

## 158: Henry James Rockell

### Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Henry James Rockell

Rank: Rifleman

Battalion / Regiment: 21st Bn. King's Royal Rifle Corps.

Service Number: R/16707

Date of Death: 20 July 1916

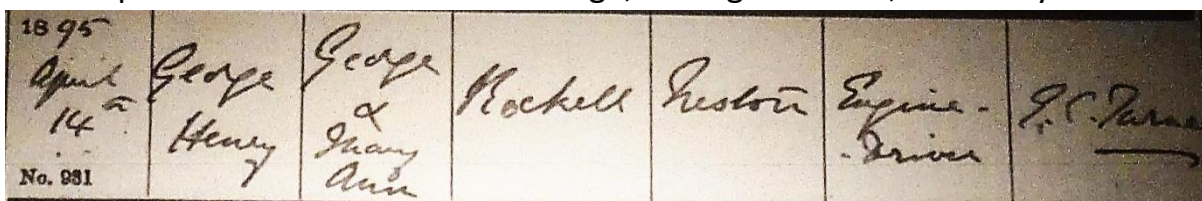
Age at Death: 21

Buried / Commemorated at: Berks Cemetery Extension, Comines-Warneton, Hainaut, Belgium

Additional information given by CWGC: Son of Mrs. J. Rockell, of 97, Park Rd., Leyton, London

Although the Service Record of Henry James Rockell has survived, this is sparse on detail and there is little other information on Henry and his family and their background.

Henry was born, in Neston, on about 18 February 1895 and he was baptised - although recorded as George Henry - at Neston Parish Church on 14 April. In the baptismal register his parents were recorded as George, an engine driver, and Mary Ann:



This is probably an error of entry, the father's name being transposed into the baptismal name and his mother's name (Emma) being misrecorded. The register of his birth does give his name as Henry James.

Henry was the only son of George and Mary, although they had three younger daughters, Emma Beatrice, Elizabeth Sarah and Florence.

George Rockell was the son of James (recorded in 1881 as an agricultural labourer and in 1891 as a carpenter) and Sarah Rockell. James' family - there were at least six children - were born in the London area and the family was recorded in West Drayton, near Slough, in 1881 and in East Ham to the east of the city in 1891. Emma was the eldest child of (Thomas) Henry and Emma Brooks; in 1881 Henry was recorded as 33, an excavator from Stokenchurch near Oxford and the family was living at Beckenham, Kent.

George Rockell married Emma Jane Brooks at Neston Parish Church on 14 May 1894; George was recorded as being 22, a labourer residing in Neston and Emma was aged 20. George's father was recorded as James, a carpenter, and Emma's father was Thomas Henry Brooks, a labourer. Neither family has been traced, locally, in census returns and there are no other records of Rockell/Rockall in Wirral or Liverpool between 1885 and 1905. However, the census return for 1901 shows that both George and Emma Ann originated from S.E. England - George from (Great) Marlow, near High Wycombe, and Emma from Holloway in north London - and that the family had moved regularly since their marriage:

George Rockell	Head	M	29	Navy on Railway	Worker	Bucks. Marlow
Emma Jane	wife	M	27			London. Holloway
Emma Beat.	Daughter		3			London St. Johns
Elizabeth S.	Daughter		1			Glos. Westerleigh
William Pritchard	Boarder	S	63	Navy on Railway	Worker	Montgomery

1901 census (extract) – 2 Park Place, Frampton Cotterell, South Gloucestershire

George Rockell	29	navvy on railway	born Marlow, Bucks.
Emma Jane	27		born Holloway, London
Emma Beat.	3		born St Johns, London
Elizabeth S.	1		born Westerleigh, Glos.
William Pritchard	63	boarder, navy on railway	born Montgomery

Henry James Rockell would have been aged just six at the time of this census, but he was not with his family on census night and has not been found elsewhere in the census returns (he was not with his grandfather, James Rockell). Neither Henry, nor his family, have been located in the 1911 census.

