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In Search of Tom, George Rodgers, Cormorant, 2008, 095585931X, 9780955859311, . .

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Thomas George Rogers (1806-1903), religious instructor, was born probably in Dublin, the son of Thomas Rogers. He went to Trinity College, Dublin, in November 1823. About 1834 he had married Sarah Smyth, of Dublin. Finding his endowments too small for a growing family he accepted an offer by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel to go to Norfolk Island as a religious instructor of convicts at a salary of £250 with a living allowance. He was appointed in November 1844 and given £125 by the society and £250 by the Colonial Office to take out his wife and six children, but left them in the care of the vicar of Halifax, promising to remit a third of his salary for their maintenance.

In the Bussorah Merchant Rogers arrived at Sydney in June 1845 and in July went on to Hobart, where Bishop Francis Nixon refused him a licence because religious instructors in the convict department were outside episcopal control. In September Rogers reached Norfolk Island, where the chaplains also maintained that he was in an unecclesiastical position, and the convicts soon discovered the anomaly. In October he complained to the commandant, Joseph Childs, that his duties were not clearly defined. Childs misunderstood the complaint and for months letters between the two men went back and forth each day, Childs insisting on discipline and Rogers professing increasing outrage at the inhumanity and irreligion of the commandant. In January 1846 Rogers proposed to report Childs to Nixon and the Colonial Office and in May asked for leave to put his case to the lieutenant-governor in Hobart. When refused he wrote to the superintendent of religious instructors, Archdeacon Fitzherbert Marriott, who assured him from Hobart that his complaints would be investigated. In August John Price replaced Childs as commandant. Rogers was soon in trouble and Price, in a 200-page dispatch on his misdemeanours, recommended his removal from the island. In Hobart the acting lieutenant-governor, Charles La Trobe, and the comptroller-general of convicts, John Hampton, agreed that Rogers should be recalled because 'he was deficient in temper and discretion'. He left Norfolk Island in February 1847.

In Hobart Lieutenant-Governor Sir William Denison refused to see him, wrote to London about his neglect of his family, and removed him from the convict department. Marriott was more sympathetic, offered him temporary curacies at New Norfolk and at Windermere near Launceston, but lost patience when Rogers stayed in Hobart, bombarding Denison and Downing Street with long rebuttals of Price's charges. When Bishop Nixon returned from England in 1848 Rogers was admitted to deacon's orders and went to Windermere. Publication at Launceston in April 1849 of Correspondence Relating to the Dismissal of the Rev. T. Rogers, from his Chaplaincy at Norfolk Island brought him angry reproof for daring to print official documents without government sanction. Unabashed, Rogers published in October a statement from his churchwardens, with laudatory testimonials from six Launceston citizens and from Fielding Browne who had witnessed the 'faithful,

fearless, yet affectionate performance of his clerical duties' at Norfolk Island.

In December Rogers heard through the bishop that his wife had died in Dublin, her death hastened by the long silence of her husband who had sent only £75 in four years, and his six children left destitute. In January 1850 Rogers sought leave to return to Ireland for them and sailed in the Philip Oakden on 28 February, but friends had already subscribed to send them to Melbourne and according to family tradition he passed them on the way.

In London in July 1858 he gave evidence to the parliamentary committee on the petition of William Henry Barber, a wrongly convicted solicitor whom he had befriended on the island. Until 1860 Rogers's name remained in clergy lists as chaplain of Norfolk Island, but he became a Roman Catholic before he returned to Australia, where he worked as a tutor and under the name 'Peutetre' contributed many religious articles to the Advocate in Melbourne. He died at Malvern on 17 January 1903 aged 98.

Rogers's account of the evils of the Norfolk Island penal settlement may have helped to inspire the founding of the Anti-Transportation League at Launceston; it was given a much wider impact by Marcus Clarke, who with some fictional licence used him as the prototype of Rev. James North in For the Term of his Natural Life.

Their occupation of St Venant was short lived because the British 6th Brigade arrived and put them back out of the village, perhaps the first time that the SS had been forced to give up captured ground. In St Venant trenches were prepared with the RWF preparing the outer defences with the 2nd Bn Durham Light Infantry (DLI) and the 1st Bn Royal Berkshire behind them.

Lt Colonel Harrison of the RWF had moved his HQ back within the cemetery at St Venant, alongside the bridge and only a matter of metres from that of the 2nd DLI. As the day wore on he received the order that his men were to protect the bridge for as long as possible whilst the retreating units crossed over to the far side.

For many of the Durham Light Infantry the order to retire was too late and Colonel Harrison and his group only just managed to scramble away to safety themselves. For the Colonel it was not far enough. Having reached the far side of the bridge he was struck down on trying to leave the cover of a ditch.

We obviously couldn't tell the whole story for a second time in the paper, so I thought some might find it interesting to read it here: ===== "I can still remember the day in 1946 when Lukey Wood came home to Wingate," says George Rodgers. "We were ushered out to play. When we returned, we could see that Dad had been crying - but he never told us what Lukey had said."

Lukey had brought James "Slogger" Rodgers news of his son, Tom. Lukey and Tom had been best friends since school in the colliery village in west Durham. They'd joined the Durham Light Infantry within a fortnight of each other in 1938 to escape the privations of the pit - Tom had had his thumb ripped off by a pony putter - and, two years later, Lukey had seen Tom die in the heat of battle.

Slogger - so called because he was the strongest hewer at the Wingate coalface - knew Tom had been lost trying to stave off the Germans while the rest of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) was evacuated at Dunkirk. Slogger also knew that Tom's body had never been recovered, and this played on his own wartime experiences.

"He didn't speak much, but he always said that under a white flag they would go out from the trenches and collect the dead and bury them behind the lines. Then the Bosch - he always called them the Bosch - would shell the graves, so on a night-time all the little bits of them that had come up had to be reburied.

Then the search began. Regimental sources and veterans were spoken to, the scene in France -

the village of St Venant - was visited. The first success was tracking down Tom's sweetheart, Annie Warriner. She had never married, but she still had his photo. It showed him to be surprisingly tall, a six footer, with a toothy grin and a distinctive gap between his teeth.

Now George had a location. With the help of the St Venant historical association, he located the location. The humpback bridge was still there, bullet marks still visible. The farmhouse was still there, shell holes still visible. The farmer's daughter was still there, and to her the battle scene was still visible in her memory.

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