

Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager

2nd Lieutenant, Number 5159, 73 Squadron, Royal Flying Corps

Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager was born on 9 August 1892 in Hampstead. His parents were Edward George and Kezia Croager. Norman had a twin brother Cecil Ernest Rowley Croager and a sister Dorothy Mabel, who was four years older and also born in Hampstead. In the 1901 Census, the family were living in Hampstead, at 3 Mill Lane. Mr Edward Croager described himself as a Professor of Music. The family had a live-in domestic servant, Rose Dibbin, a native of Dorset. Edward Croager, born in 1861 in St Pancras, married Kezia Wade in St Pancras in 1885, and his address in the Electoral Role for 1889 was 14 Cotleigh Road, Kilburn. Prof. Edward Croager



A.R.A.M. was a well-known organist (at St James, West Hampstead; St Paul's, Avenue Road, NW 1898-1919, and Christ Church, Brondesbury) and also a composer and conductor. He composed songs, (*Fairy Songs* 1893) cantatas and anthems, and conducted the West Hampstead Choral and Orchestra Society. Whilst living in Hampstead, the young Norman E.S. Croager was admitted to the St Paul's Cathedral School in August 1901 (aged 9) and became a chorister in the cathedral in December 1902.¹ He left the school when his voice broke in July 1906 and went to

Merchant Taylors' School, Northwood (shown in the photograph). Norman was a pupil there from 1906 to 1907.² His brother Cecil E.R. Croager was not a pupil at either school.

By the time of the 1911 Census, the Croager family were resident in Amersham Common. Flint Cottage still stands in Woodside Lane, near the railway bridge. Edward Croager was still a Professor of Music, Cecil E.R. Croager (aged 18) was an Insurance Clerk. Norman E.S. Croager (also 18) was a Clerk for a Foreign Railway Company. Also living in the house was Maria Towner (a widow aged 80), described as mother-in-law. The family was able to employ a domestic servant, Ada Ellen Speed, aged 22, from Aylesbury, Bucks. The house was a substantial dwelling with 8 rooms in addition to scullery, bathroom etc. By 1911 Dorothy Mabel Croager had left home and was listed as a nurse, aged 22, at the Epileptic Colony, Chalfont St Peter, Bucks.

Norman E.S. Croager left his job as a clerk and enrolled at Kelham College, Newark, Nottinghamshire, as a Theology student, with a view to being ordained in the Church. However, before he had completed his studies, in August 1914, war was declared. Like many other young men, Norman and his twin brother Cecil decided to put their careers to one side and volunteer for the armed forces. Their names appeared on a list of those who enlisted at Amersham, in the *Buckinghamshire Examiner* on 2nd October 1914. They both enlisted into the 7th Battalion of the Royal Fusiliers.

¹ Information kindly provided by St Pauls Cathedral School, 2 New Change, London EC4M 9AD.

² Information kindly provided by Merchant Taylors' School, Moor Park, Northwood.



'Flint Cottage'

The house in Woodside Lane, Amersham Common, where the Croager family lived at the 1911 Census and during World War 1.

(photographed in May 2013)

Enlistment and Attestation: Norman E.S. Croager's records³ show that he was enlisted on 16 September 1914 into the Royal Fusiliers and posted as a private on 19 September. The attestation document shows that the service was to be of short duration – 3 years – and was signed by N.E.S. Croager in front of a magistrate. He answered a number of basic questions and took the oath of allegiance to the King and his heirs. On his certificate of medical examination, Norman Croager was described as being 5ft 8ins tall, weighed 130 lbs approximately, and his chest when fully expanded was 35 ½ inches. His complexion was fresh, eyes grey and hair brown. His religion was Church of England. He was passed as fit for the army and his certificate was signed by Lt Colonel A.R. Aldridge R.A.M.C.

Army Service: Norman Croager was appointed into the Royal Fusiliers by the Approving Officer. He must then have undergone basic training, in the South Downs, and the regiment does not appear to have been engaged in any action. Norman was promoted to Lance Corporal on 21 January 1915. Like many other young men from Public School backgrounds, Norman Croager applied for a Commission and was transferred out of the Royal Fusiliers and into the 10th Battalion, Norfolk Regiment. His application for a Temporary Commission in the Regular Army was submitted on 7 April 1915. Norman was then serving in the Number 2 Company of the 12th Royal Fusiliers and was billeted in Brunswick House, Shoreham-by-Sea, Sussex. His character referee was the Vicar of St Paul's Church, Avenue Road, Hampstead, (where his father was the organist), who certified that Norman was "of good moral character". Another character reference was obtained from the Headmaster of Merchant Taylors' School, who also had to certify that Norman's standard of education was sufficient to enable him to be admitted to the Royal Military College. Norman Croager was transferred to the Norfolk Regiment on 2 May 1915 as a 2nd Lieutenant.

