he go abroad, arriving in France on 16 September 1916.<sup>19</sup>

Exactly which battalion he initially joined remains unclear. According to the Army List of February 1917, Lionel was then serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers. This appears to be confirmed by the data in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission records; he was killed while attached to the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. Yet there is no evidence from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion's War Diary that Rogers served with them on the Western Front. On 19 September 1916, however, the diary does record that three officers joined the battalion.<sup>20</sup> Unfortunately (and unusually), no names are given. The problem is compounded by the fact that the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion War Diary does not mention when Rogers joined them (although it fails to record any information about any officer arriving or leaving). The solution perhaps lies with the information on Rogers' Medal Index Card, a source that is concerned only with service overseas. This mentions his service with the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion but says nothing about the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. It seems likely, therefore, on the evidence currently available, that Rogers was initially posted to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion when the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion was absorbed into the 19<sup>th</sup> Reserve Brigade, but that he was soon re-posted to the 18<sup>th</sup> for service overseas.

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<sup>12</sup> Service Record, Leonard Neville Rogers, TNA PRO WO 339/28784; *London Gazette*, 11 May 1915, p.4634.

<sup>13</sup> Rogers, *Autobiography*, p.29.

<sup>14</sup> The Long, Long Trail, <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/>.

<sup>15</sup> Rogers, *Autobiography*, pp.29-44.

<sup>16</sup> *London Gazette*, 7 October 1915, p.9875.

<sup>17</sup> Army List, March 1916, col. 945f.

<sup>18</sup> The October 1916 Army List, p. 934, still listed both brothers as serving with the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

<sup>19</sup> Medal Index Card, Capt. Leonard Neville Rogers, Ancestry.Co.

<sup>20</sup> War Diary, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers, 19 September 1916, TNA PRO WO 95/1430.

Assuming that to be the case, Rogers would have joined his battalion just after the 34<sup>th</sup> Division had completed its tour of the Somme and was in the trenches at Armentières, south of Ypres. As a pioneer battalion, the 18<sup>th</sup> had a number of functions that included, usually under orders from Royal Engineers, digging trenches, building bridges, mending roads, salvaging war materials and burying the dead. Although trained infantrymen, Pioneers did not usually man the line or take part in attacks, but they did enter the battlefield very soon after assaults commenced, in order to secure ground taken by repairing old trenches and digging new communication trenches. They were, therefore, often under fire. In times of emergency, however, they did take their place in the line. It was this last requirement that was to lead indirectly to Rogers' death.

34<sup>th</sup> Division, part of XVII Corps, Third Army, was heavily involved in the Battle of Arras in April 1917. The Corps' role was to attack the southern end of Vimy Ridge while the Canadian Corps assaulted the remainder, with the aim of reaching a line beyond the German third defensive system (the Point de Jour line). The plan involved three Divisions of XVII Corps attacking in line, with the 34<sup>th</sup> in the centre between the 9<sup>th</sup> and the 51<sup>st</sup>.<sup>21</sup> Major-General C.L. Nicholson, CO of 34<sup>th</sup> Division, decided to make the assault with all three brigades—101<sup>st</sup>, 102<sup>nd</sup> (Tyneside Scottish) and 103<sup>rd</sup> (Tyneside Irish)—being used together.<sup>22</sup>

The offensive began on 9 April in very poor weather and initially there was some success. In the early evening three companies of the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion were ordered to clear a communication trench called Gavreller Weg, which was between the first and second line objectives of the Division that day. Only a portion of it, however, could be consolidated owing to the presence of enemy troops still holding a section. They returned to their base in Roclincourt Valley at 2am on the 10<sup>th</sup>.<sup>23</sup>

After only two and a half hours rest the three companies were ordered up into the line currently held by 103<sup>rd</sup> Brigade.<sup>24</sup> This was the Blue Line on the original map (the first objective), but at 3pm two of the companies were ordered forward to the Brown Line. According to the War Diary, 'Their orders were to reinforce 27<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers in front line in case of attack. At about 7.30pm both companies reinforced front line during counterattack. These three companies remained in the line until about 2am on 11 April'.<sup>25</sup>

It was while returning to their billets that Rogers was fatally wounded. The War Diary does not mention the event, but the history of the Battalion, written by its CO, Lt-Colonel John Shakespear, does. 'It was on returning to billets', wrote Shakespear, 'after being relieved that the battalion lost Captain L.N. Rogers, one of our most capable officers, whom everyone loved and respected. He was killed by a small fragment of shell which struck him in the head soon after he had left the front line'.<sup>26</sup> He died in 28 Field Ambulance behind the lines.<sup>27</sup>

The Rogers family first heard the bad news when a War Office telegram arrived dated 14 April. It said that he had been killed in action. Two days later the War Office Casualties

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<sup>21</sup> Scheme for Operations against the Southern End of Vimy Ridge, Instructions No.1, War Diary, 18<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, 26 March 1917, TNA PRO WO 95/2451.

