

Captain and Mrs. Peirson-Webber

(An Ettington family's contribution to the war effort)

Captain Francis Peirson-Webber came to live at The Manor, Rogers Lane, Ettington in September 1912 with his wife Margery and three young sons.¹ They moved from Kineton, having previously lived at Stockton, near Southam, where the Captain had owned a substantial poultry farm. He had been a professional soldier for many years and, since being retired from the military in November 1900², he had become a renowned expert in all matters concerning poultry rearing and egg production. What makes this especially remarkable is that he was totally blind. He had lost his sight while serving on the North-West Frontier and this misfortune led to his discharge from the army.³

Undaunted, Capt. Peirson-Webber set about re-building his life. After learning to read Braille and to type, he began an intensive study of poultry with an emphasis on profitable egg production. He was also innovative. Among his inventions was the Liberty Poultry Shutter, a ventilation shutter designed to enable a draught-free flow of fresh air into the sheds and to remove noxious fumes.⁴ He became a much respected judge of poultry at shows and exhibitions⁵ and by 1911 was employed by the Warwickshire County Council as a poultry lecturer.⁶

Despite his handicap Capt. Peirson-Webber provided most valuable services during the First World War. He was appointed director of the National Service Poultry Section, which offered advice and practical help to poultry farmers. His expertise helped many of them to raise their productivity thus providing valuable support for the country's pressing food production needs. For example, a report about the Coventry Economy, Home and Welfare Exhibition in 1917 told of a pen of hens selected by him having come from "a strain of 27 hens which laid over 6000 eggs last year at a cost, in spite of war prices, of less than a halfpenny each egg".⁷

In addition to this activity he also gave considerable help to soldiers blinded during the First World War, becoming the head of the Country Life Section at the St. Dunstan's institution in 1915. Poultry farming and market gardening were among the topics the unfortunate servicemen could study under Captain Peirson-Webber's direction, providing for many of them a new start to a shattered life.⁸

Mrs Margery Peirson-Webber also made a worthy wartime contribution as a quartermaster at the Clarendon Auxiliary Hospital in Kineton. Her "valuable services" were recognized in a War Office communiqué in October 1917.⁹ There were also several press reports about the wartime activities of the Mothers' Union in the Ettington, such as making and collecting garments, food and other supplies for the troops in the field or in the local hospitals. No individuals are identified but it is certain that Mrs. Peirson-Webber would have

involved herself fully with these activities. After the war, in 1919, she was a founder member of the Ettington branch of the Women's Institute and was the branch President for a number of years.



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References:

1. Leamington Spa Courier 30/8/1912
2. Reported in London Gazette 27/11/1900. (<http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/>)
3. From Obituary in St. Dunstan's 'Review' magazine, October 1927
4. Leamington Spa Courier 8/2/1907
5. One of several references to this appeared in the Hawera and Normanby Star, New Zealand 10/3/1906
(<http://paperspast.natlib.govt.nz/cgi-bin/paperspast?a=d&cl=CL1.HNS>)
6. 1911 census
7. Coventry Evening Telegraph 31/10/1917 and 7/11/1917
8. Reported in "Star and Sentinel" 8/6/1915, accessed at
http://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=2241&dat=19150608&id=Cb8IAAAAIBAJ&sjid=U_QFAAAAIBAJ&pg=6770,5247821
9. Coventry Evening Telegraph 23/10/1917

Note. The articles from the Leamington Spa Courier and Coventry Evening Telegraph and the 1911 census have been accessed at <http://www.findmypast.co.uk>

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