Field Service  
63 Cockburn St  
Army Form B. 178.  
To be used for recruits enlisting direct into the Regular Army only.  
Army Form B. 178<sup>a</sup> to be used for Special Reserve recruits and Special Reservists enlisting into the Regular Army.

**MEDICAL HISTORY of**  
Surname Rockell Christian Name Henry James

TABLE I.—GENERAL TABLE.  
Birthplace ... Parish Neston County Cheshire

Examined ... on 12<sup>th</sup> day of Nov 1915  
at EDINBURGH

Declared Age ... 20 years 267 days.

Trade or Occupation ... Roperunner

Height ... 5 feet, 9 inches.

Weight ... 128 lbs.

Chest { Girth when fully Expanded 35 inches.  
Measurement { Range of Expansion 2 inches.

Physical Development ... good

Vaccination Marks { Arm ... Right ... Left ...  
Number 1 none

When Vaccinated ... Infancy

Vision ... R.E.—V=6/6  
L.E.—V=6/6

(a) Marks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease ...

(b) Slight defects but not sufficient to cause rejection ...

Approved by (Signature) J. Stewart (Rank) Capt.  
Regt. Medical Officer.

Enlisted ... at EDINBURGH  
on 12<sup>th</sup> day of Nov 1915

Joined on Enlistment ... Corps. K.R.R. Regt. No. 16709

Transferred to ...

Became non-effective by Killed in Action  
on 20<sup>th</sup> day of July 1916

(Signature) J. Stewart  
(Rank) Capt.

2966. Wt. W8005/2748. 300,000. 8/15. D. D. & L. [P.T.O.]

Henry James Rockell attested in Edinburgh for the King's Royal Rifle Corps. on 19 November 1915 when he and his family were living in Rosyth, a village south of Dunfermline in Fife. Then aged 20 years 267 days he was recorded as being unmarried, 5ft 9ins tall, weighed 128lb (9 stone 2lb / 58kg) and with a 35-inch expanded chest and good physical development. Henry's occupation was recorded as roperunner, a man who worked on the rope haulage system in a colliery and who changed over the ropes which hauled the tubs at the end of the run.

Henry was sent to Winchester and, on 31 May 1916, embarked on the SS Golden Eagle, a paddle steamer built by John Brown on Clydebank in 1909 and intended for day-trip excursions on the Thames, for France. On 16 June 1916, whilst in the field, he was posted to 'D' Company, 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion King's Royal Rifles.

The 21<sup>st</sup> (Service) Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps., (Yeoman Rifles), was formed in September 1915 from volunteers from the farming communities of Yorkshire, Northumberland and Durham by the Northern Command and they moved to Duncombe Park at Helmsley in North Yorkshire before being moved to Aldershot where they came under the orders of the 124<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the 41<sup>st</sup> Division. Having moved to France in May 1916 the division concentrated between Hazebrouck and Bailleul.

The circumstances of Henry's death - he was killed in action - are unknown, especially as it occurred sometime before the first main conflict involving the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette. The Regimental War Diary extracts for the period around the time that Henry was killed in action are reproduced on the following pages but provide little detailed information of the enemy's activities other than the location of the troops within Ploegsteert Wood (often corrupted to *Plugstreet Wood*), around 12km south of Ypres, Belgium.

Army Form B. 103.

**Casualty Form—Active Service.**

Regiment or Corps 21<sup>st</sup> KRRC

Regimental No. \_\_\_\_\_ Rank \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_

Enlisted (a) \_\_\_\_\_ Terms of Service (a) Durham War Service reckons from (a) \_\_\_\_\_

Date of promotion to present rank \_\_\_\_\_ Date of appointment to lance rank \_\_\_\_\_ Numerical position on roll of N.C.O.s \_\_\_\_\_

Extended \_\_\_\_\_ Re-engaged \_\_\_\_\_ Qualification (b) Boatman

Report		Place	Date	Remarks taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 50, or other official documents.
Date	From whom received			
16.6.16	J. A. [unclear]	EMBARKEED	31 MAY 1916	Memo VRC 452
20.7.16	"	DISEMBARKED	20.7.16	PRC 437 d/20.7.16
17 August 1916		Killed in Action		

*C. O. [unclear] Major  
of the Record No. 1 Light Battalion 1<sup>st</sup> A.A.*

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.  
(b) e.g., Signaller, Shooting Smith, etc. etc. also special qualifications in technical Corps duties.