While Norman Croager was serving with the Norfolk Regiment, his sister Dorothy Mabel Croager (then aged 27) married 27-year-old Roy Willoughby Jeffery on 10 July 1915, in the church of St Paul, Avenue Road, Hampstead, where her father was organist. Roy Jeffery was a Banker's Clerk and the son of a "gentleman", Frederick Jeffery.

³ 2nd Lt Croager of the Royal Flying Corps has a file in The National Archives under WO 339/39646, former reference 106927. There is also a file under AIR 76. All records of enlistment, attestation, service, medical records and finance are in these two files.

The Norfolk Regiment embarked for Egypt from Devonport on 7 January 1916, disembarking in Alexandria on 3 February. On 5 February Norman joined the 1/4th Btn Norfolk Regiment, which was in Egypt during 1916 and 1917. They became part of the **Egyptian Expeditionary Force** which was formed on 10 March 1916 under the command of General A.J. Murray. The force was to guard Egypt and the Suez Canal, the vital link with the British Empire in the East. There were several battles with German-commanded Ottoman Turks near the canal and into Palestine. During his service in Egypt, Norman Croager was given the opportunity to apply for a transfer to the **Royal Flying Corps**. On 4 October 1916, he moved to Base pending passage to England for transfer to the R.F.C. On 15 October he embarked in Alexandria on H.T. *Arcadian* for the journey back to England, to join the R.F.C on 23 Oct 1916.

Royal Flying Corps: 2nd Lt. Norman Croager joined the 40 R.S [Reserve Squadron], spent some months learning to fly and graduated as a Flying Officer on 17 April 1917. He was placed on the General List. However, it appears that on the same day, Norman was involved in a flying accident over Oxford. He received concussion to the brain and a simple fracture of the right tibia. He was admitted to the Somerville Hospital in Oxford and declared unfit to fly, but fit for light duties only. This must have been very frustrating for him. He was living in London, in Brondesbury N.W.6, and had been posted to the Southern Group Non-Effective Officers' Pool from 2 August 1917, working in an administrative role. He was out of active service for thirteen weeks. Norman appeared before the Medical Board on 11 September, in the hope of being able to fly again. His medical report was generally positive, except that the Medical Officer claimed that Norman was 'oversmoking', and urged him to cut down. Having been pronounced fit to fly, Norman Croager was transferred to 73 Squadron, 25th Wing, on 12 September 1917.

The Squadron, based at Lilbourne, Warwickshire, was training in preparation for active service in France, and the aircraft usually flown was the Sopwith Camel. The Royal Flying Corps was involved in reconnaissance work and aerial photography along the Western Front, and gradually took on more of a combat role. Parachutes were not available to pilots in any of the heavier-than-air craft, nor were they used by the R.F.C. during World War 1.

The Fatal Accident: On the morning of 8 November, 1917, around 11.30, Flying Officer 2nd Lt. Norman E.S.Croager took to the air at Lilbourne aerodrome on a training flight with a passenger under instruction, 2nd Lt. Victor William Price. For some unknown reason the aircraft went into a spinning nose-dive and crashed into a field adjacent to the aerodrome at 11.45 a.m. 2nd Lt V.W. Price was killed, and Norman Croager initially survived the crash, but died later. The aircraft they were flying was a Mono Avro B3179, which was in a batch of 150 Avro 504J built by A.V.Roe at Hamble.⁴

An inquest into the deaths of Victor Price and Norman Eustace Croager was held on 12 November 1917 and recorded in Warwickshire Central District. The case files have not survived. Cause of death was stated as 'fell from aircraft', which seems to be the standard term for a crash, and location Rugby.

The Rugby Advertiser on Saturday 10 November 1917 printed the following article:

"Aviation Fatality - Two Officers killed" "On Thursday an aeroplane, while flying near Rugby, came down, falling about 300 feet, and the two officers Lts Price and Croager, received such injuries that the former died immediately and the latter about two hours later, after being removed to hospital under the care of Surgeon-Major Collins."

The accident was not reported to the accident committee, but a Court of Inquiry was held on 23 November 1917. "The Court considered the evidence and viewed the wreckage and ascertained that all the controls were in first order. Are of the opinion that for some unknown reason, got into a spin at a height of about 200 feet and crashed to the ground, causing the death of both pilot and

⁴ All information regarding the accident and aircraft kindly provided by Mark Evans of the Aviation Archaeology Museum.

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passenger. A/c not called for as this is obviously not a case of structural breakage or one calling for investigation of design" [sic].



