

## FEATURES

# **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A NINETY YEAR OLD – ROGERS!**

*Rogers Evert Knight ACGI FCGI profiled by Colleen Shilstone Richardson*

It was a very short GGCA Committee meeting on 6 December 2005, as it was Rogers Knight's ninetieth birthday. Everything was special: from arriving in Boanerges (he was co-driver in 1934), to his admiring guests, his birthday cake covered in candles, to the glowing terms that Barry Brooks introduced him and to his witty speech, when he thanked everyone for coming to celebrate with him and organizing such a lovely party.

"I came out of this College seventy-one years ago when we had three dignified buildings," Rogers reminisced. "The architect expected them to be there for another hundred years – now they are all gone! They were destroyed and in their place are a lot of office blocks with the main entrance to the College that looks like the entrance to a Bingo Hall!

"On a lighter note, I am possibly the only surviving member of the Links Club that knew some of the founding members. John Millard, who was one, also talked me into joining the Old Centralians Association. One

disadvantage was planning the Annual Dinner. Here I am fifty years later and still doing it!

“We all had nicknames in those days at the Links Club. Mine was Roger. John Garland was Gudgeon, Peter Justesen was Useless. C G Mayer, one of the four founder members was RIP.

“The relationship with the police was entirely different in the thirties. If anything big was going on in the Albert Hall, you could depend on it that the Union Bar was occupied, most of the evening, by ‘on’ and ‘off’ policemen taking their tea-breaks.”

Rogers Knight finished his speech with an amusing story about being had up for speeding in the thirties. He was in his 4-litre Bentley and the police couldn't catch him up. They followed him for fifteen miles until he slowed down and then they rang a bell for him to stop.

Rogers has done so much for the Association over the last seventy years that it is difficult to name them all. I suppose the joining of the Old Centralian's Trust Fund at the time that Bean – Arthur Montague Holbein, founded it, was central to the time and interest that Rogers gave to the Association. Rogers Knight was also a founder member of the Wine Society that has provided the Association with fine wines for the past four decades. As a student he was a member of the Artillery Battery with its horse drawn guns and a very active member of the Rugby Club.

He also organized the Tug-Of-War battles. After two years as an electrical engineering student he switched to mechanical engineering.

Rogers kindly invited me to his house for a further chat.

Rogers Evert Knight was born in 1915 in Hammersmith. His father was from Illinois and his mother was Scottish but born in Australia. He had one sister, who never had any children. He married an American lady, Virginia, from New York City, but they never had any children.

As the family home was in Barnes, Rogers had to board at prep school as the school was in Herne Bay in Kent. It was the only school they could find that played Rugby. Later he went on to St Paul's School. It was the only public school that had an army and engineering side and once he had switched to that side he was able to drop Latin. The school encouraged him to try for the City & Guilds College to study engineering. This was in 1934.

After Rogers graduated, his father, basically a very successful salesman, sent him to the States in 1938. His secondments were with Republic Steel, Bethlehem Steel and many others. In 1939 Rogers expected to return to England, however, he had to report to the British Supply Mission instead, where his knowledge of engineering and US steel companies was essential to the war effort. He joined a team of half a dozen specially selected engineers who co-ordinated the constant flow of steel – something like 500 million tonnes of war supplies to Britain.

“You returned to London in 1946 with your wife, after being demobbed from the Royal Engineers. What happened then?”

“I became involved with compressed air, and secured an import agency with C A Norgren Company, Denver. They were manufacturers of compressed air filters, regulators and lubricants. In the fifties, as Technical Director, I managed to create a Research & Development Department doing research into modular valves with some very talented engineers.”

In 1964, Rogers persuaded Norgren to raise funds to the British Compressed Air Society to institute an investigation at Imperial College. This resulted in a thesis *‘The elimination of lubricating oil from compressed air’*. Realizing the implications of this research, Rogers developed the first highly successful filters in the compressed air industry. He was also involved in research at the Fluid Power Centre at Bath University. Norgren then developed the Micro-Fog lubricator, which led to the greater efficiency of the art of ‘Tribology’. Rogers became recognized as a worldwide authority on lubrication of steel mill bearings where constant motion, weight and immense heat, can create havoc. In India, a cold mill was converted from hydrodynamically lubricated sleeve bearings to Micro-Fog. This saved 15 million Mega Joules in one year!

Amazingly this technique benefited the dentist as well. Micro-Fog technology enabled spindle speeds of 250,000 rpm, which enabled the drilling to be almost painless.

Another application was for the North Sea Oil Rigs regulators. The sulphur mercaptans rotted their o-rings within six weeks but Norgren UK formulated a regulator out of a solid block of stainless steel with steel parts and ultra-resistant o-rings. They lasted six months.

“Sadly,” said Rogers “there are not many oil drilling rigs in the North Sea now.”

We switched to a slightly more recent achievement of Rogers.

“About twenty years ago, I was one of the people involved in the new metric system that was proposed. I sat on the CBI metric committee trying to persuade Britain to stop messing about. The metric system has been legal here since the early nineteen hundreds if you wanted to use it, but nobody did. Take the construction industry; up to about ten years ago, they still measured the size of timber in millimetres and the length of it in feet! The metric system also has a great safety advantages, especially where control panels with gauges are used.

“You have to think metric – not be converting from one to the other all the time.”

Rogers Knight was President of the British Compressed Air Society (1972 – 1974) and a founder member and President of the European Oil

Hydraulic & Pneumatic Association (1972 –1974). He showed me the Joseph Bramah (1748 – 1814) Medal he was awarded in 1987 by the Institute of Mechanical Engineers. Aptly, Bramah invented the hydraulic press that enabled the 19<sup>th</sup> century bridge-builders to lift massive girders. In recognition of his amazingly diverse career, Rogers Knight was made a Fellow of the City & Guilds Institute in 1980.

Rogers wife, Virginia sadly died ten years ago. He still lives in their charming mews house, complete with garage and car and does his shopping at Selfridges and Waitrose. He tells me that he is still consulting in the Compressed Air Industry and sits on a number of institute committees. He still has support in his work by a very loyal PA, Susan Collins. She has worked for him since 1970.

“I haven’t changed much over the years,” Rogers says “I think still working has probably helped.”

Whatever the formula is, Rogers has cracked it. He is a very special man and is very special to the Association.

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Word Count: 1280