Source: <https://rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au>



July/August 1916, Ploegsteert Wood near Messines. [Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-one/11238280/Unseen-WW1-photographs-by-Irish-Rifleman-uncovered.html>]



Hunter's Avenue, Ploegsteert Wood, 16 February 1918. By this date the path had become a well-used, duckboarded route. [Source: [www.ww1westernfront.gov.au](http://www.ww1westernfront.gov.au)]

Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information	Remarks and references to Appendices
PAPOT	July	11/17	Batt <sup>n</sup> remained in rest billets at PAPOT, furnishing working parties to the trenches to assist RE & Special RE, commencing night of 11/12.	
PLOEGSTEERT WOOD		17	Batt <sup>n</sup> marched from Papot to relieve 10 <sup>th</sup> Bn "Queen's" RWS Regt. Relief commenced 5 Am, completed 8.40 Am. D. Coy. held T. 113-114 (Gap G), A. Coy. T. 115 (Gap G) - 117, B. Coy. T. 118-120, C. Coy. Hunters Avenue (S. end to the STRAND).	
		18	9.15pm to 11.15pm artillery fire against hostile roads & communications.	
		19	Morning period: wire cutting by our artillery opp. GAP F & T. 113.	
		20	Morning period: repetition of previous morning. A surprise gas attack with smoke discharge had been arranged to take place between 12 midnight & 3 Am (20/21) but was cancelled.	
		22/23	A raid was to have been made by one Coy. 124 Inf Bgd & 1 Coy. 123 Inf Bge during the night against hostile front line trenches from U. 22. C. 4. 2 to U. 28. a 3 1/2. 8 (Map ST. YVES 1:10000, part of Map 28) & against RED HOUSE locality respectively but was postponed.	
		23	The Batt <sup>n</sup> was relieved by 10 <sup>th</sup> Bn "Queen's" R.W.S. Rgt. by 7.0 Am & took our reserve billets at CRESLOW from 26 <sup>th</sup> Bn. ROYAL FUSILIERS, excepting C. Coy. which remained in HUNTERS AVENUE	
PLOEGSTEERT WOOD	July	23/27	AVENUE until July 27 <sup>th</sup> when it was relieved early in the morning by D. Coy. for Baths. In the evening C. Coy. returned to HUNTERS AVENUE, D. going to T. 113, the Batt <sup>n</sup> re-entering the line on this day. Our casualties during tour of duty in the trenches, 17/23 <sup>rd</sup> July, were: WOUNDED & EVACUATED 13 KILLED 8.	
CRESLOW & PLOEGSTEERT WOOD (HUNTERSTON)		23/27	The Batt <sup>n</sup> - less one Company - remained in Reserve Billets, furnishing working parties to assist RE. HQ at CRESLOW, A. Coy. in HUNTERSTON South, D. Coy. HUNTERSTON North, B. Coy. at TOUQUET BERTHE FARM.	

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22/23 A raid was to have been made by one Coy. 124 Inf Bgd & 1 Coy. 123 Inf Bge during the night against hostile front line trenches from U.22.C.4.2 to U.28.a3 1/2.8 (Map ST. YVES 1:10 000, part of Map 28) & against RED HOUSE locality respectively but was postponed.

