

GREAT WAR STAINED GLASS WINDOW MEMORIALS IN KENT

No. 13: St Mary's Chiddingstone

2nd Lt Richard Gerald Milburn

2nd East Surrey Regiment

DOW 10 February 1915

Window: St Mary's Chiddingstone

Kent links: Family Home

Medals: 1914-1915 Star, British, Victory Medals

War Grave: Perth (China Wall) Cemetery, Zillebeke, IV.A.3



Richard Gerald Milburn

Source: Malvern College First World War Casualties:
<http://www.stanwardine.com/cgi-bin/malvernww1.pl?id=283>



2nd Lt Richard Gerald Milburn
Source: *The Sphere*, 23 March 1915

Richard, better known as Gerald, Milburn was one of the many educated young men whose adult life was regrettably cut short by the Great War. His father, William, was a very wealthy Northumberland shipowner when he died at the comparatively young

age of 51 in 1908, leaving £417,341 in his will.¹ He and his wife Edith produced a large family, three boys and three girls. Gerald was the youngest boy. The family had a Highland property, Uppat, in Golspie, Sutherland, but spent most of their time in the southern counties of England. In successive censuses from 1891 the Milburns lived in Banstead, Surrey; East Grinstead, Sussex; and in 'The House in the Wood' in Beaulieu, Hampshire. In 1914 Edith and her daughters were renting Stonewall Park in Edenbridge in Kent. In that year the two elder brothers, William (1883-1949) and Booker (1888-1941), were serving with the Territorials, the part-time auxiliary force formed in 1908 to protect the country from invasion, the former with 5th Yorkshire Regiment, the latter with 1st Hertfordshire. In 1915 William was posted as aide-de-camp on the staff and later held other staff jobs, in the fields of Railway Transport and Embarkation. He ended the war with the rank of Major. Booker had a much more active military career. Wounded three times, he was awarded the DSO and MC and survived the war as a Captain in the Coldstream Guards.

Both of the two younger sons, Booker and Gerald, born on 24 August 1893, attended Malvern College in Worcestershire.² Gerald was there from 1905 until 1912, becoming a prefect and a member of the cricket XXII and House football team. He was also in the ranks of the school's Officer Training Corps, being 'efficient' in every year from 1908 until he left Malvern, reaching the rank of Corporal.³ The school magazine described him as 'a type of the care-free schoolboy' who 'was the friend of everyone'.⁴

Milburn was at Trinity College Cambridge when the war broke out and he immediately applied for a commission in the Special Reserve.⁵ He was appointed 2nd Lieutenant on probation on 15 August and was posted to the 4th Battalion East Surrey Regiment.⁶ This was an Extra Reserve Battalion which on mobilisation moved from Kingston, Surrey (the regiment's depot) to Plymouth. For three months Milburn trained with this battalion in Devon until he was posted to the 2nd Battalion, arriving in Winchester on 4 January 1915 with three other officers. He was posted to D Company.⁷ The 2nd Battalion, a Regular unit, had been in India when war was declared, returning to England on 23 December 1914. It prepared for overseas service with the BEF in Winchester, being part of 85th Brigade, 28th Division. It arrived at Le Havre on 19 January 1915 and proceeded to the Ypres sector of the line.⁸

Milburn's career as a soldier in the BEF was to be very short for, like so many others in the terrible winter months of 1914-1915, he quickly became a casualty in the

¹ Probate Records, Ancestry.co.uk. This is the equivalent of £47.7 million in 2017 values. The Milburn Line was primarily a passenger line plying between Britain and Australia.

² William Milburn was educated at Uppingham and Jesus College Cambridge. Until 1921, he was a partner in his late father's ship-owning company, William Milburn & Co. I am grateful to Christine Uphill for this information.

³ Service Record [SR], Richard Gerald Milburn, TNA PRO WO 339/17052.

⁴ Malvern College First World War Casualties: <http://www.stanwardine.com/cgi-bin/malvernww1.pl?id=283>

⁵ SR, Milburn.

⁶ *London Gazette*, 29 September 1914, p.7694.

⁷ War Diary, 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment, 4 January 1915, TNA PRO WO 95/2279.

⁸ Chris Baker, *The Long, Long Trail*, <http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/east-surrey-regiment/>

lottery of trench warfare. He was never to be involved in any fighting and probably never saw a German soldier. The battalion's War Diary records the events leading up to his death:

9 February 1915: Battalion ordered to relieve 3rd Bn. Middlesex Regiment in trenches S.S.E. Ypres. This relief was subsequently counter-ordered and the Battalion was employed in carrying rations and water to the trenches. During this 2nd Lieut. R.G. Milburn was wounded ... Casualties 4 wounded. Battalion returned to billets by 6.45am 10th inst.

