

PERCY HAROLD CHIDGEY

Percy Harold Chidgey was born on 3rd February 1891 and was the youngest son of Hugh Thomas Arthur Chidgey and Sarah Sophia Chidgey, whose maiden name was Dodd. Hugh Chidgey was born in Shoreditch in 1860 and was the son of Thomas Mandey Chidgey, a builder, and Anna Sophia Chidgey, née Witherspoon.

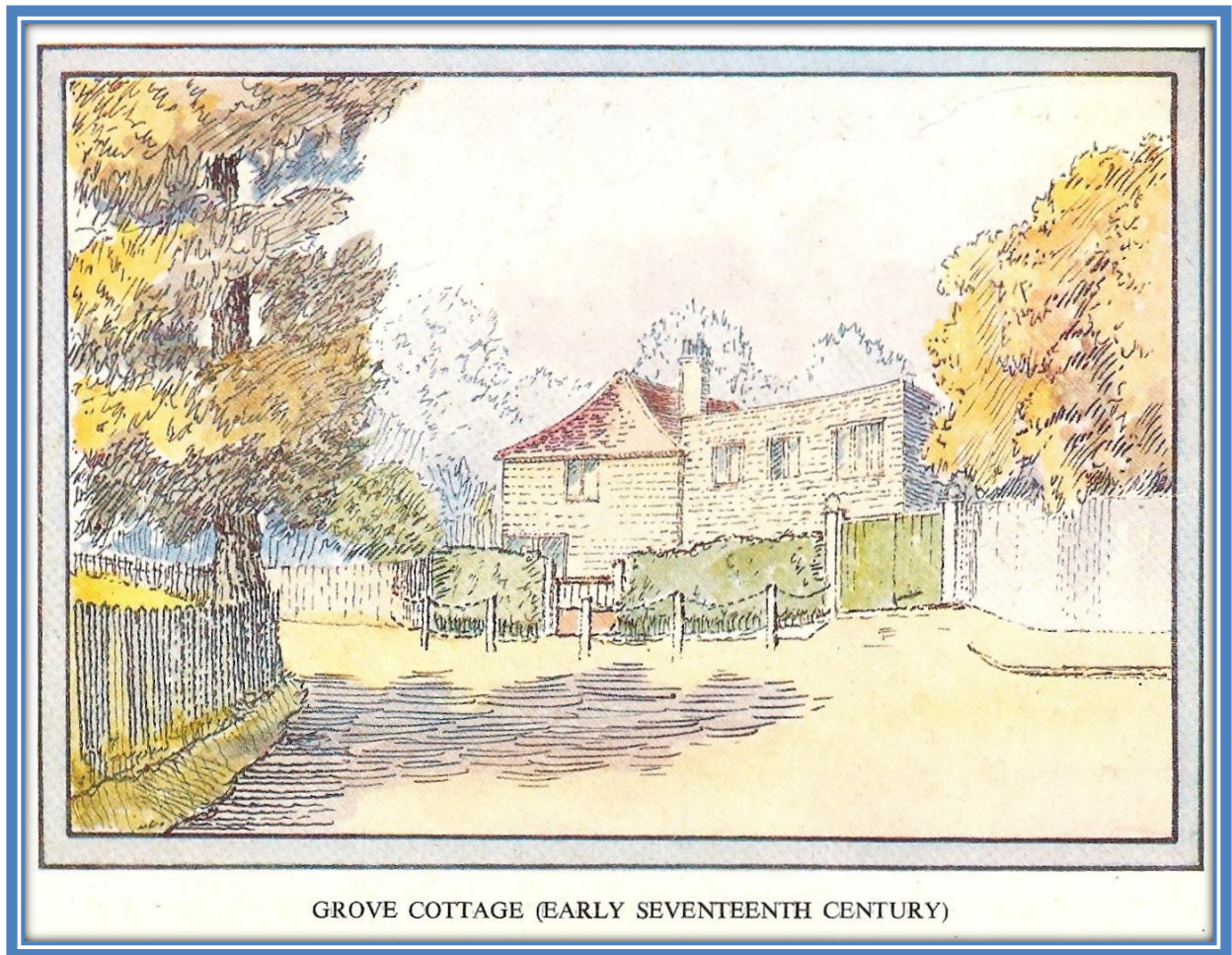
Sarah Sophia Dodd, a school mistress was born in Mile End in 1858. She married Hugh, an architect and surveyor in 1884. They had five children, all born in Mile End, Stepney - Alfred Reginald (1885- 1913), Herbert Thomas (1887- 1978), Edith Isabel (1889-1919), Percy Harold (1891-1918) and Kate Gertrude (1892-1973).