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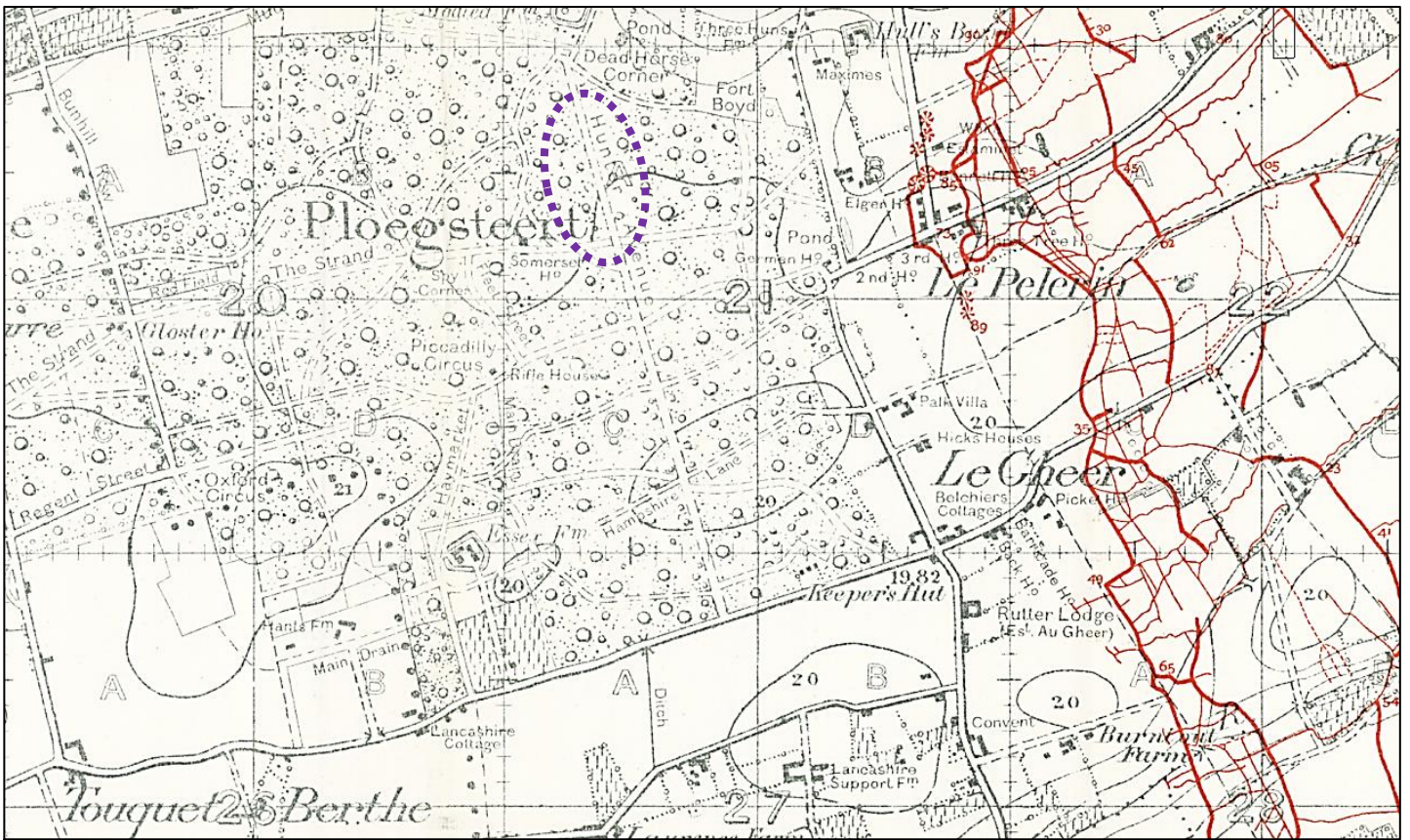
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Our casualties during tour of duty in the trenches, 17/23<sup>rd</sup> July, were:

WOUNDED & EVACUATED 13

KILLED 8

CRESLOW & PLOEGSTEERT WOOD (HUNTERSTON) 23/27 The Batt<sup>n</sup> - less one Company - remained in Reserve Billets. Furnishing working parties to assist RE. HQ at CRESLOW, A Coy. in HUNTERSTON South, D Coy HUNTERSTON North, B Coy. at TOUQUET BERTHE FARM.