<sup>22</sup> Capt. Cyril Falls, *Official History of the Great War: Military Operations France and Belgium 1917* (London 1939), Vol. 1, p.231.

<sup>23</sup> War Diary, 18<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, 9 April 1917.

<sup>24</sup> The 103<sup>rd</sup> Brigade had been the least successful in achieving the objectives laid down for 10 April. Falls, *Official History 1917*, p.254.

<sup>25</sup> War Diary, 18<sup>th</sup> Northumberland Fusiliers, 10 April 1917.

<sup>26</sup> John Shakespear, *Historical Records of the 18<sup>th</sup> (Service) Battalion Northumberland Fusiliers (1<sup>st</sup> Tyneside Pioneers)* (1920: Uckfield 2009), p.61. I am very grateful to Robert ("Old Owl") of the Great War Forum for this reference and for sending me the quotation.

<sup>27</sup> Service Record, Leonard Neville Rogers, TNA PRO WO 339/28784.

Department sent a letter to say that Rogers had died of wounds and had not been killed in action. Rogers' brother Mordaunt replied for the family, saying that the information the family had received from the battalion suggested that he had been killed outright and that the official casualty list should reflect that, if true. But as Rogers died in a Field Ambulance, the correct designation was "died of wounds" and that remained the official position.<sup>28</sup>

Rogers was buried in St Nicolas British Cemetery, just to the north of Arras. When the Imperial War Graves Commission replaced the wooden crosses with headstones after the war, Mordaunt Rogers asked for the inscription '*Quo Fata Vocant* [Where Destiny takes me], *Never Forgotten*' to be carved on his brother's.<sup>29</sup> The motto is that of the Northumberland Fusiliers.

The motto links the site of Rogers' grave to the stained glass memorial window, designed by Walter Tower's C.E. Kempe & Co. of London in 1920, erected in his memory in St Saviour's Church, Westgate, for the latter's central light contains the Northumberland Fusiliers' crest of St George slaying the dragon with the same motto underneath (see Figure 1).<sup>30</sup> The dedication (see Figure 2) again uses the motto, as well as suggesting that the family still did not accept that Rogers had died of wounds.

The Northumberland theme continues with the representation of St Oswald, King of Northumbria, in the right-hand light.<sup>31</sup> Oswald (605-642) was responsible for the expansion of Northumbria during the seventh century and for re-introducing Christianity to the North, lost since the decline of Roman Britain and the arrival of the Anglo-Saxons. He also founded the famous abbey of Lindisfarne on an island off the coast near Bamburgh. He was killed fighting the pagan King Panda of Mercia and his body hacked to pieces. He became revered as a Christian warrior-martyr.

In the left-hand light is a representation of St Alban, supposedly the first Christian martyr in Britain, who sacrificed himself for his religious beliefs and for his fellow men.<sup>32</sup> The story is that Alban, a Roman soldier but probably born in Britain, sometime at the end of the second or in the early third century, protected a Christian priest at a time when Christianity was banned by the Romans. Impressed by the priest's piety, Alban converted. When soldiers came to arrest the priest, Alban took his place and, despite scourging, refused to reject Christianity and was beheaded for his intransigence.

Like St Oswald, St Alban is seen as a Christian warrior-martyr. Both hold the palm branch that represents martyrdom, as well as symbolizing victory, triumph, peace and eternal life. St Oswald holds a green cross, signifying his role in developing the roots of Christianity once again in England. St Alban is commonly seen holding a sword, inverted, as well as the palm. Together they imply that Rogers died as a Christian warrior-martyr.

This is a common trope in many of the stained glass windows commemorating the dead of the Great War. What makes this window so unusual is its focus on Northumbria/Northumberland in a church so far to the south of the country. Clearly, with two brothers serving with the Northumberland Fusiliers, the family was very proud of that connection.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> CWGC Archives, <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/51111/ROGERS,%20LEONARD%20NEVILLE>.

<sup>30</sup> Permission to erect the window was sought from the Diocese in 1920.

<sup>31</sup> For the identification of the saints in the window, see Canterbury Cathedral Archives, Faculties, DCb-E/F/Westgate, St Saviour/14. I am also grateful to Dr Dawn Crouch and the St Saviour's History Society.

<sup>32</sup> There is no contemporary evidence that Alban existed.



Figure 1: Leonard Neville Rogers' Memorial Window



Figure 2: Memorial Tablet



Source: Michael Durey & ellesmerecollective.co.uk

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