In 1891, the Chidgey family were living at 497, Commercial Road, Mile End Stepney, where Hugh's surveying business was based. The business later relocated to Cecil Chambers 76 and 86, The Strand, London. In 1902, Hugh's father Thomas, a builder, was living at 20 Arbour Square and working in the Borough of Stepney. By 1901 Hugh and Sarah had moved to Wanstead and were living in St Augustine's in the High Street.

In 1911, the Chidgey family were living at "Grove Cottage" George Lane, Wanstead. Hugh's mother Anna was living there in 1884 when she transferred her membership from Bethnal Green Road Church to Wanstead Congregational Church in July of that year. Anna became a member of the church choir.

[Hugh Chidgey photo from Wanstead U.R.C. Archives](#)





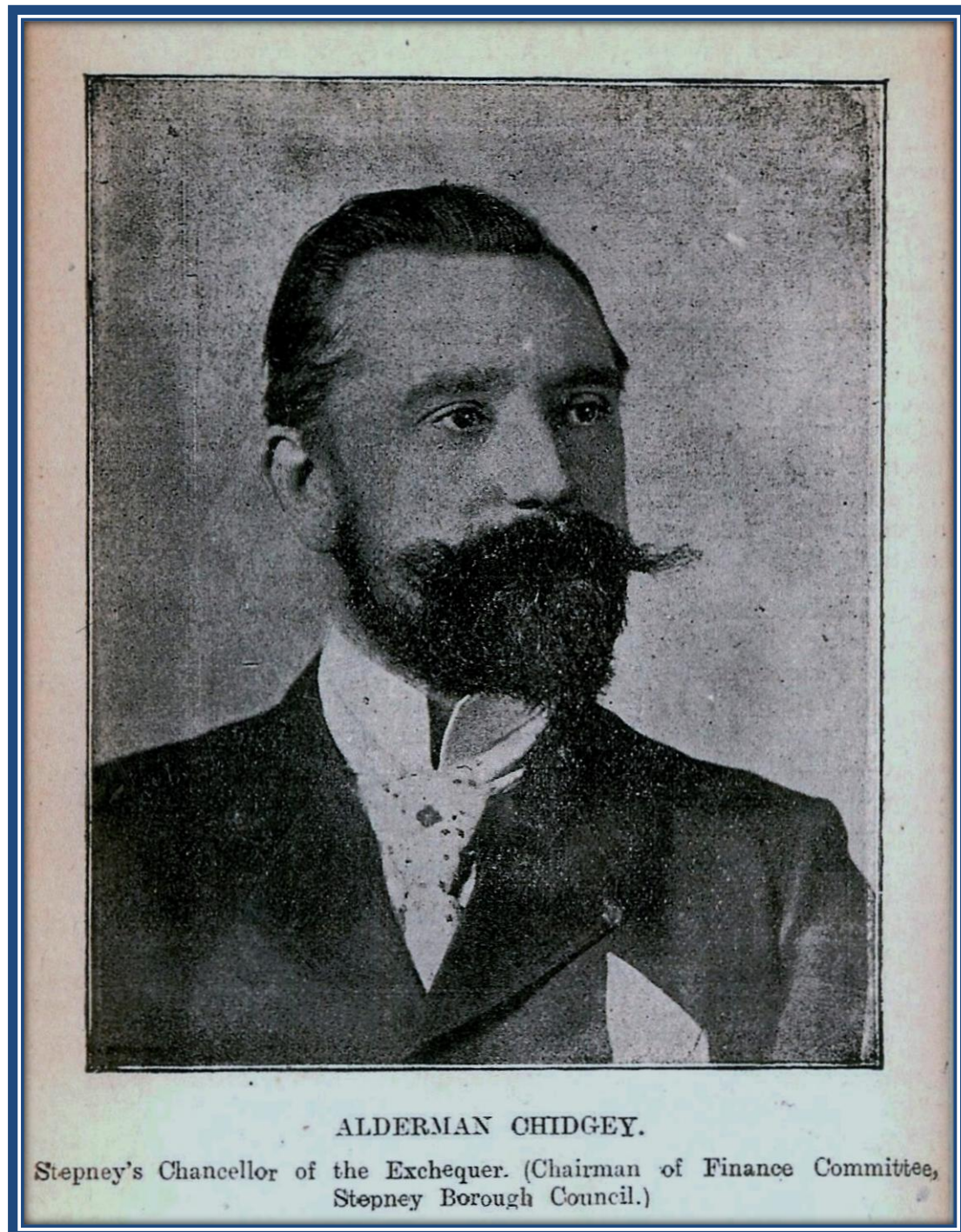
GROVE COTTAGE (EARLY SEVENTEENTH CENTURY)