Although this trench map (only the German trenches, in red, are shown) shows the situation in January 1916, some 6 months before Henry James Rockell was killed, the English-named locations in Ploegsteert Wood are indicated. The position occupied by the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion King's Royal Rifle Corps from 17 July 1916 (Hunter Avenue [S. end to the Strand]) has been encircled in purple.

Following Henry's death his personal effects were forwarded to his father in Rosyth; these consisted of:  
 1 disc ; 1 small mirror ; 1 purse ; 1 pocket book of photos ; letters and cards ; 1 big case ; 1 razor ; 1 wrist watch and strap (broken) ; 1 knife ; 1 gospel.

R.R. (A.1.)

ANSWER. (A.1.)

From: Officer i/c Rifle Records, N.A. Section, K.R.R. Corps, WINCHESTER.

To: Mr. G. Rockell, 20 Hut, Rosyth Village, Dundee.

WINCHESTER, Nov. 11. 1916.

I beg to forward the effects of the above named soldier received from Officer i/c Base Records, consisting of :-

1 Disc / Small mirror / Purse / 1 Pocket Book of photos / Letters & cards / 1 big case / Razor / 1 W. Watch & Strap (Broken) / 1 Knife / 1 Gospel.

KINDLY ACKNOWLEDGE RECEIPT HEREON.

Addington Capt. MAJOR for Colonel i/c Rifle Records, NEW ARMY SECTION, K.R.R.C.

MEMORANDUM FOR

The Officer in charge of Rifle Records, Winchester

WAR OFFICE, PARK BUILDINGS, ST. JAMES'S PARK, LONDON, S.W.

6<sup>th</sup> November 1916.

Will you please note that any articles of personal property now in your possession or subsequently received by you belonging to the late No. 116707 Private Henry James Rockell D.C.M. should be despatched to:- Mr. George Rockell, 20 Hut, Rosyth Village, Dundee.

Any medals granted to the deceased that are now in your possession or that may hereafter reach you should be forwarded to:- the same person.

Assistant Financial Secretary.



The war grave of Henry James Rockell in the Berks Cemetery Extension, Hainaut, Belgium [CWGC]

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt./No.
ROCKELL	K.R.R.C	Pte	R/16707
Henry J			
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	M/10/18/26	3312	
BRITISH	do		
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

328028	203188	Rockell, Henry. Jones.	21 <sup>st</sup> Bn. K.R.R.C. Pte. action R.16707.	20.4.16 Winchester In 9/16.	3	9	6.	3	9	6.	M/10/16.	6.11.16	For: George.	3	9	6.
		A 2nd 5040, Sgt											M/10/2 For: George.	3		92

### Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid. In July 1919 Henry’s father, George, received a payment of outstanding wages of £3 9s 6d from the army and a War Gratuity of £3. This, a total value of £6 9s 6d, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £1000 in 2016.

The War Gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW1 for a period of 6 months or more home service or for any length of service if a man had served overseas. The rules governing the gratuity were implemented under Army Order 17 of 1919 but the amount paid was related to the length of war service.

Whilst little is known for certain of Henry’s parents or siblings, it is clear that the family moved to south-west Essex as a George Rockell died in that district in late 1940, aged 69, and Emma J Rockell died there in early 1946 aged 72. In the 1939 Register they are recorded as living at 97 Park Road, Leyton, Essex:

George Rockell	born 12 November 1871	public works contractor, ganger
Emma J	born 19 March 1874	
Thomas	born 18 October 1861	public works contractor, retired Labourer

Elizabeth Sarah Rockell, Henry’s sister, probably married William Hollands in the Medway district in mid-1921. It is not known when Elizabeth died.