An **AVRO 504** aircraft, similar to the one that 2nd Lt. Norman E.S. Croager was flying when he was killed. The versatile Avro 504 became the standard training aeroplane for the RFC during WW1 and in the early days of the conflict was used as a night fighter and for the first bombing raid in the history of aerial warfare. The photograph was taken at the Shuttleworth Collection, Old Warden Aerodrome, near Biggleswade, Bedfordshire, in May 2013.

The British Army Medal Rolls Index card for 2nd Lt. Norman E.S. Croager, which confirms his death in an aeroplane accident in the U.K. and also that he served in the army in Egypt.

He was awarded The Allied Victory Medal and The British War Medal, 1914-18

Name	Corps	Rank	Regt. No.
CROAGER.	Gen List	X/2/Lieut	
N. E. S.	R.F.C.		
Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager	Page 189	Killed in U.K. Aero. acc. 17 Dec '16	
Victory	X		
British	X		
Star			
Theatre of War first served in	Egypt		
Date of entry therein	25.1.16		
		NW/5/17653	K. 1390

2nd Lt. Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager is remembered with Honour
Rugby St. Marie Roman Catholic Churchyard

He is remembered on the Roll of Honour in St Mary's Church, Amersham and also on the Memorial in Malvern, along with 2nd Lt Victor William Price, who came from Great Malvern.



2nd Lieutenant Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager is buried in the churchyard of the Roman Catholic (St. Marie), Church Rugby. His grave lies against the north wall.

"Of your charity pray for the soul of Norman E.S. Croager. He offered his life to God and to his country."

(Photograph provided by the War Graves Photographic Project in association with the Commonwealth War Graves Commission.)

After the Death of 2nd Lt. Croager: When a young serviceman died there were his financial affairs to be settled. The documents in 2nd Lt. Croager's extensive War Office file give a detailed account of the problems of sorting out his affairs and the tenacious efforts of his father Edward Croager, to obtain all money to which Norman was entitled. Norman Croager died intestate, having never made a Will. Normally, after a death in the U.K, death duties would have to be paid, but Edward Croager made a personal appeal to the War Office for remission of death duties on his son. The death in an aeroplane accident came under the Finance Act of 1900. However, all troops at home were declared to be on active service by Army Order 314 (16 August 1914). So effectively, 2nd Lt Croager had been killed "while on active service against our enemy", and should therefore be exempt from death duties.

The Croager file contains letters and records of telephone conversations between the War Office and Edward Croager. Shortly after his son's death, Edward contacted the War Office and enquired whether there would be any gratuities in respect of the injuries received by the deceased in April 1917 and said that Norman Croager had made an application. The War Office explained that, if anything was due, it would be dealt with as part of the estate. Eventually, the War Office sent their decision to Edward Croager on 24 April 1918:

"I am directed to acquaint you that as the Medical Board, by which he (Norman Croager) was examined on 14/7/1917 did not regard his injuries as of a very severe nature, he was not eligible under the regulations for any wound gratuity." This was signed by Sgt.J.G. Ashley, for the Assistant Financial Secretary.

Edward Croager also made enquiries about expenses to which he thought Norman was entitled. He had found a signed application from 2nd Lt. Croager claiming hotel and travel costs in relation to his job. It appears that Norman neglected to post it and the Financial Secretary said he had no knowledge of the expenses claim. Edward was still visiting the War Office asking about the expenses claim in June 1918.

On 11 December 1917, Edward Croager collected the personal effects of his son, and only the small amount of money found on the deceased was handed over. 2nd Lt.Croager's pay was settled by the 25 April 1918. His pay had been calculated up to the date of his death on 8/11/17 and pay over-issued was deducted. His Mess bill of £4 10s 4d was paid by Edward Croager. Probate for the estate of 2nd Lt. Norman E.S. Croager, Buckinghamshire, was granted eventually on 29 June 1918, and the sum of £191.11s.3d was paid to Professor Edward Croager as next of kin.⁵

From the *National Probate Calendar*, information relating to Edward and Kezia Croager:

CROAGER Edward George of Flint Cottage Amersham Common, Buckinghamshire, died 30th June 1922 at Victoria Private Hospital, Victoria, British Columbia, Canada Administration (with Will) London 3rd January 1923 to Kezia Croager Widow. Effects £943.6s.8d. (His death was registered also in Amersham).

CROAGER Kezia of Newlands Framfield near Uckfield Sussex, widow, died 8th August 1934 at Southlands Hospital Shoreham Sussex. Probate London 11th October 1934 to Cecil Ernest Rowley Croager, insurance broker, and Dorothy Mabel Jeffrey (wife of Roy Willoughby Jeffrey). Effects £1145. 7s.

Cecil Ernest Rowley Croager, the twin brother of Norman E.S Croager, enlisted in the 7th Royal Fusiliers at the same time, on 16 September 1914. He enlisted as a Private, but also applied for a temporary commission and transferred to the Machine Gun Corps as a 2nd Lieutenant.