Sketch by Mr Arthur Parsons courtesy of Redbridge Museum

Grove Cottage was a two- storey, 17th century, timber framed house which stood on the corner of George Lane (now Nutter Lane) and Leicester Road. Hugh was described as a Quantity Surveyor, Herbert aged 23 was a Civil Engineer and Percy aged 20 was an Apprentice Civil Engineer. Alfred, Hugh and Sarah's eldest son, also a Quantity Surveyor, had left home in 1910 and had married Beatrice May Chidgey. Sadly, Alfred died just 2 years later in 1913, aged 27, leaving his widow Beatrice and infant daughter Gwendoline Mary, born in 1912.

Percy's family were members of Wanstead Congregational Church and were also very committed to public service. In October 1901, Percy aged 18 was proposed for membership of the Church at its monthly Meeting. Hugh Chidgey was a member of the Church's 'Wanstead Young men's Association' originally founded as a literary and debating society. Hugh was active in politics in the East End of London at a time of great social change. In 1890 he served as a

vestryman for the civil parish of Mile End Old Town. He became an Alderman for Stepney Borough Council and was the Chairman of the Finance Committee. He also served two terms as Mayor of Stepney between 1913-1915 and 1916-1917.



Photograph from the 1905 East London Handbook courtesy of Tower Hamlets Library Service

The position of Mayor was later held by Clement Attlee from 1919-1920.

Hugh was extremely patriotic and was involved in many recruiting drives for the British Army during the First World War, particularly for the Poplar and Stepney Rifles. It is interesting to note that at one such recruitment drive in September 1915, 150 men signed up for duty but only 15 were considered fit for service. Malnourishment, disease and poverty in the East End had stunted their growth and taken a heavy toll on their health and fitness.

Articles in both local and national newspapers report Hugh Chidgey's active participation in public meetings, his charitable acts and local government service. He was a Divisional Commander in the Metropolitan Special Constabulary, for which he was awarded the M.B.E. in the New Year's Honours List 1919. Hugh also became the Chief Surveyor for London's post-war housing scheme.

The Bancroft's School Mission was located in the Borough of Stepney so it was a straightforward decision for Percy's parents to send him to Bancroft's School located in Woodford Green. Percy had attended the Dempsey Street School in Tower Hamlets from February 1898.