10 February 1915: Battalion in billets. 2nd Lieut. R.G. Milburn died of wounds at 6am.⁹

He was buried near where he was killed, about a mile and a half south of Ypres.¹⁰

Milburn's mother Edith received a telegram from the War Office on 13 February 1915 informing her that her son had been killed in action on 9 February. Two days later she acknowledged 'the sad news' and requested more details. In reply, the War Office wrote that further details, if any, would not be available for some time, but on the 21st another telegram was sent informing her that Gerald had died of wounds on the 10th.¹¹ In March a parcel of his effects was received in Edenbridge, but did not include his signet ring, pocket Kodak camera, compass and knife, all articles that the family would value if returned. The War Office established an inquiry to discover the whereabouts of these items, but none was found. The Deputy Adjutant General at 3rd Echelon surmised, perhaps ingenuously, that the signet ring had been buried with the body.¹² When Milburn's remains, however, were exhumed in October 1919 in order to be concentrated in Ypres (China Wall) Cemetery, the ring appears not to have been recovered, for no effects were forwarded to the Base.¹³

Before the second War Office telegram reporting Milburn's death from wounds on 10 February arrived, his mother had already placed an obituary in the local and national newspapers giving his date of the death of 'her dearly loved youngest son' as the 9th.¹⁴ The most significant commemoration of her son, however, was the stained-glass window erected in St Mary's Church, Chiddingstone (see Fig.1). Designed by Walter Tower, owner of Kempe and Co. (see his signature in Fig.2), it is a three-light window with three panels at the bottom.¹⁵ The lights are filled with representations of three of the seven Archangels: Gabriel on the left; Michael in the centre; and Raphael on the right. They are the only three archangel saints to be mentioned by name in the

⁹ War Diary, 2nd Battalion East Surrey Regiment, 9, 10 February 1915.

¹⁰ Major Stopford, DAAG 3rd Echelon, to Mrs. Milburn, 3 October 1919, SR, Milburn.

¹¹ SR, Milburn.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Commonwealth War Graves Commission, Concentration of Graves Burial Return, <https://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/103787/milburn,-richard-gerald/#&gid=null&pid=1>

¹⁴ *Surrey Mirror*, 19 February 1915; *The Times*, 15 February 1915.

¹⁵ Rupert Gunnis, *The Story of Chiddingstone Church and Village* (n.p., c.1950), p.10, is wrong to attribute the window to Powell of Whitefriars.

Bible.¹⁶ All three are represented here with the emblems with which they are associated in Christian iconography. Raphael is known as the angel of healing and is often depicted with a fish (seen here below his right arm), referring to the legend that he used fish gall to return the sight of the blind Tobit. His presence in this window may be an oblique reference to Milburn's death from wounds, especially as his main garment is predominantly black, which can represent sickness or death. In the centre light is Michael the Archangel, military leader of the heavenly hosts that threw the Devil and his minions out of the kingdom of God. His emblem is a cercelee cross with trefoiled ends and can be seen as a pendant on his breast and on the banner above his head. He is piercing the dragon with his spear of angelic power.

Gabriel is probably the most important archangel in this memorial, as he is the main link between the three lights and the panels below. He is known as the messenger (in 1921 Pope Benedict XV proclaimed him the patron saint of post office, telephone and telegraph workers).¹⁷ Gabriel appears in the Bible as the prophet who foretold the birth of John the Baptist and, more importantly for his role in this window, as the angel who informed the Virgin Mary of the future birth of Christ (Luke 1:26-38). His emblem, *Ave Maria*, seen here on a flag, represents his first words of salutation to Mary. He also carries a long-stemmed lily, a symbol of Mary's purity and of the Annunciation and Resurrection.¹⁸

The three panels together make up the Nativity scene, the birth of the Saviour as foretold by Gabriel. Taken as a whole, this window is a very personal memorial of a mother to her son. There are no references or crests to represent Milburn's school or his regiment. Apart from the dedication there is no sign that Milburn had died in war. The dedication reads: *To the glory of God & in loving memory of Richard Gerald Milburn, 2nd Lieut. East Surrey regiment, & youngest son of William and Edith Milburn, aged 21 years, who was killed in action at Ypres 10 February 1915, this window is dedicated.* The archangel Michael, although a militant leader of God's hosts, is preferred as a symbol of the victory over evil, rather than the other slayer of dragons, the patriotic St George. The dragon is thus more representative of the Devil than of the German enemy. As a widowed mother, surrounded by three daughters, it is perhaps unsurprising that the main thrust of the memorial focuses on the mother-son relationship, a son who had just reached manhood. There remains, however, a message of hope. The inscription in the first two panels reads: *When he bringeth in the Firstbegotten into the world He saith let all the Angels of God worship him* [Hebrews 1:6, King James Version]. The full version of this quotation in Hebrews, which begins 'And again ...', is thought to be a reference to the Second Coming of Christ and the certainty of a future resurrection.¹⁹ This is a stained-glass war memorial that could have been erected to commemorate the death of a civilian (as Milburn, except for a few months, was). Unwittingly, perhaps, it points up the very short time that Milburn served in the armed forces.

¹⁶ David Hugh Palmer (ed.), *The Oxford Dictionary of Saints*, 5th edition (Oxford 2011), p.375.

¹⁷ Ibid, p.178.

¹⁸ For another example of Gabriel carrying a lily in a stained-glass window, see Peter Cormack, *Arts and Crafts Stained Glass* (New Haven 2015), p.222.

¹⁹ <https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/hebrews-1-6.html>; <https://www.bibleref.com/Hebrews/1/Hebrews-1-6.html>

Fig. 1: Window dedicated to R. Gerald Milburn
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Fig. 2: Walter Ernest Tower's Wheatsheaf & Tower Signature
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