He was awarded the Military Cross in 1916 and the citation in *The Edinburgh Gazette*⁶ read:

⁵ National Probate Calendar (Index of Wills and administrations) 1858-1966, from Ancestry co.uk.

Kezia Croager died aged 75 and her death was registered in Steyning, Sussex.

⁶ *Supplement to The Edinburgh Gazette*, No. 12,978, 28 August 1916.

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"2nd Lt. Cecil Ernest Rowley Croager, Mach. Gun Corps.

For conspicuous gallantry in action. He moved his guns across "No Man's Land" under heavy machine-gun fire, drove the enemy into cover with his fire, organised a bombing party of another unit, and cleared part of the enemy's trenches. Later he again repelled the enemy with his guns."

He was later promoted to the rank of Captain.

Name.	Corps.	Rank	Regtl. No.
CROAGER, (M.C.)	M. G. C.	2nd Lieut + Capt	
C. E. R.			
Cecil Ernest Rowley	Page.	Remarks.	
+ VICTORY	169	N. X. 420. d/11-5-22.	
+ BRITISH		NW/5/23789.	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in	France		
Date of entry therein	2-3-16		
1832 No record of M.C.D.			
NW/5/23789			
K. 1380			

Cecil E.R. Croager married Mary M. Hartung in the June quarter of 1924, in the Pancras district of Middlesex. He died in 1966, aged 74, in Aldershot, Hampshire.

Perhaps the most fitting end to this piece about 2nd Lt. Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager would be to quote the whole of his Obituary, which appeared in the *Buckinghamshire Examiner* on 7 December 1917:

OBITUARY

"Amersham Common. The Late Sec-Lt Croager"

"Sec-Lieut. Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager, son of Mr. and Mrs. Edward G. Croager, of Amersham, was killed while flying at Rugby on November 8th, but a week or two previous to going to France. The tragedy of the accident was increased by the fact that it happened whilst his parents were in the train on their way to Rugby on a visit to witness his flying manoeuvres. He lingered for about three and a half hours, and they saw him just before he breathed his last.

"As a boy he was a chorister in St. Paul's Cathedral Choir, on leaving which he entered Merchant Taylors' School. For some years he derived much pleasure in assisting his father in his work as organist and choirmaster of St. Paul's Church, Avenue Road. He then entered as a theological student at Kelham College, Newark, with a view to taking Holy Orders, but the war breaking out, he did not hesitate to enlist in the 12th Royal Fusiliers in September 1914.

"Obtaining a commission in the 10th Norfolk Regiment, in April 1915, he went to Egypt attached to the 4th Norfolks. In October 1916, an opportunity of transferring to the Royal Flying Corps occurring, he returned to England for training, which was somewhat hindered by an accident in April last.

"Described by his C.O. as an expert flyer, and by his brother officers as a good, safe and skilful pilot, who would take no risks, his crashing to earth in a flat spinning, nose-dive is the more unaccountable. A man of lovable disposition and high character, he is mourned by a large circle of friends. R.I.P."

ADDENDUM



The wreckage of the Avro 504 Aircraft B3179 of 73 Squadron, RFC, in which the two officers were killed. (Photograph supplied by Giles Smith of Lilbourne from an unidentifiable source.)

“The circumstances under which Lieut Price and a brother officer Second Lieut Norman Croager were killed as a result of an aeroplane nose-diving to earth soon after rising, were explained at an inquest held at Rugby on Monday.

Capt M Smith said that the machine which the two officers were flying was one used for instructional work and was not a type of machine now used in France. When he noticed the machine, it was about 200ft, and falling to earth in a slow spin.

It was stated that this was the third flight which Lieut Croager, who was a fully qualified pilot, had made that day. After the second flight, it was found that one of the sparking plugs was not acting and another was put in, but even if that had not operated it would not have endangered the two men as a pilot could land with the engine stopped. The aeroplane was tested, and it was found to be perfect.

Mr and Mrs E G Croager of Amersham Common, Bucks (parents of Second Lieutenant Croager) were journeying to spend a few days with their son on the day of the tragedy and were in the train when the accident occurred. They got to their son’s side just before he died. Both officers were terribly injured. A verdict of ‘accidental death’ was returned.”⁷

⁷ Extract from: *Malvern News*, 17 November 1917. We are grateful to Giles Smith of Lilbourne for bringing this to our attention.

THE MEMORIAL TO THE CHORISTERS OF ST PAUL'S CATHEDRAL WHO FELL IN THE GREAT WAR⁸



Photographs courtesy: Hazel Garas

⁸ Norman Eustace Sassoon Croager was a chorister at St Paul's Cathedral from 1902 to 1906. The Memorial, created following the First World War, also bears the names of those members of the choir who gave their lives during the war of 1939-1945.