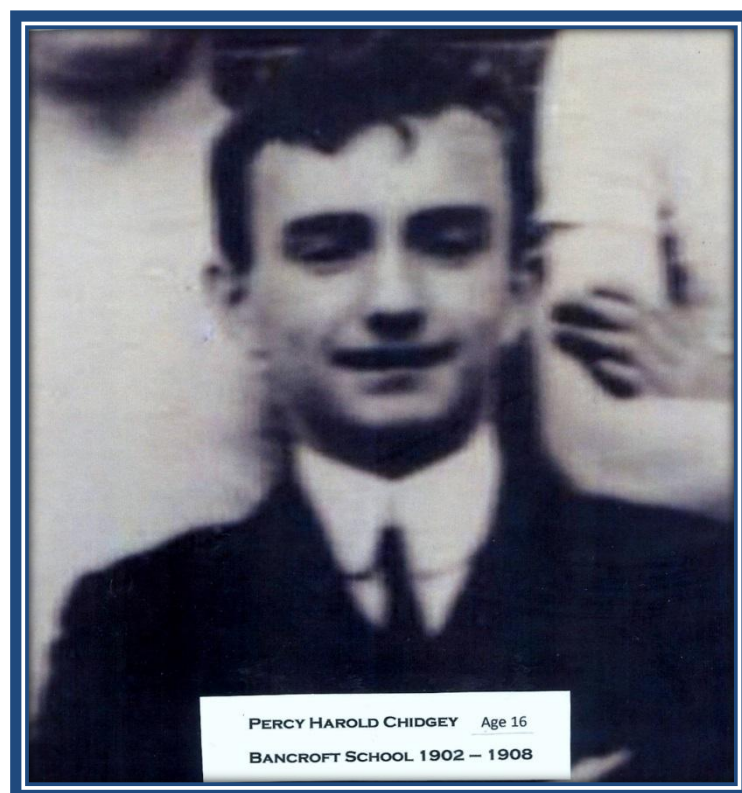


Photo courtesy of Simon Coxall and Bancroft's School

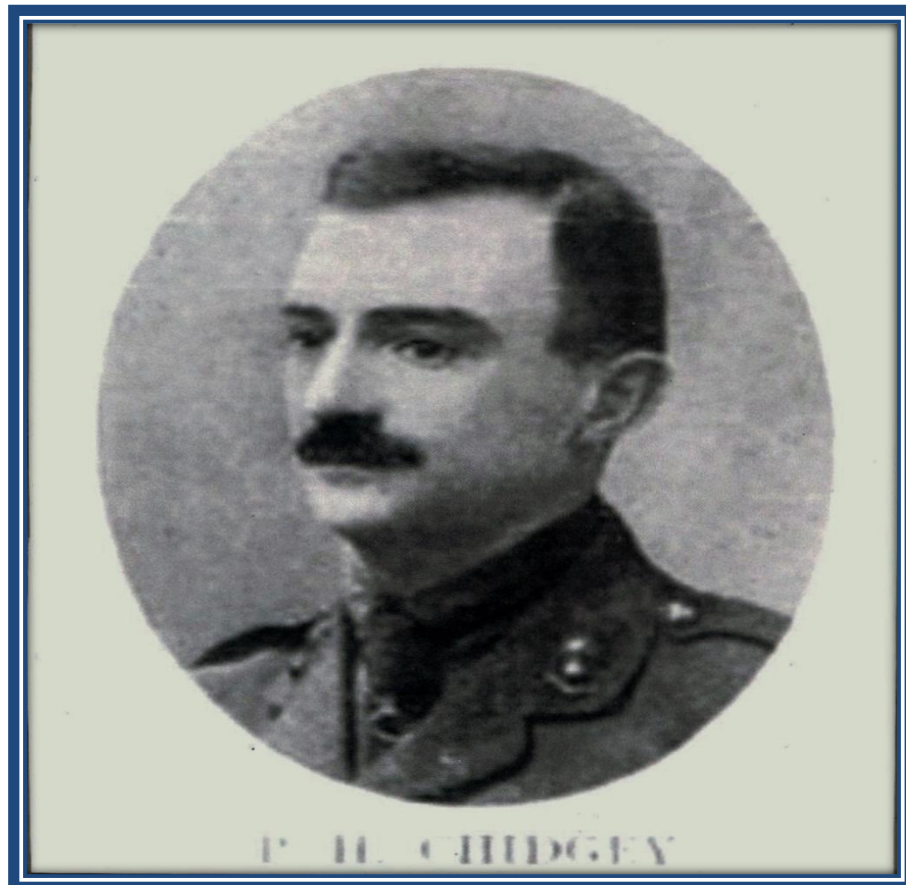
During his time at Bancroft's from age 11-18, (1902-1908), Percy proved himself a talented athlete, particularly in long distance running and gymnastics, for which he won annual school prizes. In 1908 he became captain of East House Sports team.

After leaving school, Percy followed the career path of his older brother Herbert, becoming an apprentice civil engineer. The Chidgey family had moved to "Magdala House," Palmerston Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex before the outbreak of war and the family worshipped at St James Congregational Church. They later moved to "Highclere", 190 High Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex.

Percy enlisted as a private on 20th May 1915 at age 24 into the 3/1st City of London Field Ambulance, Royal Army Medical Corps, Territorial Force. He was posted to the Littlemore Barracks at New Barnet.

Percy attended the Royal Engineers Training Centre and was appointed a Second Lieutenant, 200th Field Company Royal Engineers 30th Division, receiving his commission on 21st October 1916.

photo courtesy of Simon Coxall and Bancroft's School



Percy landed in France on 2nd January 1917. Among his jobs was the design and construction of fortifications; guiding the building of the vast network of trenches; the construction and maintenance of roads and railway tracks to bring up vital war supplies and the building of bridges and underground tunnels. The Engineers were required to repair everything from weapons to wells but they were also expected to fight if need be. In 1917, Percy's Company took part in the pursuit of the German retreat to the Hindenburg Line, the Arras Offensive and the Battle of Pilkem Ridge.

