

Percy Albert Bettridge,

Private, No. 28345. The 8th Battalion, Dorset Regiment.

Percy Albert Bettridge, born on 24/9/1883 in Wellesbourne, was the grandson of Wellesbourne born, John Bettridge, whose original Wheelwrights business, John Bettridge and Sons, appeared to keep pace with the requirements of a developing industry. By the time his son Clement, Percy's father, joined the company as a junior partner, the name of Wheelwright had virtually disappeared and the company was being advertised as an 'Implement and Machine Manufacturing Company'. When John died in 1891, Clement took over the business.

The business brought the family its rewards. In addition to owning property in Chapel St., they also possessed five properties in Saltisford, and Parkes St. Warwickⁱ. Clement also entered into an agreement with James Newman Grey to purchase a 50% stake in a drapery business in Church St., Wellesbourneⁱⁱ.

Of Percy's three elder brothers it was only Charles however, that joined the family business. Brother John became a Draper in Evesham and Arthur a Grocer in Cheltenham.

After attending the infants section of the village school, on the 30th June 1890, Percy moved up to the junior level before leaving, after only nine weeks, to be taught by Miss Hawkins at the Stratford upon Avon Commercial school. He however returned to tuition in Wellesbourne in May 1893 before finally leaving on the 3rd of May 1895ⁱⁱⁱ.

Five years later, with his father's consent, Percy, known as 'Pa' because of the initials of his Christian names, signed the indentures to become an apprentice to Mr. James Henson, 'a notable butcher' of 14, Bridge Street, Stratford upon Avon. The document^{iv} records that Percy 'would be trained in all the skills of the profession commencing on the 2nd October 1900 for a three year period at a starting wage of 2 shillings per week, rising to 4 shillings per week on the first anniversary and 8 shillings per week for his final year'. For Percy's part, the contract stated he would agree, that during this period he would not 'waste his master's time or contract matrimony'. He would also 'refrain from playing cards, dice or other games and that he would not haunt taverns and playhouses'. At some time during his apprenticeship he lodged with Frederick and Elizabeth Hodgkins at 34, Birmingham Rd. Stratford upon Avon.

He certainly did not renege on the clause relating to matrimony, as it was not until 1906 that Percy, now a Master Butcher, married Ethel Annie Morris. Although born in Huddersfield she and her family had returned to Stratford upon Avon from whence her parents originated. The ceremony was held at the Wesleyan Chapel, Stratford upon Avon on December 10th of that year. By then, Percy already had his own business, acquiring in July 1904 the butcher's shop of Benjamin Whitlock at 20, Leam St. Leamington Spa^v. Within two years he had transferred his business to Wellesbourne (Mountford) acquiring the 'Pork Butchers' in Chestnut Square from Miss E. Herbert^{vi}.

At the Parish Council meeting of the 16th April 1915 Percy was elected as Overseer for Wellesbourne Mountford^{vii}.

From the length of Percy's Military Service recorded as starting on 21st June 1916 it appears that he would have initially, probably as the result of conscription, been called into the Army Reserve.

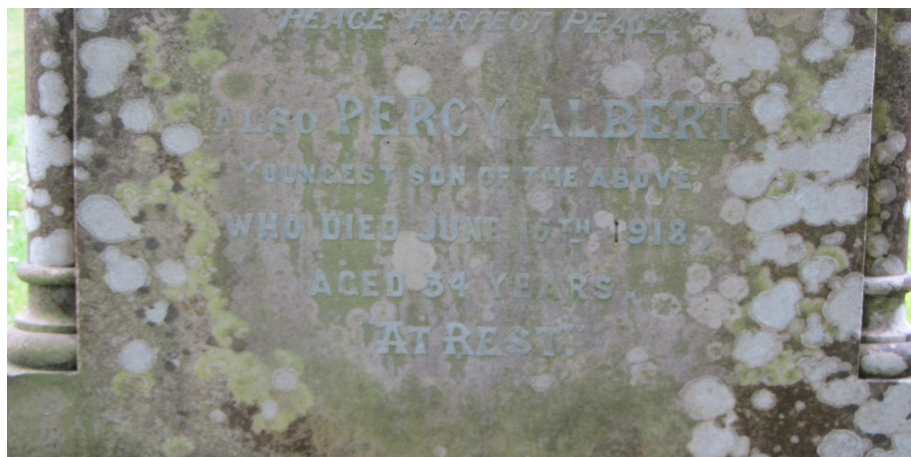
Three months earlier in March 1916 several editions of the Stratford upon Avon Herald carried an advertisement announcing that on the instruction of Mr. P.A. Bettridge, who was leaving the village, Hutton, Thomson and Colbourne would be holding an auction in the Yard of Wellesbourne's Talbot Hotel on the 20th of that month. This would include items of household property, utensils of the butchery trade, and a Humberette motor car – certainly a rarity in Wellesbourne at the time.



It wasn't until the 25th April 1917 that Percy was required to report to the Recruiting Office in Birmingham to enlist for Active Military Service. He was medically Classified Grade B1 for Garrison service abroad^{viii}. His pension record indicates that at the time he was living in Heath St, Winson Green, Birmingham. He was appointed to the 8th Battalion, the Dorset Regiment with the rank of Private, Service No. 28345.

Six weeks later however, Percy reported sick and on the 13th June 1917, after initial tests, was admitted to the Military Hospital, Colchester where a malignant tumour was diagnosed. He was discharged from the Army on the 21st August 1917 at Exeter, medically unfit for war service. He was described as 'of good character' and 'a steady discerning man'. His service lasted 1year 59days.

He returned to Wellesbourne and being unable to work lived on his Army Pension. After much suffering, on Saturday the 15th June 1918, Percy Albert Bettridge passed away at his mother's home in Warwick Road. The local doctor, Mr.R.J Pitt, certified that he had died from Schirrus disease of the pelvis and exhaustion^{ix}. He was buried four days later in the grave of his father, who died in 1904 (later, also of his mother), in the Churchyard of St. Peters, Wellesbourne.



Without Military service abroad Percy was not awarded any medals. He is however commemorated on the Roll of Honour for the Dead, St Peter's Church, Wellesbourne and on the village War Memorial. The commemorative font in the Wesleyan Church, Wellesbourne also bears his name and those of his parents.



Great War in the Villages Project

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- ⁱ W.R.O. (C.R2695/59)
 - ⁱⁱ W.R.O. (CR2695/2)
 - ⁱⁱⁱ Wellesbourne School records CR 371/1,CD371/2, CR371/3 and CR371/4(WRO)
 - ^{iv} NA DR574/579 (Shakespeare Centre)
 - ^v W.R.O. (CR2695/26)
 - ^{vi} W.R.O. (CR2695/28)
 - ^{vii} Stratford upon Avon Herald 23/4/1915.
 - ^{viii} British Army WW1 Pension Records 1914 -1920 (WO364/242)
 - ^{ix} Death Certificate.