In April and May 1918, the Company was in action on the Somme in the Battles of Lys. This mostly British-held sector of Flanders was the site of some of the fiercest battles of the war and it was crucial to Britain because it defended the Channel ports. The German offensive in Flanders known as the Battle of Lys opened on 9th April 1918. During fierce fighting over several days, the British were forced to withdraw to a defensive line near Ypres. In April, Percy's company was based at Elverdinghe, 5 miles from Ypres. Percy was gravely wounded during the battle and he died of his wounds in No 36 Casualty Clearing Station, near Roesbrugge, Belgium on Friday 12th April 1918. He was 27 years old. The war diary entry for that day consists of only one line:-

Lieutenant Chidgey killed in action at Divisional H.Q. while attached to the C.R.E.30 Div. A note on Percy's Medal Record Card states that he died of wounds.

Percy was buried in Grave II B 6 at the Haringhe (Bandaghem) Military Cemetery, Poperinge, West Flanders, Belgium, which is about 18 km from Ypres. He earned the War and Victory Medals which his brother Herbert applied for on his behalf on 18th November 1921.

Percy left effects of £342 18s in his Will to his father Hugh

Herbert Chidgey served as a Captain in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment arriving in France on 22nd May 1916. He survived the Great War and died aged 90 in 1978. In 1924, Herbert wrote a book called "Black Square Memories. An Account of the 2/8th Battalion, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment 1914-1918".

Percy is remembered on the Great War Memorial inside Wanstead United Reformed Church; on the War Memorials in Wanstead High Street, at St John's

and St James Churches in Buckhurst Hill and also on his family gravestone in Loughton Cemetery. Hugh Chidgey was, as Honorary Lieutenant Colonel, the chairman of the committee which decided upon the lych-gate at St Johns Church as the First World War Memorial in Buckhurst Hill.

Woodford Times, Friday August 16th, 1918

Roll of Honour

2nd Lieutenant. P.H. Chidgey

The following extracts are from letters sent to the father of 2nd Lieut. P.H. Chidgey, RE, who was recently killed in action, and appear in the last issue of the "Bancroftian", the magazine of Bancroft's School :-

From the Commanding Royal Engineer of the Division:

"Your son has been with me for about three weeks as assistant adjutant, and his very sad death came as a very great shock to us all. He was with me through the great retreat from St Quentin and rendered great service. He was a keen soldier and fearless in action as well as a good companion. I cannot tell you how I feel in this my loss as well as yours."

From the Officer Commanding the 200th Field Company:

"I should like to tell you how much his loss meant to us all. He was a man who was utterly inflexible in his devotion to duty. He hated all thought of war, and while he shrank from taking another man's life he was never backward in risking his own. He was absolutely devoted to his men, and I think that every man in his section was as devoted to him as he was to them. He will always live in my mind as an example of a man who had absolutely the courage of his convictions, and was afraid of no man except his own conscience."

From the Second in Command of his Field Company:

"He was universally popular and loved by the men whom he looked after and cared for most conscientiously. He was a true Christian soldier and always strove after what was right, setting a fine example to us all. In our sorrow we must remember he died the finest of death possible, doing his duty and at his post."

Percy's sister Edith Isobel Chidgey died in December 1919 aged 30. His mother Sarah Sophia Chidgey died in 1929 aged 70 years at the Beaumont Hall Hotel in Clacton-on-Sea. Hugh Chidgey died at "Highclere" on the 9th June 1941 aged 81. He left his estate, effects of £12,468 12s 2d to his 2 surviving children, Herbert Thomas Chidgey, chartered Civil Engineer and Kate Gertrude Chidgey, spinster. Kate died in Maidstone in June 1973, five years before her brother Herbert.

Percy's sister-in-law, Alfred's widow Beatrice, did not remarry and died in 1957. Their daughter Gwendoline Mary Chidgey, like her Aunt Kate, did not marry. As a consequence of the First World War, there was a shortage of available men to marry for women of that generation.

Acknowledgements

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Lynn Haseldine Jones for information from her paper on Magdala House, Palmerston Road, Buckhurst Hill.

Bill Oliver for information from his book "The Path of Duty -the Service and Sacrifice of Buckhurst Hill Men in the Great War 1914-1918" Royal British Legion, Buckhurst Hill Branch 2009.

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Margaretha Pollitt Brown for Wanstead United Reformed Church.